

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

The Just Shall Live by Faith
OTTO W. HEICK

The Political Function of Luther's *Doctrina*
JAMES S. PREUS

Wisdom and Law in Old Testament
Wisdom Literature
ALFRED VON ROHR SAUER

The Relationship Between Psalm 22 and the
Passion Narrative
HARVEY D. LANGE

Homiletics

Book Review

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The Just Shall Live by Faith

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WHEN DID LUTHER REACH THE REFORMATION INSIGHT INTO THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION? The author reviews the literature on the question, and brings to the attention of American readers the work of Uuras Saarnivaara, which has received little scholarly attention since its publication. The author is professor emeritus of systematic theology at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary.

On Oct. 19, 1512, Luther became a doctor of theology in the University of Wittenberg. This promotion enabled him to succeed Staupitz, the vicar-general of the German Congregation of Augustinian Friars, who was his own superior and special friend, as professor of the Bible. Luther began lecturing on the Psalms. This kept him busy for 2 years.¹ When finished with the Psalms, he turned to Paul's Letter to the Romans. These lectures occupied him for three semesters, but they had no reading public until they were edited nearly 400 years later by Johannes Ficker, professor of church history at Strasbourg, in 1908. Later they were incorporated in the Weimar Edition of Luther's works as Volume 56. Then they had a profound effect on German and Scandinavian scholars. Indeed, the books became the springboard and focus of a Luther renaissance in Protestant thought and life. Through them Luther became again a living influence. This fact demonstrates the significance of the book: it is a telling document of Luther's development.²

The lectures aroused a special interest in the theology of the young Luther, or Luther in the formative years of his life, prior to the nailing of the Ninety-five Theses in 1517. Since justification by faith is regarded as the keystone of Lutheranism, young Luther's interpretation of it became a matter of special concern. According to the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, man is justified altogether by faith, independently of the works which issue from it. Faith does not save as a superethical quality in the regenerate; it is the instrument which accepts the gift of God. In this sense, Melancthon says in the Apology, Article IV, 86, 88, faith is imputed for righteousness, faith is the righteousness of the heart. This imputation doctrine came under attack as a Melancthonian perversion of Luther's own view of justification. The attack was spearheaded by Karl Holl of the Berlin university in an essay entitled "Die Rechtfertigungslehre in Luthers Vorlesung über den Römerbrief," 1910.³

KARL HOLL'S VIEW

Beginning with a brief reference to Ficker's edition of the lectures on Romans, Holl opens the discussion saying

³ The essay was reprinted in Holl's *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (1948), I, pp. 111—54.

¹ On the conflicting dates see Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), p. 74, n. 169. Also helpful is Wilhelm Pauck's introduction to the *Library of Christian Classics* edition of the lectures on Romans (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), p. xix.

² Pauck, p. lxiii. On the interesting history of the manuscript, cf. pp. ix—lxvi.

"The core of his [Luther's] theology is already presented [in these lectures] in its mature form."⁴ "Even the lectures on the Psalms contain the old Luther."⁵ Succinctly stated, according to Holl, Luther does not distinguish, as did Melancthon and the dogmaticians who followed him in the next century, between justification and sanctification. Man is not justified by a mere imputation of Christ's righteousness, followed by gradual sanctification. Justification, to Luther, is an analytical act: God declares a sinner righteous in anticipation of the moral change of the sinner, of his restoration to empirical holiness. Justification is an act of healing human nature. Luther's comment on Rom. 4 is of special significance to Holl: "Christ, our good Samaritan, brought the man who was half dead . . . to an inn and took care of him. . . . He does not reckon him his sin . . . holding up to him the hope that he will get well. . . . Now can we say that he is perfectly righteous? No, but he is at the same time both a sinner and righteous, a sinner in fact but righteous by virtue of the reckoning and the certain promise of God that he will redeem him from sin in order, in the end, to make him perfectly whole and sound."⁶ Luther understands justification, Holl maintains, as an effective act, as an act by which the sinner is made righteous in fellowship with God. Man is justified, as it were, *intuitu renovationis*. The famous "tower experience" of necessity preceded in time the lectures on Romans.

