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### **Justification and the Office of the Holy Ministry**

The first five articles in this issue were originally papers presented at the 35th Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions held in Fort Wayne on January 18–20, 2012 under the theme “Justification in a Contemporary Context.” The final two articles, by Joel Elowsky and Roland Ziegler, were first delivered as the plenary papers of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Theology Professors Conference that met at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, on May 29 to June 1, 2012, under the theme “To Obtain Such Faith . . . The Ministry of Teaching the Gospel” (AC V). It has been the practice of the two seminary journals to alternate in publishing plenary papers from this bi-annual conference in order that these studies may be shared with the wider church.

*The Editors*

## Justification: Jesus vs. Paul

David P. Scaer

Inspiration for this topic came from an article featured on the front cover of the December 20, 2010, issue of *Christianity Today* by Scott McKnight reflecting on the debate in New Testament studies on differences between Jesus and Paul. For Jesus, preaching the kingdom of God was important; for Paul, it was justification.<sup>1</sup> An even more recent publication, *Jesus Have I Loved, but Paul?* by J.R. Daniel Kirk, suggests a similar theme.<sup>2</sup> A seminary student called my attention to *Did St Paul Get Jesus Right? The Gospel According to Paul* by David Wenham.<sup>3</sup> Wenham addresses Paul's relationship to Jesus in the matter of justification. Some things are in perpetual opposition to each other. Men *are* from Mars, women *are* from Venus. *Viva la difference!*

One cannot serve God and mammon; for some, Jesus and Paul saw things differently. Gospels in the forefront of the canon followed by the epistles set the stage for pitting Jesus against Paul—or was it the other way around? In any event, it began when the church was hardly off the ground. Ebionites favored Matthew's more Jewish Jesus, and Marcion constructed Christianity out of Paul's letters. Another fork in the road came at the Reformation when Roman Catholics took the road leading to the Gospels with James as a guide and Lutherans took the Pauline option. Eighteenth-century rationalists favored the Gospels' simple moral teachings over Paul's complex dogmatic theology.<sup>4</sup> Nineteenth-century classical liberalism followed suit, as did the Social Gospel by abridging Jesus' message to loving God and the neighbor.

Choosing Jesus over Paul in retrieving authentic Christianity faces an obstacle in the scholarly consensus that Paul died before the Gospels were

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<sup>1</sup> Scott McKnight, "Jesus vs. Paul," *Christianity Today* 54 (December 2010): 26.

<sup>2</sup> J.R. Daniel Kirk, *Jesus Have I Loved, But Paul? A Narrative Approach to the Problem of Pauline Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> David Wenham, *Did St Paul Get Jesus Right? The Gospel According to Paul* (Oxford, UK: Lion Hudson, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Wenham goes into the specifics of the differences between Jesus and Paul in his chapter "Was Paul the Inventor of Christian Doctrines?" in *Did St. Paul Get Jesus Right?* 81–96.

written (A.D. 68–100).<sup>5</sup> This means that the evangelists were either unaware of Paul's epistles, ignored them, or constructed their Gospels out of other sources (e.g., the Q document and the Hebrew Matthew, oral tradition, and their own creative imaginations).<sup>6</sup> With this scenario, it can hardly be said that Paul reacted to Jesus; rather, Matthew reacted to Paul's antinomianism.<sup>7</sup> If the Gospels preserved the authentic simple religion of Jesus, as preserved in Q, it should be explained why Paul, who defined his life as Christ's life, did not absorb more of it into his epistles. Before his conversion, he was resident in Jerusalem and made several visits afterwards. Left unexplained is how the apostles remaining in Jerusalem left Paul's newer theology, if indeed this is what it was, unanswered. Though both Gospels and Epistles were read in the worship of early churches, apparently no one recognized any discrepancies.

