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Luther on Justification

JOHN F. JOHNSON

Once upon a time every student of theology identified in any way with the Lutheran Confessions was able to read, pronounce, and understand the expression *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. More importantly, he was not only able to read it; he believed with all his heart that this designation referred to the doctrine of justification. Indeed, this has always been the distinguishing mark of evangelical Lutheranism. In an article entitled *Rechtfertigung heute* Peter Brunner states that the Reformation developed and grew from the conviction that "die Gerechtigkeit Gottes, die im Evangelium offenbart wird, besteht nicht darin, dasz Gott die Sünder als die Ungerechten straft, sondern darin, dasz er aus Liebe zu uns seinen Sohn Jesus Christus uns zugute dahingegeben hat und uns in seiner Barmherzigkeit durch den Glauben an das Evangelium rechtfertigt." The article on justification became the *Hauptsache*, the doctrine that could neither be altered nor in any way diminished.

The centrality of this doctrine, which was so carefully and thoroughly worked out by Dr. Martin Luther, is evident from the position which he gives it in the Smalcald Articles (see also Apology IV, 1—4). In the Second Part, which treats of the articles which refer to the work of Christ

and Redemption, Luther states the oft-quoted words: "Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered even though heaven and earth and whatever will not abide should sink to ruin . . . and upon this article all things depend which we teach and practice in opposition to the pope, the devil, and the whole world. Therefore, we must be sure concerning this doctrine and not doubt; for otherwise all is lost." Writes Einar Billing: "Whoever knows Luther knows that his various thoughts all, as tightly as the petals of a rosebud, adhere to a common center, and radiate out like the rays of the sun from one glowing core, namely the gospel of the forgiveness of sins."¹ And we know that for Luther forgiveness of sins and justification are one and the same thing. It is significant to note in passing that Luther recognizes the deep inner connection between Christology and Soteriology. The person of Christ and the work of Christ are intimately conjoined. To deny the Godhead of Christ is to deny the article of justification. Luther boldly declares in his Commentary on Galatians: "They that deny the divinity of Christ lose all Christianity. We must learn diligently the article of justification. For all the other articles of our faith are comprehended in it. And if that remain sound then are all the rest sound. Wherefore, when we teach that men are justified by Christ . . . we witness that he is naturally and substantially God."² It is doubtful whether Luther

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¹ *Our Calling* (Augustana Book Concern, 1952), p. 7.

² *Galatians* (London, 1807), p. 190.

would have posed the Bultmannian dilemma: "Hilft er mir weil er der Sohn Gottes ist, oder ist er der Sohn Gottes weil er mir hilft?"³

It is refreshing to hear Peter Brunner conclude his article: "Wir müssen uns darüber klar sein, dass alle Versuche, die Verbindung der reformatorischen Rechtfertigungsbotschaft mit dem christologischen Dogma der alten Kirche zu zerschneiden, gleichzeitig den Lebensnerv der reformatorischen Rechtfertigungsbotschaft zerschneiden. Wir müssen uns darüber klar sein, dass die Wirklichkeit unserer Rechtfertigung vor Gott durch Jesus Christus an der Wirklichkeit der Gottmenschheit Jesu Christi hängt."⁴

We said that once upon a time every student of theology could not only read and pronounce but also understand the apex phrase of the Christian faith: *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. Our great concern today is not that students of theology (and pastors) can no longer read or even pronounce the statement; it is rather that some no longer believe it—but still continue to call themselves Evangelical Lutheran Christians. Is justification still the cornerstone of our theology, the central doctrine of the Christian religion, the doctrine served by all other doctrines of Scripture? Or is justification merely one of the motifs of Scripture? Is the article of justification (which spells out the correct understanding of the Gospel) the valid *Vorverständnis* and *Voraussetzung* for the proper interpretation of the Holy Scriptures? (see Apology IV, 2—5). Or (reminiscent of the question the disciples of

³ *Glauben und Verstehen*: Gesammelte Aufsätze II, 252.