⁴ Holl, p. 111.

⁵ *Ibid.*, n. 1.

⁶ Pauck, p. 127.

THE TOWER EXPERIENCE

In the Preface to his Latin works, 1545, Luther relates that he had been deeply troubled by the meaning of *justitia Dei* in Rom. 1:17 until he found peace in understanding of the term as "passive righteousness." Referring to this discovery in the *Table Talk*, he adds that the event occurred in the heated dayroom of the tower of the monastery.⁷

Scholars have usually assumed that with Luther the experience referred to in the Preface was simply a matter of whether the "righteousness of God" was God's retributive justice, which takes account of the merits of man, or His grace, by which He declares righteous a man who is a sinner. Scholars distinguish between *justitia activa* and *justitia passiva*. Both terms have a double meaning. With God as subject, *justitia activa* means the punitive righteousness of God: He judges and condemns the sinner. With man as subject, it designates both man's virtuous striving after merit as well as his humble submission to the holy will of God (Luke 7:29). With God as subject, *justitia passiva* is an expression of divine love and grace, God bestowing His righteousness on man. With man as subject, it implies that he is "passively" justified by the imputation of an "alien righteousness," i.e., the righteousness of Christ.

It was usual in the tradition of Augustine to interpret Rom. 1:17 as referring to the mercy of God, who is righteous in keeping His promise to save the sinner. If Holl were right, the discovery of Luther

⁷ *WA, Tischreden*, III, No. 3232 et al. See the text of the Preface in *Luther's Works*, 34, pp. 327—38, especially pp. 336—38. The original is in *WA* LIV, 179—87.

was in reality practically nothing other than the Augustinian understanding of *justitia Dei*: "It is called the righteousness of God because by his bestowal of it he makes us righteous. . . . By this faith of Jesus Christ—that is the faith that Christ has given us—we believe it is from God that we now have, and shall have more and more, the ability of living righteously."⁸

But evidently Luther wanted to state that in his tower experience he had discovered the Reformation insight into justification. In his lectures on Romans he speaks quite unemotionally about Rom. 1:17, explaining the term "righteousness of God" as the grace of God that makes men righteous.⁹ There is not the slightest hint as to the intense struggle with this passage as related in 1545.

UURAS SAARNIVAARA

The crucial point in the discovery of Luther, in the eyes of Uuras Saarnivaara, was not the understanding of the "righteousness of God" as the grace of God; rather it was the "doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to him who believes." When Paul says that the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel, he indicates "that the merciful God justifies us by *faith*" [our italics], not by a gracious infusion of love. It is precisely at this point that Augustine lacks the fuller insight into the Gospel.¹⁰ Justification is not a medicinal

process gradually healing the human nature, but a forensic declaration setting man free at once; it grants man certainty of salvation. All the passages quoted by Holl, Saarnivaara maintains, occur in the framework of Augustine's theology. To substantiate his view Saarnivaara quotes, among others, the following passages. "The . . . believing people . . . beseech, ask, and beg to be justified constantly until death."¹¹ "Man is justified more and more."¹² "No saint considers himself, or professes to be, righteous, but constantly longs and waits for justification."¹³ The believer, in the eyes of Luther, is partly righteous and partly a sinner: at the same time he is *justus* and *peccator*, i. e., sin has only been partly wiped out of him, with Christ covering the remainder. All this is typically Augustinian, Saarnivaara avers. The full Reformation doctrine of justification was not expressed by Luther before 1518. For the first time he stated it in his "Sermon on the Threefold Righteousness," published toward the end of 1518, and even more clearly in the "Sermon on the Twofold Righteousness," delivered not later than the first quarter of 1519.¹⁴ "Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he is has become ours; rather he himself becomes ours. . . . This is an infinite righteousness and one that swallows up all sins in a moment, for it is impossible that sin should exist in Christ. On the contrary, he

⁸ Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, Ch. 18 (XI). Cf. also "This is not the righteousness whereby God himself is righteous, but that whereby we are made righteous by him," Ch. 31 (XVIII).

⁹ Pauck, p. 18.

