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# The Doctrine of Justification in The Theology of Classical Lutheran Orthodoxy

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THE PURPOSE of this article is not to present the classical Lutheran doctrine of justification *in toto*. Even to summarize what such theological giants as Chemnitz, Hutter, Brochmand, Gerhard and Quenstedt have said on the central theme of the Gospel would be quite impossible in a brief article. During the period of orthodox Lutheranism which prevailed for nearly a century and a half (ca. 1550-1715) no other article of faith was given such thorough treatment as the locus on justification. Not only did dogmaticians like Chemnitz and Gerhard and Calov devote hundreds of pages in their dogmatics to the doctrine, but immense monographs were written on the theme (H. Hoepfner) and vast commentaries were written on the article of justification in all its depth and breadth (Gerhard, Seb. Schmidt, Calov, Balduin, Brochmand).

The aim of this paper is rather threefold: (1) to trace some of the more significant emphases in the orthodox Lutheran doctrine of justification, (2) to compare these emphases with Luther's doctrine, and (3) to examine whether the post-Reformation presentation of the doctrine is relevant in the light of contemporary issues. These three purposes shall be carried out concurrently as we consider what I believe to be the three main features of the doctrine of justification as taught by the orthodox Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

## I. *The Centrality of Justification*

No other article of faith is developed by orthodox Lutheran theology with such conscious dependence upon Luther as the article on justification. One can read pages in the works of the orthodox Lutherans on the doctrine of God or Christology without finding reference to Luther. On the Sacraments and the doctrine of the Church more dependence upon Luther is noticeable. The doctrine of Justification, however, is often little more than a paraphrase

what Luther had said. Indeed, a major criticism of the dogmatics from Chemnitz to Hollaz might center in the almost total lack of originality in developing the doctrine of justification—that is, if we considered any advance from the presentation of Luther necessary. Perhaps the most notable contribution which begins with Chemnitz is the systemization which takes shape; and by the time of Gerhard and Quenstedt we observe the doctrine being presented according to a neat outline: viz., the meaning of justification, the subject of justification (man), the author of justification (God), the meritorious cause (Christ's work), the means, the *organon leptikon*, the nature of justification, etc. But there is nothing new in all this. Another new feature is the increased use of scholastic terminology which we today would consider of doubtful value and which we have long since abandoned. Such terminology was a sort of theological short hand in the seventeenth century (although it seldom lent itself to brevity), a technical language which was thoroughly known and used by Roman Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran theologians alike. Scholastic terminology served as a medium of scholarly communication in those days, like the Latin language, and the Lutherans were compelled to employ it in the interest of interconfessional dialogue, just as we are forced to use a good deal of Kantian and Existentialist jargon today. In respect to the doctrine of justification a minimum of scholastic terminology was used by Lutheran theologians, adhering very closely to Luther's and Melancthon's terminology, especially to the forensic imagery. The reason for this was that as Chemnitz and the later dogmaticians rejected the medieval doctrine of justification, they were compelled to abandon as well the scholastic terminology which conveyed this doctrine.

Following Luther, Lutheran orthodoxy makes the article of justification the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. In this they are not merely repeating a cliché. The insistence upon the centrality of justification does not result from a mere adherence to party spirit or an inability to see beyond the polemics of the day. It was the earnest conviction of Lutheran theology that justification was a summation of the result of Christ's work, a paraphrase of the Gospel itself. It is highly significant that Chemnitz begins his treatment of the locus on justification with a thorough discussion of Law and Gospel and of the grace of God.<sup>1</sup> And Gerhard subsumes his entire lengthy treatment of the work of Christ under the locus on justification. For justification is meaningless without an understanding of the distinction between Law and Gospel; and justification is impossible without its basis in the obedience of Christ. The point is that justification is not considered to be a narrow Pauline or "Lutheran" formulation, but it is a doctrine embracing the entire Gospel, a summation of the entire doctrine of Christ's work, His obedience under the Law, His suffering for our sins, His resurrection for our justification and His lordship over His Church. This is why the article of justification assumes such immense significance in Lutheran theology, why nothing pertaining to this article must

be yielded "even if heaven and earth and all things should sink in ruin." "Everything," says Calov, "which we teach, witness a<sup>1</sup> urge against pope, devil and the whole world in this life is center and set forth in this one article."<sup>2</sup> Calov is only echoing what Luth<sup>1</sup> and Chemnitz said before Him. We recall the statement Luther's:

This doctrine [of justification] can never be urged and taught enough. If this doctrine is overthrown or disappears, then knowledge of the truth is lost at the same time. If this doctrine flourishes, then all good things flourish, religion, true worship, the glory of God and the right knowledge of all conditions of life and of all things.<sup>3</sup>

Chemnitz goes into even greater detail to express his conviction that justification is the central, focal point of the Gospel and of theology. He says,

This teaching is the most important in our Christian doctrine. For anxious and frightened minds which struggle under the wrath of God seek this one gate through which they might have a God who is pacified and propitiated.