⁴ *Lutherische Monatshefte*, 1, 3, 106.

John asked) do we look for another motif or principle just as valid in understanding and interpreting the apostolic, Biblical message? Does the traditional teaching of justification found in Lutheran literature agree with that of Luther himself? Will Lutheranism continue to be a militant voice in the theological world if it unwaveringly clings to and proclaims the doctrine that God in Christ has justified the world purely by grace? When one of my colleagues heard that I was preparing a paper on "Luther on Justification," he asked: How can you speak on justification at all when the Lutheran World Federation couldn't even frame a definition? The more I think about the contemporary situation the more I am prompted to say that perhaps our article ought not to read "Luther on Justification" but rather "A Justification of Luther." Which is to say that what is pressingly needed is a theological justification of Luther's "doctrine pure" which formerly was to endure to eternity.

I

There is a significant and often provocative amount of contemporary literature to be found on the subject of justification. This material is found not only in Protestant studies but also in the burgeoning Roman Catholic scholarship. Paul Tillich was a great proponent of justification by grace. Indeed, Tillich is known for his re-emphasis on the Protestant principle which is certainly undergirded by his insistence on justification by faith. "It should be regarded as the Protestant principle that, in relation to God, God alone can act and that no human claim, especially no religious claim, no intellectual or moral or devotional work, can reunite us with him." Tillich means that estrangement is uni-

versal and that if we are to be reunited with God (and with ourselves) God must take the initiative. A man must recognize that neither religious piety nor moral effort can make him right with God. (Neither, Tillich would add, can the act of believing specific doctrines.) This is the meaning of Luther's doctrine of "justification by grace through faith."⁵ The kind of justification and the kind of faith of which he spoke is, however, open to considerable question.

Bultmann claims that "faith in the resurrection is faith in the saving efficacy of the cross." Christ meets us in the preaching of one crucified and risen: He meets us in the preaching and nowhere else, says Bultmann. The Easter faith is for us "the proclamation of Christ, the risen Lord, the act of God in which the salvation event of the cross is completed." This is reconciliation, and reconciliation is our justification before God. Bultmann even holds that "de-mythologizing is the radical application of the doctrine of justification by faith to the sphere of knowledge and thought. Like the doctrine of justification de-mythologizing destroys every longing for security."⁶

Paul Van Buren has something to say about justification. In *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* Van Buren writes that "what the Gospel has to say about sin is that it has been dealt with on the cross once for all, that man has received justification by sheer grace in the event of Easter, and that this gift is received and acknowledged in faith. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith expresses the be-

liever's conviction that he has been accepted freely, regardless of his merit, because of Christ." Unfortunately Van Buren adds: "If it is understood empirically, it puts us in a cosmological courtroom which is logically meaningless and morally doubtful. Understood as the expression of the believer's historical perspective, however, it indicates that his freedom is such that he no longer feels the need to 'prove' himself to himself or to anyone else. He is free to accept himself."⁷ He prefers Bultmann's understanding of justification as the existential new self-understanding of the believer. As Ninian Smart reminds us, Van Buren means well, but he does not mean much!

Better known to the Protestant world is the Christocentric theology of Karl Barth. Barth writes voluminously regarding justification by faith. In fact, he agrees with Luther that "with the theology of justification the entire theological enterprise stands or falls." He observes, however, that the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* is not the doctrine of justification as such, but its basis and culmination: the confession of Jesus Christ. "The problem of justification does not need artificially to be absolutized and given a monopoly," writes Barth. "It has its own dignity and necessity."⁸

A rather hasty and admittedly superficial overview of Barth's theology on justification might perhaps be in order. He grounds justification in the eternal decree of God made in Jesus Christ. Our justification, which is a temporal event, has its roots in the eternal commitment of God to men, resulting in the gracious election

⁵ *Systematic Theology* (University of Chicago Press, 1963), Vol. III, p. 224.

⁶ *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, (Scribner, 1958), p. 84.

⁷ *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (Macmillan, 1963), p. 181.