¹⁰ Cf. *WA, Tischreden*, II, No. 1572: "Augustine did not correctly understand the article of justification."

¹¹ Saarnivaara, p. 78.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 80. Cf. also "All righteous works that are done in grace are a preparatory stage in the progress of justification. . . ." (Pauck, p. 113).

¹⁴ Saarnivaara, pp. 92 ff.

who trusts in Christ exists in Christ; he is one with Christ, having the same righteousness as he. It is therefore impossible that sin should remain in him. This righteousness is primary; it is the basis, the cause, the source of all our own actual righteousness." It is in this sense that we are to understand the prayer in Ps. 31:2: ". . . in thy righteousness deliver me."¹⁵ This understanding of the *justitia passiva* differs considerably from the earlier one found in the lectures on Romans. There Luther expressed his admiration of the Blessed Augustine for his view of the *justitia passiva* as "the righteousness by which we are made righteous by him."¹⁶ However, in the Preface of 1545 he complains that Augustine "does not clearly expound everything concerning imputation."

In Luther's own eyes, Augustine lacked the proper understanding of faith. He considered faith to be the beginning of justification, the first step in the renewal of man. To Luther now it is the means of apprehending the merits of Christ: it is both the beginning and the end of justification. "Faith is the righteousness of the heart" (Melancthon); it needs no implementation through the infusion of love. To justify man God requires no *fides caritate formata*, he simply wants man to believe in him, to put his whole trust in him. According to Augustine, man is partly justified and partly a sinner.¹⁷ When Luther also says in the Romans lectures

that man is *simul justus et peccator*, he means that man is only partly healed but still partly sick. Luther judges man empirically. Later, as we shall see, Luther regards the Christian as living in two realms, as having dual citizenship. By faith he is a member of the kingdom of God, by nature a citizen of this world. In the former he is under the grace of God which covers all his moral imperfections; he is totally holy. On the other hand, in the world and the area of works he is only gradually healed and sanctified.

F. EDWARD CRANZ

These insights into Luther's development are also treated by F. Edward Cranz in *An Essay on the Development of Luther's Thought of Justice, Law, and Society*.¹⁸ As the title indicates, the author has set the problem of the tower experience into the wider context of the Reformer's social significance. He notes three periods in Luther's development: 1513—18, 1518—19, and the later writings.

With respect to Luther's testimony of 1545, Cranz maintains that the Reformer described his development in a terminology of later years. The phrase "passive justice," for example, does not occur in the writings of 1518—22.¹⁹ In 1545 Luther looked back to 1518—19 "in the light of his more developed position of 1530."²⁰ The Reformer's writings "from the earlier period of 1513 through the first part of 1518 represent a general unity in themselves and as contrasted with his mature

¹⁵ *Luther's Works*, 31 (hereinafter *LW*), pp. 298 f. This passage from Ps. 31:2, which reoccurs in Ps. 71:2, had been used by some of the followers of Holl to date the tower experience as early as 1514—15; cf. Saarnivaara, pp. 59 ff.

¹⁶ Pauck, p. 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁸ *Harvard Theological Studies XIX* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

theology."²¹ Broadly speaking, throughout this period Luther maintained the position that man is partly justified and partly a sinner. In the second period Luther moved away from this position. Cranz uses three examples for illustration.

1. Commenting on Rom. 5:15, Luther says that the grace of God and the gift of God are one and the same.²² In the *Rationis Latominanae confutatio* (1521), however, the Reformer distinguishes between the two. God's grace is indivisible; man is either totally under His grace or totally under His wrath; he is either totally justified or not justified at all. He can not be partly the one or the other. On the other hand, the gift of God is divisible, the gift that heals man gradually from his corruption.²³

2. In the commentaries on the Psalms and Romans, Luther takes "flesh" and "spirit" as anthropological terms for two parts of man. In the later writings "flesh" and "spirit" imply a new distinction between two realms of existence. The terms now indicate a religious dualism. By nature the whole man, including his spirit, is flesh, while the justified man is spirit.²⁴

3. In his earlier period Luther held that good works apart from grace are sins. The natural man cannot perform works pleasing to God. In 1518—19 he moved to a fundamentally new position: Now even the works done in grace are, from a different aspect, sins, and even the justified man is, from a different aspect, a sinner.