In times of temptation and trouble one can only lean on this, that God who condemns sin will nevertheless receive the poor sinner's grace. There is nothing left the poor sinner to depend on.<sup>4</sup> Chemnitz is not indulging in rhetoric, but speaking in all seriousness. To him all theology is practical, and the heart of all Christian theology is the word concerning our justification before God:

This locus contains the sum of the Gospel. For it indicates the benefit which we derive from Christ, and offers immovable consolation to pious souls; it teaches which are the proper ways of worshipping God, what it means truly to call upon Him, and it sets the Church of God apart from other peoples, Jews, Mohammedans, and Pelagians, that is, from all who imagine that a man is righteous by the Law or by outward discipline, and who bid us doubt concerning the remission of sins.

Not only are pious souls comforted, but the Gospel and all theology is preserved when the one article of justification is kept pure. Notice the sense of urgency and the optimism also in another of his statements:

This article is in a sense the stronghold and the high fort of all the doctrine and of the entire Christian religion; if it is obscured or adulterated or set aside, the purity of doctrine in other articles of faith cannot possibly be maintained. If this article is kept pure, all idolatry, superstitions, whatever corruptions there are in other articles of faith tumble down of their own weight.<sup>5</sup>

From the above it is clear that to Lutheran orthodoxy, as Luther himself, justification is not merely "an image present in

earliest Christian tradition," one image among others "used to set forth the significance of God's deed in Christ." But justification is God's inspired account of the result of the saving act of Christ; it is a description of what really takes place when a sinner comes to faith in Christ. It is more than a mere image or metaphor which may be discarded if modern man finds it irrelevant. But as a matter of fact our justification before God is never irrelevant; we have God's Word for this.

But did not Lutheran orthodoxy, like Luther, with the emphasis upon the justification theme in Scripture, see "the message of the Bible in unitary and almost monolithic terms," as the study document prepared for the LWF assembly in Helsinki implies? I think it would be difficult to find one motif in Scripture dealing with the work of Christ (reconciliation, redemption, forgiveness, propitiation, victory, etc.) which is not given thorough attention in the Lutheran dogmatics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The orthodox theologians recognized that these themes are all interpretations of Christ's one saving work. And they included all these themes under the concept of justification in their discussions of the doctrine. Like Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, they used such terms as "justification," "forgiveness" and "reconciliation" promiscuously and interchangeably. Thus, when they spoke of justification as the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, they had in mind justification in the wider sense including both its basis (Christ's work) and its effects (*unio mystica*, sonship, peace of conscience, sanctification and eternal life). They were, of course, aware that the term "justification" was not even found in many books of the New Testament and that the Gospel could be proclaimed without any allusion to the term. Indeed, they never "considered the doctrine of justification by faith" a fundamental article of faith.<sup>8</sup> The centrality of justification in the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy is not an example of "the way controversy shapes and warps theological thinking." For classical Lutheran theology the centrality of justification means the centrality of the Gospel, the centrality of Christ crucified in the theology and the proclamation of the Church.

## II. *Forensic Justification and the Justitia Aliena*

The results of theological controversy are both good and bad. Sometimes it warps theological thinking and drives one into untenable positions. At other times it forces the theologian to clarify his thinking and to search the Scriptures anew. The latter was the case as a new generation of Lutherans, beginning with Chemnitz, sought to defend Luther's doctrine of justification and to reply to the charges and condemnations of the Council of Trent and its apologists (Andrada and Hosius) and a throng of later able controversialists such as Bellarmine, Adam Tanner, Jacob Gretzer and others.

According to the Lutheran theologians the entire controversy with the Church of Rome hinged on one crucial issue, viz., the

nature of justification. What does it mean to stand justified before God? A typical definition of justification is offered by B. Mentzer and we might examine his words carefully.

Justification is an act of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit an act which forgives the sinner all his sins, imputes to the righteousness of Christ and receives him into everlasting life. It is an act of pure grace, love and mercy, performed because of the most holy obedience which our Mediator Christ rendered to the entire divine Law and because of the satisfaction He made. The sinner is justified who through the ministry of the Gospel truly believes that Christ is the redeemer of the whole world, and he is justified by grace without his own work or merits.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the emphasis upon the divine monergism of grace, notice the forensic imagery which dominates the description of justification. Justification is an act or judgment of God which entails a verdict of acquittal and an imputation of Christ's obedience to God's Law. About this time of Mentzer and Gerhard justification came to be commonly defined in Lutheran circles as embracing formally (1) the forgiveness or non-imputation of sins and (2) the imputation and gift of Christ's righteousness (obedience). This forensic picture is portrayed even more graphically as Mentzer goes on to speak of the basis of our justification in Christ:

The basis which merits our justification is Jesus Christ the one man who in both of His natures is the one Mediator and Redeemer of the entire human race. Although He was not over the Law, for our sake He was made under the Law to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of children (Gal. 4:4,5). He not only observed the whole divine Law, but fulfilled it completely and exactly (Matt. 5:17,18). Thus He is called the end (*telos*) and the perfection of the Law (Rom. 10:4). But He also sustained the punishment which we deserved by our sins, suffered and died in our place, as the whole Gospel history abundantly testifies. This entire obedience of His, both what He did and what He suffered (which is commonly termed active and passive obedience), is called the righteousness of Christ, i.e. the righteousness which avails before God, and the righteousness of the Gospel, i.e. the righteousness which is revealed in the Gospel, and the righteousness of faith, i.e. the righteousness which is apprehended by faith and counted as our righteousness to us who believe.<sup>10</sup>

Again we see how the legal and nomistic nature of Christ's work of redemption (His obedience, His being punished by the Law), informs the article of justification. We can easily understand how Chemnitz and Gerhard could consider the work of Christ under

locus on justification: Christ is the heart and center of the doctrine of justification, just as He is the heart of the Gospel.

The emphasis upon the forensic nature of justification springs not merely from a loyalty to Luther, who unabatedly stressed the doctrine of imputed righteousness. The Lutheran dogmaticians were fully persuaded that they were presenting the doctrine of Scripture. Schrenk in Kittel's *Woerterbuch* has made no more intensive a study of the term *dikaioō* and its cognates than did Chemnitz, for instance, in his *Loci Theologici* and his *Examen Concilii Tridentini*. And the two come to the same conclusion: the entire New Testament is haunted by the forensic image. The term *dikaioō* is never used in the New Testament to denote a qualitative change in man, but as a judicial act of God. This is shown from the fact that the term is so often found in a judicial setting, as in Rom. 3, 5 and 8, and is shown from neutral evidence (Lk. 7:29; 10:29; 16:15; 7:35; 1 Tim. 3:16). That forgiveness of sins is used interchangeably with justification indicates to Chemnitz that forgiveness too is a forensic concept. The forensic nature of justification is brought out unmistakably in Rom. 4 where righteousness is said to be imputed without works (v. 8), and faith, not works, is reckoned for righteousness (v. 5). Justification is often contrasted to the forensic term "condemnation" in Scripture (Rom. 5:18; 8:33,34; John 5:24). And Chemnitz points out that not only the *dikaioi katastathēsontai hoi polloi* of Rom. 5:19 is forensic phraseology, but even the terminology of binding and loosing sins is judicial terminology (John 20:23). The forensic picture is found, actually, throughout the Bible (Gen. 44:16 [Cf. LXX]; 2 Sam. 15:4; Isa. 43:9; Ps. 51:4; Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15; Isa. 5:23; Matt. 12:37; Ps. 19:9; 143:2; Dan. 8:14; Job 13:18; 34:5; 33:9-12,32; 32:2).

The conclusion to which such evidence leads is that in justification God reckons the ungodly to be righteous—and this is done forensically, legally, not arbitrarily, capriciously or without a cost, as Luther would say.<sup>11</sup> In other words, God is just when He justified the sinner (Rom. 3:26). We might quote Chemnitz at length on this important point:

The forensic term indicates that the justification of the sinner is not something trifling or perfunctory; but the whole man stands in the presence of God's judgment, and he is examined according to his nature and his works—and that by the rule of divine Law. However, after sin entered the world, man in this life does not truly and completely conform to the Law of God. Thus nothing can be found in man, either in his nature or his works, which he can offer so that he might be justified before God. Rather the Law pronounces the sentence of condemnation upon him, a sentence written with the finger of God. Now God does not justify the ungodly through some error, like a judge who passes a verdict when he has not

examined or acquainted himself sufficiently with a case. N does God justify the ungodly carelessly, as though He were not really disturbed over the transgression of His Law. N does He justify in an unfair manner, as though He approved of injustice and connived and colluded with the ungodly? God Himself would adjudge such a justification to be an abomination (Ex. 23:1; Isa. 5:23; Prov. 17:15). No, God cannot take back His decision of condemnation which is revealed in the Law unless He has been given satisfaction (Matt. 5:18). If God is to justify, justice and satisfaction are required. Luther correctly said, God remits no sin unless satisfaction has been rendered for it to the Law. . . . And so because God does not justify out of fickleness or carelessness or mistakenness or injustice and because nothing can be found in man by which He can be justified by God,—and yet the righteousness of the Law must be fulfilled in the one to be justified (Rom. 8:4)—it is necessary that a foreign righteousness intervene. This foreign righteousness is such that the payment of guilt and the complete obedience of the Law satisfied divine wrath. As the result is that there can be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. To this righteousness the sinner, terrified and condemned by the voice of the Law, flees with true faith. He desires, implores and seizes this righteousness. To this righteousness he surrenders himself. This righteousness he sets against the judgment of God and the accusation of the Law. And by virtue of this righteousness and its being imputed to him he is justified, that is, absolved from the sweeping sentence of condemnation, and he receives the decree of life eternal.<sup>12</sup>

What a beautiful and comforting statement this is. Here again we notice how important the vicarious atonement of Christ is to the Lutheran doctrine of justification. Christ's work is not merely a remote meritorious cause which makes justification a possibility as in Roman theology,<sup>13</sup> but a part of the very form of justification. Christ's obedience of life and death, His righteousness which alone avails before God, becomes mine, is imputed and transferred to me. This is the heart of the doctrine of justification, the heart and core of the Gospel.