⁸ *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, 2, 7 ff.

of Jesus Christ, through whom justification comes to the sinner. While for Barth justification occurs in reconciliation, it is still but one aspect, certainly a vital one, of reconciliation. Barth pursues fascinating schemata in outlining his doctrine of reconciliation. He includes Christology, sin, soteriology, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Under soteriology he treats justification, stating: "The pride of man (sin) is encountered by God's verdict. This happens in man's justification . . . in justification the Holy Spirit then awakens man to faith." For Barth the achievement of justification occurs in the judgment of God in the death of Christ on the cross and the verdict of this judgment revealed in the resurrection. Jesus Christ is our justification; justification hinges on the fact that God in Christ became man. He says "*Deus pro nobis* means that God in Jesus Christ has taken our place when we become sinners, when we become his enemies, when we stand as such under his accusation and curse, and bring upon ourselves our own destruction" (IV/1, 2, 16). Justification is man's acquittal from sin. It is through faith alone because "no human work as such either is or includes man's justification." For Barth, justification is the passing of man from the state of reprobation to the state of election, from death to life. "The Christian community and Christian faith stand or fall with the reality of the fact." (IV/1, 570 ff.)

A leading contender for the clearest and most decisive voice in Roman theology regarding justification is without question Hans Küng. Küng maintains that the theology of justification lies at the root of the still continuing theological battle over the true form of Christianity. He adds that

justification is the root of the greatest catastrophe which has befallen the Catholic Church in her 2,000-year history.⁹ Küng is thoughtful enough to quote Luther, who says in Galatians, "If the article of justification goes, everything goes." Küng also asserts — and this is certainly pertinent for this present study — that we are at a turning point in the theology of justification. He says that the age of antithesis is now over; serious theologians in both camps see that the task of unity will not be made essentially easier by antithesis of this sort. In the ongoing dialog regarding justification, says Küng, we ought to be talking not as adversaries but as partners. (P. 99)

The following lines are an attempt to give a very brief summary of Küng's position. With regard to δικαιοῦν, δικαίωσις, and δικαίωμα¹⁰ he says: "The idea of an act like that of a court is not universally present, yet the association with a juridical situation is never absent" (p. 209). "The sinner is justified through faith alone, but not through a faith which stands opposed to works" (p. 256). But listen to this: "Faith means simultaneously nothing and everything for justification. Nothing, in so far as even it does not produce justification and is neither an achievement nor a good work. Rather, faith wants God to work on itself. God himself produces justification" (p. 266). Justification occurs through faith alone, and not through works of man; it is not identical with sanctification . . . sanctification follows justification (p. 268).

⁹ *Justification* (Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964), p. 8.

¹⁰ δικαίωσις occurs only twice in the New Testament, in Rom. 4:25 and 5:18; its meaning is established by 4:1-3. δικαιοῦν is used almost exclusively in Romans and Galatians. δικαίωμα is found in Romans and Galatians.

Noting that a great number of contemporary Protestant theologians have given up the "purely extrinsic declaration of justice," Küng concludes that today there is a fundamental agreement between [Roman] Catholic and Protestant theology, precisely in the theology of justification. (P. 284)

II

In his lectures on Christian doctrine delivered at the University of Cambridge, John S. Whale remarks that the amazing thing Paul discovered in his meeting with God is that God justifies the ungodly. No wonder Luther once burst out in that mixture of Latin and German of which his table talk is so full: "*Remissio peccatorum soll dich fröhlich machen. Hoc est caput doctrinae Christianae, et tamen periculosissima praedicatio.*"