This is the new meaning of the saying that the Christian is *simul justus et peccator*.²⁵

In the *Kirchenpostille* (1522) Luther distinguishes two works of Christ. The one he calls "gift" and the other "example." The principal part of the Gospel is that one accepts Christ as a gift, while Christ as example is second. Gift and example are to be distinguished as faith and works, "for faith has nothing of your own but only Christ's life and work," while works are something which one performs. Christ makes the believer holy "all at once," and not "piecemeal." One's works do not make him holy, rather he must be holy before he can do good works.²⁶ The Christian now exists in two realms, before God and in the world. In the sight of God, he is totally holy in Christ, but also totally a sinner outside of Christ. In the world, however, he is gradually being healed and sanctified by the grace of God.

This orientation led Luther to a new evaluation of the orders of society. During his Augustinian period he practiced withdrawal from the world, lest contact with the world impede his increase in justification. But after the reorientation the direction of his thought was reversed. Justification has been accomplished: "it is no longer a goal, but rather a starting point"; now the Christian turns to the world, for only here can he be active and begin, with the help of God, his gradual

²⁵ Cf. Cranz, pp. 49 ff. This thought found classical expression in Rothe's hymn, "Now I Have Found a Sure Foundation":

Though in the best of all my actions,
In works that are admired the most,
I must perceive great imperfections,
I surely have no right to boast.

²⁶ Cf. the references in Cranz, p. 55.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²² Pauck, p. 174.

²³ "Against Latomus," *LW* 32, pp. 227 ff.

²⁴ Cf. Cranz, pp. 47 ff.

sanctification.²⁷ This reorientation is the source and root of Luther's concept of the two kingdoms, of the kingdom at the right hand of God (the kingdom of grace as manifest in the church), and the kingdom at the left hand of God (the kingdom of the Law as represented by the state and society in general). The study of Cranz then is a vindication of Saarnivaara's interpretation of Luther's development. Expressly Cranz says that he "accepts in general" the thesis of Saarnivaara on the date of Luther's new insight into Rom. 1:17 and his refutation of modern attempts to place it during the time of the *Dictata super Psalterium* (1513—15) or of the lectures on Romans (1515—16).²⁸

FAITH AND WORD

Saarnivaara's study had been published in Finland as early as 1947. But it remained largely unknown among European scholars. For example, Axel Gyllenkrok, a Swedish scholar, does not include Saarnivaara's study in his very extensive bibliography in *Rechtfertigung und Heiligung*.²⁹ Concerning the date of the tower experience, the author flatly states that in 1545 Luther was mistaken. This discovery is to be dated before the first lectures on the Psalms, for the evangelical understanding of the *justitia Dei* is clearly contained in these lectures.³⁰ The reformatory element is to be sought somewhere else. It is the problem of certainty of salvation. A new understanding of this is for the first time expressed in Luther's lectures on Hebrews

and especially in the exposition of the Seven Penitential Psalms. The author refers to Ps. 32:2, "That is, be bold, courageous, rise up and sing praises; . . . for the heart that is right with God . . . is founded on the eternal good and stands firm."³¹ In addition he quotes a significant passage from Luther's sermon preached at Leipzig in 1519:³² "It is important to know whether one has received God's grace or not. For one must know how one stands with God, if the conscience is to be joyful and be able to stand. For when a person doubts this and does not steadfastly believe that he has a gracious God, then he actually has no gracious God. As he believes, so he has."³³ Faith derives its assurance from the Word that God is gracious. Thus Luther learned the meaning of the evangelical assurance of the Word. The promise of God is materialized *nunc et hic* through the Word. It is not just a future hope, as some scholars have said. This, in the eyes of Gyllenkrok, is Luther's reformatory discovery.³⁴

While Gyllenkrok's study, too, received little attention, the discussion gained momentum through the study of Ernst Bizer, *Fides ex Auditu*.³⁵ The book is difficult to assess.³⁶ Bizer's method is exegetical-systematic. He too confronts the Reformer's testimony of 1545 with the earlier writings prior to the nailing of the Ninety-five

³¹ LW 14, p. 154.