It was upon the idea of imputation that Rome's chief criticism of the Lutheran doctrine of justification was centered. A justification by imputation, according to Roman theology, was merely relational and not ontological. And a relation without an ontological foundation was a fiction and a fantasy. There must be a basis for justification in us, or there can be no righteous imputation. Chemnitz replies that God does not wish to justify anyone unjustly or without an adequate basis. Satisfaction must be made for sins. It is just that the foundation for our justification is not in us believers, but in Christ the Mediator, who obeyed the Law of God and carried away our sins. "Thus, we have a true verdict," say

Chemnitz, "and its foundation is in the obedience and redemption of Christ." There is nothing fictitious about the forgiveness of sins or the imputation of Christ's righteousness in classical Lutheran theology. In justification our sins "which are in us and not in Christ" are actually transferred to Christ according to God's decree and determination, and Christ's righteousness is actually transferred to us (*justitia Christi, quae est in Christo et non in nobis, Dei decreto et aestimatione transfertur ad nos*).<sup>14</sup> Justification means that "he who is justified was not previously righteous, but becomes [*feri*] righteous."<sup>15</sup> Justification does not happen in another life, but now; it happens once and for all here and in this life (*hic et in hac vita*). We are justified by faith which we have now. The publican went to his house justified. Justification never takes place apart from men in the counsels of God's heaven.<sup>16</sup>

The reality and the greatness of our justification, of the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us, cannot be over emphasized. Speaking against the accusation that the Lutheran doctrine makes justification a legal fiction, Quenstedt says:

The imputation consists in a real reckoning. According to the judgment of God the sinner who believes in Christ is absolved of sins and the righteousness of Christ is truly reckoned to him. True, this reckoning does not result in the righteousness of Christ existing inherently in the believer; but the imputation is not, nevertheless, thereby fictitious and imaginary, a mere opinion of a just person, without any actual effect, as the papists maliciously report us as teaching. No, this *imputatio* or imputation is earnest and real. It has its gracious foundation in Christ and its termination in us [*ad nos*]. It consists in a gracious determination of God and in a real conferring and transferring of Christ's righteousness to the believer. And so when one believes, he is by this imputation made and accounted righteous in the judgment of God's mind. And this is a most real judgment of God which from the throne of His grace extends over the sinner who from the Gospel believes in Christ.<sup>17</sup>

With these words Quenstedt shows himself a true disciple of Luther who staked everything on the truth and validity of God's verdict over the lost sinner who believes, the truth and reality of God's imputation. "This imputation," Luther said, "is not a thing of no consequence, but is greater than the whole world, yea, than all the holy angels. Reason cannot see all this, for reason disregards the Word of God; but we (I say) thank God that we have such a Savior who is able to pass us by and reckon our sin as nothing."<sup>18</sup>

In my opinion the most disappointing feature of the LWF study document on justification is the absence of all reference to the forensic nature of justification and to its basis in the *Christus pro nobis*, to the *justitia aliena* and the *justitia imputata*, all of which

was so central and crucial to Luther and the Lutheran Confession and classical Lutheran orthodoxy. The doctrine of forensic justification is more than a convenient safeguard against Romanism and its doctrine of work righteousness and uncertainty; it is the account of how God actually deals with the lost sinner who, crushed by Law and despairing of himself, turns to Jesus, the friend and Savior of sinners. The Church cannot afford to ignore this fact today any more than in Luther's day.

### III. *Justification by Faith*

In the matter of justification by faith Lutheran orthodoxy again makes a concerted effort to be faithful to the legacy of Luther. We can and need not summarize all that was said on this crucial issue. There are, however, I believe, in connection with the doctrine of justification by faith a number of points which are given great emphasis by all the orthodox Lutherans. To mention and discuss briefly these points may serve to give a good resumé of the position and concerns.