This, of course, is true of the doctrine of justification. It ought to make one rejoice, even though it is sometimes a very difficult and dangerous thing to preach. Luther remarks that justification is hard to hold on to (*lubrica est*), not because it is not sure and certain but because the "threatening Word of Scripture overwhelms and shakes all that is within us that we forget justification and the Gospel" (WA 40, I, 129). One of the tragedies of contemporary Lutheranism is that the stirring conviction of St. Paul, the rapturous certainty of Martin Luther, is not shared by all who bear the Lutheran name. Hofer, for example, in *Die Rechtfertigungsverkündigung des Paulus nach neuerer Forschung*, surveys contemporary Protestant literature on the theology of justification. He comes to some startling conclusions, particularly with regard to the Pauline doctrine. He concludes that justification does

not have a purely juridical or imputative meaning, but in a mystical dimension encompasses the entire Christian life of salvation, including the state of the unconscious. According to Hofer, justification in Paul is not only the forgiveness of sins but also vocation, transformation, mobilization, a new life and activity. What he is doing is mixing justification and sanctification or internal renewal. This is frequently done by some "Biblical theologians" who shy away from any kind of systematizing and in the process seem to forget that while there is a *nexus indivulsus* between justification and sanctification, they are still completely and decisively separate as acts of God.

Karl Holl reminds us that Luther did not always hold to the "Lutheran" doctrine of justification. This does not surprise us. Holl points out that Luther at one time held to an intrinsic connection between the declaration of justice and making just. He declares that it was only because of Melancthon's confusion that the pure declaration of righteousness was advocated. This, Holl adds, was immediately opposed by Osiander and later by Pietism. Lutherans do not have to be reminded that Luther did not become a full-grown Lutheran on Nov. 1, 1517. We know that he struggled desperately with the problem of righteousness. Indeed, the Biblical concept of *iustitia* caused him no end of personal anguish, particularly since he first viewed it in the sense of the *iustitia legalis et punitiva*.

In his lectures on the Psalms, delivered 1513—15, Luther viewed justification as a way by which man is cured and cleansed from his sin. God justifies; but God does this as He works humility in man, who mortifies his flesh and his pride. Humility

loomed large in Luther's concept of justification before God. Luther held the scholastic or Roman view of justification, which was simply that of St. Augustine. Justification means making righteous, or internal renewal. God *makes* a man righteous and then *declares* him to be righteous.¹¹ Justification was a gradual healing from the corruption of sin by the power of grace. Luther illustrated this meaning of the term by his reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan, Luther says, "keeps us continually in the house, where he relieves the pain with the oil of grace and gradually heals the sickness through the care of the innkeeper."

Luther's problem was that of sin. If a man continues to sin, he must continue to experience justification. This is typically Augustinian. Justification was a becoming righteous by the work of the divine grace, not the imputation of Christ's righteousness. When Luther does speak of the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, he does so in the sense that Christ works within man. It is evident that the early Luther confused *Christus pro nobis* and *in nobis*. (Neither did he yet understand the depth of the *propter Christum*.) Luther emphasized the work of Jesus Christ, to be sure; but Christ's suffering and death are presented as a pattern of how God deals with men. During this time, then, Luther understood justification as a change of heart within man, not as an *actus forensis Dei*. Justification is a gradual process of becoming righteous. (This poses quite a problem, of course, for the historian who insists that Luther

had his *Turmerlebnis* either before or during his lectures on the Psalms. The only explanation is that Luther did not have a mature grasp of the *iustitia Dei* even after the *Turmerlebnis* or that the *Turmerlebnis* occurred later than was formerly believed.)

In his lectures on Romans, 1515—16, Luther still clings to the Augustinian concept of justification as inner renewal. Man must *become* righteous before God. Justification for Luther is still a gradual process, and the nonimputation of sins occurs because the cure of justification has begun. When he speaks of nonimputation of sin *propter Christum*, he means that Christ covers the sins which remain; accordingly, the nonimputation occurs on the basis of efforts already put forth by the sinner who is being healed by the grace of God through faith.