³² LW 51, p. 58.

³³ Ibid., p. 59.

³⁴ Gyllenkrok, p. 75.

³⁵ Neukirchen: Erziehungsverein, 1958.

³⁶ Cf. the divergent reviews by Ernst Kinder in *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 15 (1959), 66—70, and by David Löfgren in *Lutheran World*, 5 (1958/59), 414—16.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁹ Uppsala: Uppsala Universitets Aarsskript, 1952:2.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

Theses in 1517. Like Saarnivaara and Cranz, Bizer concludes that the tower experience is to be dated as late as 1518. However, dating the tower experience is only one aspect of Bizer's work. He tries to fill the discovery with a new content. Luther's pre-Reformation writings are governed by the thought that man receives grace when he humbles himself. Faith is understood as *fides caritate formata*, as faith supplemented by the infusion of love. It is a means of acquiring righteousness, i. e., humility. But now faith itself is the righteousness of man. "The justice of the just and his life is his faith." It is no longer humility produced by faith nor love flowing from faith: it is simply faith in the Word of divine promise. Faith and the Word belong together. The Word is the means of grace and the only one at that.³⁷ With this view of the Word goes a new concept of the sacraments. Luther no longer believes that they work *ex opere operato*. Their central point is the Word of institution as a Word of promise. The sacraments are another form of the Word: "The sacrament is interpreted in terms of the Word, and the Word itself has a sacramental character."³⁸ The Word is the medium of the righteousness revealed in the Gospel, and man is justified by hearing and believing it. He is not justified by *fides caritate formata* but simply by "faith in . . ." by *fides ex auditu*.³⁹

In a review of the writer's first volume of *History of Christian Thought*⁴⁰ B. A.

Gerrish complains that the author failed to mention that the two scholars, Saarnivaara and Bizer, "disagree sharply over the content of the discovery." Is there actually such a sharp difference between these two men? For Saarnivaara it stands to reason that man is justified through faith in the promises of the Gospel as the divine Word. In a lengthy footnote, for example, he rejects the subjectivism of both the Catholic mystics and the Schwärmer. "The Christians should cling," Luther said repeatedly, "to the Word and Sacraments, in which God promises and imparts his justifying grace."⁴¹ On the other hand, Bizer writes that in the sermons on righteousness Luther emphasizes that a Christian's righteousness is "donated righteousness," not because Christ creates a new righteousness in us, a new ethical quality. The *justitia Dei*, mediated through Word and Sacrament, is donated righteousness, *justitia aliena*. It is Christ's own righteousness imputed to them who believe.⁴²

Actually there is an internal lack of clarity in Bizer's presentation.⁴³ In the second paragraph of the Preface to his work he says that he wants to investigate only one line in Luther's thought, namely that which deals with the Reformer's discovery of the proper meaning of *justitia Dei*. But in the first paragraph he says that the breakthrough occurred in the spring or summer of 1518 "and it deals with the discovery of the Word as the means of grace."⁴⁴ Apparently Word and *justitia Dei* are not synonymous terms.

³⁷ Bizer, pp. 99 ff., 148.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 160.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 148.

⁴⁰ *Lutheran Quarterly*, 19 (May 1967), 219 f.

⁴¹ Saarnivaara, p. 119.

⁴² Bizer, pp. 108 ff.

⁴³ Cf. Löfgren, p. 415.

⁴⁴ Bizer, p. 7.

Justitia Dei denotes an aspect of God's dealing with man, whereas the former term signifies the means by which God communicates with man. While Bizer has been successful in the historical field, he has remained contradictory in the systematic field.