#### A. *The Order of Justification*

The order (*ordo*) which God uses in preparing the sinner by bringing him to forgiveness and justification is set forth in very clear and simple terms. It is structured on the Biblical idea of repentance. According to Chemnitz<sup>19</sup> there must first be contrition; that is to say, before there can be justification one must come to a knowledge of his sin and must experience terrors of conscience when he knows God's wrath against sin. This point is stressed by all the orthodox Lutherans as it was by Luther and Melancthon. And it is the *contritio passiva*, emphasized by Luther and the Confessions, that they are speaking of, i.e. flight from God, "terror of the conscience aroused by the knowledge of sin."<sup>20</sup> But then these terrors," Chemnitz says, "must be added faith. With knowledge and trust in the promised mercy of God faith takes courage because of God's Son and gives comfort to the soul. Otherwise we become overwhelmed with despair and fall into eternal ruin. But faith approaches God; faith asks, desires, seeks, seizes and receives the forgiveness of sins. In such a manner, set forth by the Word of God, our Lord prepares the way for us so that in faith through Him, and because of Him we come to faith and gain justification." We see how simple this *ordo* is. It is constructed according to the preaching of Law and Gospel and the effects of Law and Gospel. Chemnitz emphasizes this simple, Biblical *ordo* in contrast to the Roman doctrine of *meritum congrui* by which the sinner actually merits God's grace and forgiveness<sup>21</sup> and *gratia gratis* which had the function merely of inciting the free will of man. Then by his own natural powers disposes himself toward justification. All this meant that faith was merely the preparation for justification (or sanctification). Faith does not apprehend justification; it opens the way for hope and charity which are works neces-

before justification can be achieved. Chemnitz insists that only the Biblical *ordo* gives God all glory and offers the sinner lasting comfort and peace of conscience.

The order of justification (Law and Gospel, contrition and faith) which Chemnitz outlines is most important to Lutheran theology and scrupulously observed. Faith, says Hans Poulsen Resen,<sup>22</sup> is a persuasion of a very singular kind, a spiritual confidence, a confidence in eternal life. Such faith is born out of extreme need, and can only flower in one who has felt his sin. "Where there is no contrition there can be only a feigned and painted faith." This is why it is so important, Resen says, to preach Law before Gospel, sin and wrath before faith. For faith is simply believing that our sins are remitted for Christ's sake, and then peace and comfort and joy follow. "But such joy and comfort will not be felt where there is no contrition and terror." It is because faith is what it is, that pastors must be so extremely conscientious in preaching both Law and Gospel. Sinners first "must be provoked to fear;" they must be confronted "with the overwhelming wrath of God against sin" and be shown "that no one could make atonement for sins except Christ alone." And "if Christ has to suffer so for our sins, how much more will we suffer, if we despise this wrath of God and do not repent of our sins (Lk. 23:31)?" But then the Gospel enters in and without delay proclaims that our life need not close with death and terror. God does not desire our death, but offers life. "For His anger endureth but a moment; in His favour is life" (Ps. 30:5; Ex. 18:23). No matter how involved and unsatisfactory the *ordines salutis* of later orthodoxy became, this simple *ordo* in justification is faithfully followed.

### B. *The Nature of Faith (fides justificans)*

In defining the faith by which the sinner is justified, Lutheran dogmatics seems carefully stereotyped, wishing to say neither too much nor too little. Against Roman theology it is maintained that faith is not a bare knowledge of facts, a mere assent to doctrine, a mere belief that certain things are true. But neither is faith only an opinion or feeling. Rather it is something that involves the whole man, the sinner crushed by God's Law, and all his faculties. May I offer three descriptions of faith given by three orthodox Lutherans far removed from each other in time and place, and then comment briefly? First, Martin Chemnitz:

In the matter of justification faith must be understood not merely as knowledge and a general acceptance that the promise of the Gospel is true, but faith embraces also activities of the heart and will. That is to say, there is a desire and trust by which sinners in their wrestlings with sin and with the wrath of God apply to themselves the promise of grace. Hence each believer includes himself in these general promises, and arouses himself to say without hesitation that the promise of

the Gospel is effectual also in respect to him. And thus he receives comfort and life in times of temptation.<sup>23</sup>

### Second, Jesper Brochmand:

Justifying faith is true knowledge and firm assent to the divine Word. It is first and foremost the heart's unhesitating confidence that in all necessities, even when the entire soul quaking because of sin, the poor sinner can conclude with certainty that God wishes to forgive sins for the sake of His Son Jesus, not just the sins of others, but his own sins, even though he is the greatest of sinners, and that God reckons him Christ's righteousness and gives him eternal life.<sup>24</sup>

### Third, Abraham Calov:

Justifying faith is our confidence of divine mercy in Christ; it is trust in Jesus, assurance that He has paid for our sins, restored us to righteousness and gained eternal salvation for us; and it is therefore confidence that for Christ's sake God forgives us our sins and in His grace wishes to rescue us and give us an inheritance of eternal life.<sup>25</sup>

From these three statements we notice that it is the troubled, desperate sinner who believes. We observe also the emphasis upon *fides specialis* in all three statements; faith is first of all my personal trust in Jesus Christ. No crisis theologian today could state the case more emphatically. We see furthermore that faith is essentially trust and confidence and that it is linked with the forgiveness of sins offered in the Gospel. But above all we notice that the subject of faith (man) is barely alluded to; it is the object of saving faith which is portrayed very clearly in every description. Faith looks away from self to the treasure God offers in Jesus Christ. Faith is "coming to undisturbed rest and taking one's refuge in God's promises."<sup>26</sup> Lutheran theology speaks indiscriminately of forgiveness, the Gospel, the promises, Christ, God's grace, the mercy of Christ, Christ's work as the object of faith. But there is really only one object of faith; faith clings to Christ the Redeemer who is the heart of the Gospel and the manifestation of God's mercy. True justifying faith includes the so-called *fides generalis* in all that God has revealed; but this is only because everything revealed in Scripture leads to the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, whether Scripture speaks of the history of God's people, of sin, of the life of obedience. When the papists bring up such passages as Heb. 11 to show that the whole *corpus doctrinae* is the object of faith, Chemnitz replies that here the apostle is speaking of the activity of faith after justification, viz., that faith is patient and obedient under crosses and offences. But the chief question which I as a sinner must have answered is always whether God is at peace with me, whether He is reconciled and propitiated, a question which must be answered before there can be any activity of faith and a question which is answered only in the promises of the Gospel.