With Augustine it was a case of *amans amare*. Christian love is *caritas*, a strange combination of ἀγάπη and ἔρωσ. *Caritas*, the reaching up of the soul of man toward God, really constitutes man's justification. Man's love is not perfect because he stands in corruption and depravity before God. (Remember that Augustine battled the Pelagians.) God's work of grace is to heal man's nature so that his love can become perfect. This healing or renewal, in Augustine's thought, is justification. As man continues to confess his sins in humility and exercise love, so man continues in the upward process of justification. This is how Augustine understands the famous phrase now attributed almost exclusively to Luther: *simul iustus et peccator*. *Caritas* does not dominate his life as it should; he is a Christian but he still sins, so he is justified only in part. He is "to some degree righteous, to some degree sinful."

¹¹ See Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel* (Concordia, 1951), pp. 63 ff.

The abiding influence of Augustine on Roman Catholic theology is clearly discernible from a study of the decree on justification finally promulgated by the Council of Trent. According to Trent, justification consists of two things: (1) infusion of the *habitus* or quality of charity into man's heart and (2) the forgiveness of sins. The *habitus* is the real essence of justification, while forgiveness is its supplement. For Luther, after the full enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, justification is nonimputation of sin because of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, with renewal following not as its supplement but as its consequence. Someone has pointed out that Augustine really got off the track simply because he didn't know enough Greek; he failed to realize that the term δικαιόω means "I declare righteous." He preferred the Latin *iustificare*, which does mean *iustum facere*: to make righteous.

III

The famous *Turmerlebnis* is reputed to be the event which brought Luther to a full understanding of justification. In the Latin edition of His works, *Latina Opera I*, published in 1545, Luther himself says, "I began to comprehend the 'righteousness of God' through which the righteous are saved by God's grace, namely, through faith; that the 'righteousness of God' which is revealed through the Gospel was to be understood in a passive sense (*iustitia passiva, ratio passiva*) in which God through mercy justifies man by faith." He summarizes the experience by saying: "As violently as I have formerly hated the expression righteousness of God so I was now as violently compelled to embrace this new conception of grace and for me the ex-

pression of the apostle really opened the gates of paradise."¹²

Luther learned that God justifies the sinner by imputation. Justification is not a change within man, but that gracious declaration of God by which *propter Christum* He pronounces the sinner to be righteous. Incidentally we ought to recognize particularly in our own age that Luther arrived at this evangelical conception neither through an emotionalism built on personal inward piety, nor through a long and detailed study of the higher critical methodology and its relevance to contemporary Biblical interpretation; he arrived at this understanding of the central and foundational teaching of the Christian faith through deep and prayerful meditation upon the Word, the objective, apostolic Word which is still the source and norm of all meaningful theology.

Luther now understood the *iustitia Dei*. God's righteousness was not that which He demands of man but that which He gives man in and through Jesus Christ. The righteousness of Christ which becomes ours by faith is *aliena, essentialis, originalis*. The righteousness of Christ, predicated upon His redemptive work *pro nobis*, is bestowed on men in Baptism. This righteousness is revealed in the Gospel; it is an infinite righteousness and absorbs all sins in a moment (*omnis peccata in momento absorbens*) because it is impossible that sin should adhere in Christ. This alien righteousness, which is poured into us without our works solely by grace, is set against our original sin, which is also alien and inborn.

This righteousness of Christ leads to

¹² E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, p. 286.

righteousness of our own (*inhaerens*). This is man's renewal through a gradual process of growth. The righteousness that God bestows upon the sinner by faith in Christ, therefore, produces the righteousness of life by which a sinner conforms to the image of Christ; the righteousness of Christ which is bestowed on sinners means that the guilt of sin is blotted out through forgiveness, while man's own righteousness leads to the gradual removal of actual sin. But the important point for Luther is that man is not justified *because of* this renewal; he is justified before God solely by the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed by faith.¹³

Now we can summarize Luther's doctrine of justification and observe how sanctification must necessarily be connected with it. Justification is imputation, that is, the imputing or reckoning of the righteousness of Christ to the sinner. Justification is the full and complete forgiveness of all sins. Luther writes, "A Christian is not one who has no sin, but one to whom God does not impute sin for the sake of Christ." It must be carefully emphasized that for Luther passive righteousness and forgiveness of sins are identical. This conviction is borne out by the Lutheran Confessions, which repeatedly declare that when God justifies a man He forgives his sins; justification *is forgiveness*.¹⁴ Justification takes place *propter Christum*. For Luther, Christ is our righteousness because He was made a curse for us and bore our sins in His own body on the tree of the cross. Man is personally justified when by faith he makes the forgiveness of sins his very own. Faith does not justify a man

because it is a work, a *qualitas*, or a *habitus* in man, but simply and only because it clings to the promise of grace revealed in the Gospel. Here Luther's words are pertinent: "So glaubst du, so hast du!"