In 1965 Kurt Aland published *Der Weg zur Reformation*,⁴⁵ in which he re-examined all the pertinent material in Luther's early writings. He also includes the Reformer's letters written prior to the spring of 1518, as well as numerous passages from the *Table Talk* pertaining to his subject. Aland says that Luther was not mistaken in 1545, as some scholars have maintained. The breakthrough occurred between a letter addressed to Spalatin, March 3, 1518, in which Luther still uses the term *justitia* in the old sense of *accusatio sui*, and March 28, when, according to Aland, Luther preached his sermon on the twofold righteousness. This sermon and the exposition of Ps. 5:9 (in the second commentary) amply illustrate the discovery.⁴⁶ Aland then agrees with Bizer and Saarnivaara (whom he does not mention) concerning the date of the tower experience. It is to be dated late, after the nailing of the Ninety-five Theses. One thing is missing in Aland's argument, however: he does not comment on the understanding of the tower experience proposed by Bizer, nor does he express himself on the difficulties to which the Roman Catholic scholar Heinrich Denifle referred in 1905.⁴⁷

In the Preface of 1545 Luther says, "I

⁴⁵ In *Theologische Existenz Heute*, Neue Folge Nr. 123 (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1965).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 102 ff.

⁴⁷ Saarnivaara, pp. 40 ff.

hated that word 'righteousness of God,' because in accordance with the usage and custom of the doctors I had been taught to understand it philosophically as meaning, as they put it, the formal or active righteousness according to which God is righteous and punishes sinners and the unjust."⁴⁸ But in 1905 Denifle, in an extensive study, showed that out of 60 teachers of the Latin church "all interpreted these words as meaning the righteousness through which we become righteous, God's undeserved justifying grace, the real justification of men received through faith." How does one cope with this fact? Was Luther mistaken in 1545, as some scholars maintain? Prior to the discovery, Luther was under the impression that man must be "actively" righteous in order to be accepted by God. So he seems to have understood Augustine, for "partly" holy is not sufficient. Saarnivaara quotes Erich Vogelsang: "Even when Augustine called the righteousness of God a righteousness which is given as a gift, it kindled the deepest afflictions in the heart of Luther, because he did not find this donated real righteousness and goodness in himself."⁴⁹ Luther arrived at peace for his soul only when he had overcome the limited evangelical insight of Augustine and had learned clearly to distinguish between Law and Gospel. The Christian is always *simul justus et peccator*, totally holy *in Christo* and totally a sinner *extra Christum*.

⁴⁸ Saarnivaara, p. 36.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44. "Strangely enough," Saarnivaara adds a footnote, "Vogelsang did not make use of this fine insight in his interpretation of the tower experience. He rather followed Holl's interpretation."

We shall add a brief analysis of two other recent publications: Reinhard Schwarz, *Fides, Spes und Caritas beim jungen Luther*,⁵⁰ and Matthias Kroeger, *Rechtfertigung und Gesetz*, subtitled *Studien zur Entwicklung der Rechtfertigungslehre beim jungen Luther*.⁵¹

Schwarz offers a detailed analysis of Luther's early commentaries on the Psalms, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Since the author wants the exegesis of these lectures not to be complicated by the vexing problems inherent in the Preface, 1545, he intentionally bypasses the time and meaning of the tower experience. In his opinion, Luther has already in the lectures on the Psalms outgrown some of the basic concepts of scholastic theology, such as the distinction between *fides informis*, an intellectual assent to the Gospel as a precondition of justification, and *fides caritate formata*, a faith supplemented by love infused through the sacraments, and the scholastic concept of repentance as a cooperative venture between natural man and sacramental grace.⁵² He has arrived at a kind of presupposition that the Word is the effective means of man's salvation.⁵³

In the Pauline epistles the Word is presented as asking man to undertake a revision of himself. In the light of the

Word he should accept himself as sinner. Promising forgiveness, the Word presupposes that man is sick. "God is justified in his words," means that God is rendered just and true. "And this comes to pass when one believes and accepts them and holds them true and just."⁵⁴ Justifying God actively, man is justified by God passively, for the acknowledgement and confession of sin is the central function of faith.⁵⁵ God does not impute the sins of a believer. These early lectures abound in the idea of the nonimputation of sin. The nonimputation includes both original sins as well as actual sins.⁵⁶ But do these lectures justify our assumption that the tower experience occurred prior to or during the time when Luther dealt with Romans? As stated, Schwarz does not want to commit himself on his question, but we personally believe that the material presented here does not warrant such a conclusion.