One more point might be noted relative to the orthodox Lutheran doctrine of faith. Faith is in the unseen, the unempirical, the absurd—viz., in forgiveness, grace and eternal life. May I merely cite one statement of Brochmand's to bring out this point:

Those deep mysteries which cannot be grasped by our senses or reason and which are considered to be utter foolishness by the carnal man, those deep mysteries faith makes certain and definite and worthy of our acceptance. By the Word and Spirit of God and by faith our minds and hearts are fully persuaded that those things are completely true which our senses and reason think should be rejected as unlikely or quite impossible. Thus it is that faith convinces the mind and heart to assent unquestioningly to those things which are unseen. . . . And so life is promised to us, but we are dead; we are certain of a blessed resurrection although our bodies are subject to decay; . . . we are proclaimed blessed by the Word, and yet all the time we are hemmed in by all sorts of evils; God's present help is promised us in all adversities, and yet we seem to wait this divine succor in vain. Thus it is that faith is truly the evidence of things unseen.<sup>27</sup>

Our faith cannot be proved or demonstrated in any ordinary way. It has its own proof, the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*, the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

### C. Justification *per Fidem*

In speaking of faith's place in justification, orthodox Lutheranism leaned heavily upon the contributions of Luther and Chemnitz and is quite unoriginal. Chemnitz points out that faith does not justify because it is an assent to something, or because it is an act of man, but by virtue of the fact that it grasps, desires, and accepts "in the promise Christ with all His merits, and in Christ also the mercy of God who forgives sins." Justifying faith is receptivity, an *actio passiva*, a *lēpsis Christi* (*lambanein*, John 1:12; Rom. 5:17; Gal. 3:14; *katalambanein*, John 1:5; *paralambanein*, John 1:11; *dechesthai*, Luke 8:13; Acts 8:14; *apodechesthai*, Acts 2:41; 1 Tim. 1:15). And so it is *by* faith (*pistei*, Acts 26:18; *ek pisteōs*, Gal. 3:7, 8, 9, 11, 12; *dia tēs pisteōs*, Rom. 2:30, 31; *meta pisteōs*, 1 Tim. 1:14; *epi tē pistei*, Phil. 3:9) that we are justified. Good works, acts of love do not receive anything. Faith is the only means suitable to receive the justifying object, Christ. In the very nature of the case justification is by faith alone, without works. Quenstedt says:

On our part it is this faith alone which justifies us and effects (*influit*) our justification. Whatever merely embraces apprehends to itself the promises of grace, the forgiveness of sins and the merit of Christ does so without any admixture of works. And only that on the part of man which enters into the picture when we consider God justifying him can be said to justify.

Thus we are said to be justified by faith exclusively without the deeds of the Law (Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:8,9). True, faith is never alone, never all by itself and isolated from good works; and yet faith alone apprehends the merit of Christ, and we are justified by means of faith alone.<sup>29</sup>

The Lutheran dogmatists are most careful to maintain the instrumentality of faith in justification and that faith justifies only by virtue of its object. Faith does not justify in so far as it is an acceptance and reception (*quatenus est apprehensio*), but "the whole justifying power of faith depends on the thing apprehended." Only when this point is kept clear will the sinner ever be certain of his own forgiveness and salvation.

The Lutheran emphasis upon faith as certainty wrought by the Holy Spirit and upon justification by faith *propter Christum* is to assure every believer in Christ that he can and ought to be sure of his salvation. Here we see the comforting and practical consequences of our justification before God. Lutheran orthodoxy upholds at great length one of the great issues of the Reformation—that every believer in Christ can be certain with an infallible and divine certainty of God's grace and forgiveness and eternal life. This is always with the discussion of justification, and rightly so, that this comfort is stressed.<sup>31</sup>

#### D. *The Activity of Faith (Faith and Good Works)*

The most common argument of Roman theologians against the Lutheran doctrine of justification was that it separated faith and good works, justification and sanctification. The charge then followed that Lutheran theology did not sufficiently emphasize the importance and necessity of good works. From the time of Chemnitz Lutheran theologians make every effort to show that such charge is utterly unfounded. Chemnitz insists that it never occurred to the Lutherans to separate faith and good works. He says:

The Lutheran Church has always taught that renewal must and does follow reconciliation, and in such a manner that the Holy Spirit comes with the remission of sins, and He begins renewal in us. Therefore the Holy Spirit initiates sanctification and renewal in those who have been reconciled because of Christ the Mediator . . . Thus in no sense do we teach that justifying faith is all alone, that is, that it is a mere persuasion which is without repentance and with no good works springing from it. Such faith without works is barren and dead. We insist that it is not true and living faith at all which does not work by love (Gal. 5:6).<sup>32</sup>

Rome's charge is childish. Because faith and good works are present at the same time does not imply that both faith and good works justify. We have ears and eyes at the same time, yet we do not see with both ears and eyes. The conclusion therefore must be

"True faith apprehends Christ; at the same time true faith is not without works (Jas. 2) and works through love (Gal. 5)."

The Lutherans during the period of orthodoxy, unlike Luther, are by no means embarrassed by the book of James. Rather they accept its canonicity unquestioningly and use it in enunciating their doctrine of justification. One of the greatest commentaries written during the period was Jesper Brochmand's work on James. One of Brochmand's purposes in writing this commentary was to demonstrate that Lutheranism takes James seriously on every point. According to Brochmand, James, unlike Paul, is not seeking to show how a man is justified before God; he rather wishes to explain how a believer "gives evidence to his fellow man that his professed faith is neither fiction nor sham, but real and living faith."<sup>33</sup> And the only conclusion one can come to as one reads James is as follows: "It is absolutely vain to profess faith if it is devoid of good works." Faith and good works are inextricably bound together, like fire and light. It is true, Brochmand says, "that we exclude works as a cause of salvation, but we require them as definite testimonies to the presence of faith and as the results of salvation. For there is no true and living faith which is not active through love (Gal. 5:6) and which is not productive of good works (Matt. 7:17-18; Jas. 2:14-15ff). He who says he believes in Christ who died is a liar, if by the power of Christ's death he does not daily die to sin; and he who claims to believe in the risen Christ deceives himself, if he does not by the power of the risen Christ advance daily in newness of life. This is specifically taught by Paul in Rom. 6:1ff. Therefore our adversaries are making sport in a very serious matter and oppressing our churches with a false accusation when they say that we urge faith in Christ in such a way that we turn men away from good works and from the earnest desire for a holy life. For just as we urge this saying to our churches (Jn. 6:40): 'This is the Father's will who sent me, that every one who believes in me may have eternal life,' we also commend the statement of Paul (1 Th. 4:3) and zealously impress it upon our hearers, 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification.' Thus we extol faith in Christ, but in such a way that we establish the great value and place of good works." Sincere statements such as that of Brochmand can be found throughout all the writings of the orthodox Lutherans.<sup>34</sup>

Time does not permit us to pursue this matter further. Suffice it to say that the Lutherans following the Formula of Concord felt constrained for many good reasons to stress the necessity and importance of good works, the Christian life and sanctification. On this particular point there is a greater balance in the later Lutheran theology than one finds in Luther.

### *Conclusion*

The doctrine of justification as it is presented in orthodox Lutheran theology is perhaps the most impressive, thorough, balanced and evangelical section in all of Lutheran dogmatics. With

the emphasis upon forensic justification, the *justitia aliena*, Christ as the object of faith and the *sola fide*, we have a doctrine which is not only faithful to the heritage of Luther and the Lutheran confessions, but central to evangelical Christianity and of abiding comfort to poor sinners.

The LWF study document has asked whether this doctrine as formulated by classical Lutheranism is relevant to modern man? This is a highly personal question which one can hardly answer for another. To one who has been justified by faith in Christ, who has experienced God's irrefutable verdict of acquittal, justification is the most relevant thing in all the world, and to such a person the old Lutheran doctrine will mean very much. To the materialist, the secularist, the humanist, the communist today, as for the practical atheist of Ps. 14 or the humanist and philosophers of bygone days, the idea of justification before God will represent merely the religious reflections of man in ancient or feudal times with no significance for our modern age. But certainly one thing is obvious: no Biblical theme or Lutheran teaching is better calculated to be understood in our twentieth century when courts, laws, justice, injustice, verdicts, punishment and retribution are the stock vocabulary of all men. And if it seems that the world no longer listens to the message of forgiveness, have we really any alternative to following our Lord's great commission and preaching the Gospel of forgiveness to every creature? And certainly we who are evangelical Lutherans ought to be assured that, however vast the changes in our modern world view and in the *Zeitgeist* of twentieth century man, there will always be conscience stricken sinners who feel the wrath of God; and for them a divine verdict of acquittal will be of ultimate and eternal relevance.