Justification is an instantaneous act of God. It is not a gradual process which can either increase or decrease. Justification does not admit degrees. In the moment that a man is justified he is totally righteous before God, that is, guiltless and blameless *propter Christum*. This marks Luther's great departure from the Augustinian concept and from the contemporary Roman doctrine on justification. The Gospel promise, says Luther, includes all things: justification, salvation, inheritance, and blessing. It is appropriated by faith, completely, at once.

Sanctification is intimately connected with justification, according to Luther. God justifies *and* sanctifies. He forgives sins by reckoning the sinner righteous; he renews the sinner and makes him righteous in heart and life. Here Luther carefully distinguishes between grace as *gratia salvifica* and grace as *gratia infusa*. Justification and inner renewal must be clearly distinguished but never separated from each other. Genuine faith always produces works of love.

A final word ought to be said about Luther's conception of justification and his teachings on Law and Gospel. It is the Gospel which reveals God's grace in Christ. Through the Gospel, moreover, God not only reveals but imparts the forgiveness of sins. By means of the Gospel God pronounces this justification or judgment of divine acquittal upon man. The fulfillment of Law in no wise belongs to the doctrine of justification. The Law plays a part,

¹³ Saarnivaara, pp. 96 ff.

¹⁴ Apology, IV, 76; F. C. Ep. III, 7.

however with regard to man's renewal or his "second righteousness." Luther writes: "The Law ceases through the remission of sins and divine imputation when we believe in Christ, who fulfilled the Law. In addition, God gives the Holy Spirit that we may begin to fulfill the Law also" (WA 39, I, 20). "We are free from the Law, which ceases with Christ in a twofold sense: first, imputatively, when sins against the Law are not imputed to the sinner but remitted for the sake of Jesus Christ; then by expurgation, when the Holy Spirit is given so that the sinner hates from his heart everything that offends God's name, and follows good works" (WA 39, I, 434). Here we must be reminded again of the complexity of Luther's teaching on Law and Gospel. "Both the Law and the Gospel were Word of God in the sense that they were not the word of man, but the Gospel was the Word of God also in the sense that by it God bestowed and sustained faith."¹⁵

IV

There are three areas in which Luther's doctrine of justification has special contemporary relevance. These are the areas of ecumenism, secularism, and personal experience. Ecumenical discussions often bog down on the questions of order, authority in the church, the doctrine of the church itself, and the sacraments. For Lutherans, the central question and problem, relating naturally to the matter of authority, is and remains the article by which the church stands or falls.

Omnes Christiani de evangelio consentiunt: all Christians agree on the doctrine of the Gospel; and Christians are the

¹⁵ J. Pelikan, *Luther's Works*, Companion Volume (Concordia, 1959), p. 65.

church! The Gospel is our justification by and before God. It is this article alone, says Luther, which "begets, nourishes, sustains, keeps, and defends the church. And without it the church of God could not subsist an hour." Ecumenical discussion must never forget that the doctrine of justification is the heart of the Gospel. We must insist that it is this article by which ecumenism ultimately stands or falls. According to Luther the teaching that we obtain forgiveness of sins solely *propter Christum per fidem* has been the faith of the Fathers and all saints from the very beginning. "It has been the doctrine and teaching of Christ and the apostles. And it is to this day, and will be to the end, the unanimous understanding and voice of the whole Christian church" (St. L. XII, 494). This emphasis reveals the genuine catholicity of Lutheranism.