Another study along similar lines is the volume by Matthias Kroeger. Contrary to Schwarz, Kroeger concentrates his attention on Luther's lectures on Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews to the exclusion of the Psalms. He too does not want the interpretation of this material to be burdened by the biographical and theological statements of the 1545 Preface. The tower experience was only one step, though an important one, in the development of the Reformer's theology.⁵⁷ The theology of these early lectures is antischolastic, yet only the context can show whether or not

⁵⁰ Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1962.

⁵¹ Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1968. In passing we may mention Albert Brandenburg, *Gericht, und Evangelium: Zur Worttheologie in Luther's erster Psalmenvorlesung* (Paderborn: Bonifacius Druckerei, 1960). The author, a Roman Catholic, believes himself to have discovered in Luther's first lectures on the Psalms a new understanding of *justitia* (pp. 71 f.).

⁵² Schwarz, p. 171.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁵⁴ Pauck, p. 76.

⁵⁵ Schwarz, p. 265.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁵⁷ Kroeger, p. 24.

Luther expresses a new insight by using older termini. In Romans Luther's theology is a theology of the Word insofar as the Reformer emphasizes that man is either justified or condemned by believing or rejecting the Word. But such concepts as concupiscence, imputation, law, righteousness, and grace remain basically Augustinian. Salvation *sola gratia* has always an Augustinian connotation, for justification is regarded as an act of God, who will justify the believer "more and more." In vain do we look for a jubilant note of certainty, Kroeger avers.⁵⁸

Kroeger regards the period between the lectures on Romans and the exposition of Hebrews (spring 1517) as one of transition. To be sure, the continuity between Romans and Hebrews is not to be ignored, yet something new is evident. Not just a gradual change has taken place; we observe something generically different in Luther's thought. Kroeger bases this assumption on some of Luther's sermons of the period, on the exposition of the Lord's Prayer of 1517, and on other material. This change is fully evident in the interpretation of Heb. 5. Here the state of uncertainty and despair is overcome; Luther is no longer afflicted and tortured with thoughts about works required for the worthy reception of the sacrament. Forgiveness is not obtained through a faithful observance of sacramental rites; on this point Luther quotes Augustine, "The Sacrament justifies, not because it is performed, but because of faith in its gifts."⁵⁹ The heart is cleansed not through confes-

sion, but through faith. Man is justified by relying on the "pure, holy, and dependable word of Christ, 'Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'" ⁶⁰ In keeping with this change, Christ is no longer a model for imitation, as Luther believed in his earlier period. Christ is the Lamb of God who died for our sins in order to establish the law of faith.⁶¹ Faith in the Word is the essence of the Gospel. While in the lectures on the Psalms faith has a mystic connotation, denoting conformity with Christ, Luther now understands faith as trust in the divine promise of the Word. The testimony of faith is not *ex nobis* (from us), but rather *in* that which our consciences accept.⁶² Certainty is not, as in Romans, a general principle that God justifies the sinner; it now has a personal ring—God has accepted me personally and will at the end glorify me.⁶³ Yet Luther never identifies certainty with security. *Tentatio* (Anfechtung) is to him a life-long mark of faith.⁶⁴ These insights lead Luther to distinguish sharply and properly between Law and Gospel. He no longer mixes the two. The Gospel is no longer a divine judgment to be implemented and perfected by works. It is the unconditional promise of God to accept man as he is. "This distinction was for Luther not just a doctrine, but an art to be learned and practiced in life," Kroeger observes.⁶⁵

Not identifying this discovery with Lu-

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 239 ff.

⁵⁹ Augustine, *On the Gospel of St. John*, Tract LXXX, 3. Cf. Luther's "Proceedings at Augsburg" (*LW* 31, p. 274).

⁶⁰ *WA* LVII, 171.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 224.

⁶² Ibid., p. 169, and Kroeger, pp. 184 ff.

⁶³ *WA* LVII, 171.