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. *Loci Theologici*. 1653 ed. II, 200ff.
2. *Synopsis Controversiarum*. Wittebergae, 1653. p. 18. Cf. Smalkald Articles II, I, 5,6.
3. Er. Lat. 21,12.
4. *Examen Concilii Tridentini*. Berolini, 1861. p. 146ff.
5. *Loci Theologici*, II, 215.
6. *Ibid.* II, 200).
7. *Christ Yesterday Today Forever*, par. 4.
8. Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, prol. I,33. Hollaz, *Examen Theologiam Acroamaticum*. Prol. II, q. 19-24.
9. Mentzer, B. *Exegesis Augustanae Confessionis*. (*Opera Latina*. Francofurti, 1669. I,60).
10. *Ibid.*
11. WA 103, 161-2: "I have often said before that faith in God is not enough; but there must also be a cost. And what is the cost? For the Jews and Turks believe too, but without means or cost. The Gospel shows us what the cost is. For the Holy Spirit teaches there that we do not have the Father without means and we cannot go to the Father without means. Here Christ teaches us that we are not lost, but have eternal life, that is, that God loved us so much that He willed to pay the cost of thrusting His own dear Son into our misery, hell and death and to have Him drink that up. That is the way we are saved." Cf. Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, II, 234 who is alluding to Luther.
12. *Ibid.* Cf. also *Examen Concilii Tridentini*, p. 160.

13. Trent. Sess. 6, C.7. Especially Canon 10: "Si quis dixerit, homines sine Christi iustitia, per quam nobis meruit, justificari, aut per eam ipsam formaliter justos esse: anathema sit."
14. Quenstedt, *Systema*. P. III, C.7, P.1, Th. 13 (III, 522).
15. Calov, *Socinismus Profligatus*, p. 735.
16. *Loc. cit.*, p. 743.
17. *Systema*, P. III, C. 7, P. 1, Th. 19 (III, 525).
18. *Die Disputation de Justificatione* (1536). WA 39, 97-98. Elert (*The Structure of Lutheranism*, Saint Louis, 1962, p. 74ff.) shows that the imputation and "juridical" character of justification were fundamental for Luther as for Paul. The same must be said of Lutheran orthodoxy.
19. *Examen*, p. 178.
20. Mentzer, *Op. cit.*, I, 195. Cf. WA 39<sup>1</sup>, 103.
21. Cf. Bonaventura, *Libri Sententiarum*, I, 41, 1,1: "Est meritum congrui, digni et condigni. Meritum congrui est, quando peccator facit quod in se est et pro se. Meritum digni, quando iustus facit pro alie. Meritum condigni, quando iustus operatur pro se ipso, quia ad hoc ordinatur gratia ex condigno."
22. *De Sancta Fide*. Hafniae, 1614. pp. 1-4.
23. *Loci Theologici*, II, 251.
24. *Definitiones Articulorum Fidei*. Hafniae, 1662. A7.
25. *Apodixis Articulorum Fidei*. Luneburgi, 1684. p. 300.
26. Calov, *Ibid.*
27. *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Hebraeos*. Hafniae, 1706. p. 489.
28. Cf. *Formula of Concord*, SD, III, 10.
29. *Systema*, P. III, C.8, S.1, Th. 11 (III, 519).
30. *Ibid.*, "When the hand of a starving man seizes bread which is offered to it, it is not this taking of the bread which satisfied the man, for he could seize a piece of mud or a stone or something else which could not satisfy him, but his being satisfied depends on the object which he takes to himself and on his eating it, i.e. it depends upon the bread. When the lips of a thirsty man drink water which has been drawn with a bucket from some well, it is not the drinking as such that quenches his thirst, for you can also draw sand or blood with a bucket. No, if his thirst is to be satisfied, the drink which he consumes must have the power to quench thirst. Thus he who hungers and thirsts after righteousness receives it through faith, as the begging hand which receives the bread coming down from heaven (John 6:50,51) and as the vessel of the thirsting soul draws the water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14); but it is not this receiving and drinking as such which drives away the spiritual hunger and quenches the thirst. Man does not possess anything of such a nature as can accomplish this, such as his own merits, his own pretended autonomy, satisfactions which are the inventions of the Synagogue of Rome. No, the whole strength of man's receiving depends on the thing received through faith, the redemption and the blood of Jesus Christ." Cf. *Formula of Concord*, T.D. III, 13ff.
31. Chemnitz, *Examen*, p. 189. Quenstedt, *Systema* (III, 526); Calov, *Apodixis Articulorum Fidei*, p. 302ff.
32. *Examen*, 188.
33. *In Canonicam et Catholicam Jacobi Epistolam Commentarius*. Hafniae, 1640. p. 153.
34. Cf. e.g. Calov. *Historia Syncretistica, d. i. Kirchlich. Bedenken Ueber den Kirchen-Frieden*. Wittebergae, 1685. p. 407: "We confess that true faith by which we are justified cannot exist without love and other good works. And we therefore deny that true justifying faith can in fact be separated from love and other virtues." *Apodixis Articulorum Fidei*, p. 310: "Justifying faith is not without good works, and on the other hand good works are never independent of justifying faith. . . . There can be no faith without its fruits." Kromayer, J. *Theologia Positivo-Polemica*, Lipsiae, 1711, II, 281: "Sola fides justificat, sed solitaria non existit."