This insistence is particularly pertinent when theologians such as Hans Küng maintain that the "neo-Lutheran" doctrine of justification is quite compatible with that expressed by Trent. (Karl Barth says that if Hans Küng's teachings are really those of Roman theology, then "having twice gone to the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Trent, I may very well have to hasten there a third time to make a contrite confession — Father, I have sinned." Barth does remind us, however, of the sixth session of Trent.)

The Lutheran World Federation at Helsinki made this confession: "Justification by faith remains a difficult and obscure doctrine. We may be impressed by the fact that the Lutheran Church has confessed it loyally and unswervingly through the centuries since the Reformation. But we still have difficulty in comprehending it, in in-

terpreting it, in seeing its relevance for the situation in which we live."¹⁶ Helsinki also said: "Is the doctrine of justification still crucial as the *articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae*? Yes, provided it is understood not just forensically, but inclusively as the renewal of the whole man. Yet it is not the doctrine which is crucial, but that for which the doctrine is the time-limited expression." Again, "The Lutheran doctrine of justification is irrelevant for a generation which expresses no need to be justified."¹⁷ When the heirs of the Reformation are struggling desperately to enunciate a meaningful doctrine of justification, one realizes how necessary an understanding of the Lutheran-Pauline doctrine is.

Our second area of concern is secularism. The whole God-is-dead movement is a capitulation of theology to a growing and conquering secularism. It represents a new and radical humanism. Feuerbach was willing to let man create God in his own image; modern secularized man isn't even willing to speak about God. Van Buren says that Bultmann is concerned about the incomprehensibility to contemporary man of the form in which the kerygma is expressed; it must be stripped of its mythological character. Bonhoeffer is concerned to know how the Christian who is really a secular man can understand the Gospel in a secular way. And Van Buren himself holds that we must now affirm a purely secular Christianity, a theology which is little more than an expression of a certain historical perspective on life. The cry goes up that modern man simply does not un-

derstand such concepts as sin and salvation, guilt and pardon, Law and Gospel. So what can the doctrine of justification possibly mean to him?

Our answer must be that if modern man does not understand his sin and guilt, the church must remind him that the living God, who speaks to all men in Law, damns man for his estrangement, his alienation, his own inner tensions, the radical wrongness of his nature according to which he can even say: "God is dead." But the church must also emphasize that the God who lives eternally is the justifying God, the God who in Jesus Christ pronounces estranged, alienated, ungodly man to be righteous in His sight. And the church must remember that the essential scandal of this Gospel will ever remain. If contemporary man is more concerned about existence than guilt, about authentic life than sin, the church must point out that true authentic existence is possible only in God, the God who in Jesus Christ is gracious to man and has absolved man in the resurrection of His Son. The church can neither accommodate nor compromise itself on this score; the church exists not to get along with the world on the latter's terms but to proclaim to the world God's terms for authentic life.

The third area is that of personal experience or personal faith. Personal faith is justifying faith—faith in the Christ who is our righteousness, our justification, our redemption, our life, our forgiveness, our standing with God. Genuine faith has an object; that object is Christ, the Gospel, God's gracious decree of justification. A faith which does not cling to the justifying decree is no faith at all, at least not in the Christian sense of the word. Bult-

¹⁶ *On Justification* (LWF Press, 1963), p. 5.

¹⁷ *Proceedings of the Fourth Assembly* (1963), pp. 442—43.

mann declares that human life is fallen, but it has fallen from itself. Redemption is "the act of God through which man becomes capable of self-commitment, capable of faith and love, of his authentic life." We should rather say that human life is indeed fallen, but fallen from itself because it is fallen from God; man lives in self-estrangement and alienation from his fellows *because* he is estranged and alienated from God. Redemption therefore is the

act of God through which man becomes capable of God-commitment, capable of faith in and love for the God who justifies the ungodly, capable of truly authentic existence and life in Christ, whom to know is life indeed. "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin." (Rom. 4:7-8)

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