⁶⁴ Kroeger, pp. 191 ff.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 195 f.

ther's narrative in the Preface of 1545, Kroeger escapes the confusion noticeable in Bizer, of whom he remains critical.⁶⁶

Summary

As may be seen, there is widespread agreement among scholars today that an important change occurred in Luther sometime during 1517—18. Holl and Seeberg attempt to date the tower experience prior to or during the first lectures on the Psalms, basing their conclusions partially on dogmatic presuppositions. Regin Prenter said of these men that their theology is an earmark of 19th-century pietism (Schleiermacher) and revivalism, which regard empirical piety as an unambiguous proof of faith.⁶⁷

Bizer presents a confused picture: the Word, in contrast to the sacraments, as the only means of divine grace is a problem foreign to the Preface of 1545.

Holl and his followers have said that in 1545 Luther was mistaken as to the time of his discovery. This is emphatically denied by Saarnivaara. The latter's helpful conjecture is that Luther despaired because he could not find in himself real righteousness and goodness (although Augustine maintained that these were freely given), and consequently felt himself always under the curse of the "active" righteousness of God. In fact, Luther's earlier view of the Gospel is marred by a legalistic element: *evangelium est iudicium*. In his first lectures on the Psalms he flatly states that Law and Gospel are identical, though seen from a different point of

view.⁶⁸ The breakthrough came to pass when Luther learned to extricate himself from this legalistic understanding of the Gospel. Does Luther, in any case, in the Preface use the term "doctors" in the restricted sense of recognized teachers of the past? Could he have thought of his Nominalist teachers at Erfurt with their appeal to the natural powers of man as a preparation for the reception of grace as he does in the first lectures on the Psalms?⁶⁹

Saarnivaara refers to the two sermons on righteousness, with their strong tone of assurance and joy, as the first clear indication of the accuracy of Luther's remarks in the Preface. Bizer calls attention to the same sermons, but does not regard Luther's emphasis on Christ's free bestowal of His righteousness on the sinner as reformatory.

Cranz's observation is also helpful: in the Preface Luther described his experience of 1518 in the terminology of later years. Cranz and Saarnivaara supplement each other and, to us, their volumes are the most convincing monographs on the subject.⁷⁰

To corroborate our findings we may briefly add the verdict of Paul Althaus. He rejects Holl's position: "For Luther," he writes, "justification is based on reconciliation through Christ's satisfaction. This basis is missing in Holl. The 'on account of Christ' is dissolved in the 'on account of

⁶⁸ Cf. Gyllenberg, pp. 35 f., 50; Kroeger, pp. 46 f.; according to Brandenburg, p. 50, *iudicium* is a basic term in the lectures. In the first section the term occurs 217 times, in the second even more frequently.

⁶⁹ Cf. for example, *WA* IV, 262, 4.

⁷⁰ Cf. also Cranz's chapter on Luther in *Reformers in Profile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 86—114.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 242 f.

⁶⁷ Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1946), p. 69.

the beginning of new creation.'"⁷¹ Not only the younger but also the older Luther, Althaus maintains, used the term *justificare* and "justification" in more than one sense. Althaus refers to Luther's *Disputation Concerning Justification* of 1536: "We are justified daily by the unmerited forgiveness of sins and by the justification of God's mercy," and "For we perceive that a man who is justified is not yet a righteous man, but is in the very movement of journey toward righteousness."⁷² To these citations we may add a third: "Daily we sin, daily we are continually justified."⁷³ Yet these sayings of Luther have a ring different from Holl's interpretation. In the first and third quotations Luther ob-

viously identifies justification with the forgiveness of sins. The passages express the same sentiment as the one found in Luther's explanation of the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer:

We pray in this petition that our heavenly Father may not look upon our sins, and on their account deny our prayers, for we neither merit nor deserve those things for which we pray. Although we sin daily and deserve nothing but punishment, we nevertheless pray that God may grant us all things by his grace.

Concerning the second quotation, in the light of the whole trend of the *Disputation*, the word "righteousness" means the "second righteousness," or "outward righteousness," i. e., the works proceeding from faith.⁷⁴

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⁷¹ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 242.

⁷² *LW* 34, pp. 167, 152.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 162.