In having to choose between Jesus and Paul, Lutherans have come down on the side of Paul's definition of justification in setting the terms for reading and interpreting the Gospels. The law condemns and the gospel provides salvation. Francis Pieper, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's premier dogmatician, held that justification "is the apex of all Christian teaching" and "that all other doctrines which he [Paul] preached stand in close relation to the central truth that men are saved without any merit of their own, by faith in the crucified Christ." Pieper then adds, "Thus Christology serves merely as the *substructure* of the doctrine of justification."<sup>8</sup> This would sound better without the word "merely." If I read this correctly, justification is ranked higher than Christology, at which point we may want to pause. Ranking one doctrine, whichever one it is, as superior to others has consequences, especially when it is imposed on passages that speak of other matters.<sup>9</sup> With their commitment to the

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<sup>5</sup> See David C. Sim, "Matthew and the Pauline Corpus: A Preliminary Intertextual Study," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (2009): 405.

<sup>6</sup> So posits M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006). In a review of this commentary, Darrell L. Bock notes, "By far the most important feature of this commentary is its consistent presentation of Mark as the creative Evangelist telling a story with his eye far more on his community than on historical concerns about Jesus." *Review of Biblical Literature* (<http://www.bookreviews.org> [accessed November 29, 2012]) 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Sim, "Matthew and the Pauline Corpus," 401–422.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–1953), 3:512–515. Cf. Francis Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1920–1924), 2: 619. "So is nach der Schrift die ganze Christologie (L.[atin] *de persona et de officio Christi*) lediglich *Unterbau* für die Lehre der Rechtfertigung." Emphasis in original.

<sup>9</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan*

Pauline doctrine of justification, Lutherans have had difficulty in coming to terms with James and, more seriously, with the Sermon on the Mount and its supposedly impossible requirements and subsequent penalties. Relief is then provided by Paul, who is assigned the enviable role of the purveyor of the sweet gospel. Thus, preachers looking for a passage on the law's impossible demands find it in Jesus' command to be perfect (Matt 5:48), an impossibility resolved by Paul's doctrine that we are justified by grace without the works of the law—a close call indeed if one only had to rely on Jesus.

This bifurcation between Jesus and Paul leads to a new kind of *homologomena* and *antilegomena* division of the canon, with Lutherans following the reformer in favoring Romans, Galatians, 1 Peter, and John and with Roman Catholics leaning towards the Gospels—especially Matthew—and James. This does not mean that either faith community uses only its favored books, but each picks and chooses isolated passages from its less-favored books to support views derived from the favored ones. A case in point: in 2010, Roman Catholics commemorated the bimillennial of Paul's birth at St. Peter's Cathedral in Scranton, PA. Lay members read selections from Paul's epistles that dealt with the indwelling of Christ. Noticeably absent were those passages that Lutherans use for their understanding of justification. Not heard was Rom 1:17, "The righteous man shall live by faith alone."<sup>10</sup> This may have been coincidental, or perhaps not. Each faith community has its favorites.

An internal challenge to the traditional Lutheran or Protestant position has arisen in the New Perspective on Paul. The New Perspective dismisses the typical Lutheran view that God declares the sinner justified, known as the synthetic view, which holds God responsible for the action, and sees justification as God recognizing the believer as justified by his or her inclusion in the covenant, the analytical view. So, in the dogmatic sequence, justification is relegated to ecclesiology (where do we belong?) and not to soteriology (how we are saved?).<sup>11</sup> For the New Perspective, first-century

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*and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> My translation. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptural references are from the Revised Standard Version.

<sup>11</sup> The November 2010 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Atlanta, GA, took up the topic of the New Perspective, with one of its leading proponents, N. T. Wright, as one presenter. A critical essay was given by Thomas Schreiner, "Justification: The Saving Righteousness of God in Christ," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54 no. 1 (March 2011): 19–34. For Wright, "Justification is not how someone *becomes* a Christian. It is the declaration that they *have become* Christian," *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?*

Judaism was a religion of grace and not works. Its error was not allowing a place for Gentiles in the covenant.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Paul's main task was to reconcile Jews and Gentiles, and the proclamation of justification was a program to resolve ethnic tensions. However, if this was the case, then the Matthean Jesus faced the same issue in a more subtle way. His sayings are superficially favorable to the Jews (e.g., "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," Matt 15:24), but the exemplary believers are Gentiles, beginning with the magi who worship Jesus as God (Matt 2:11) and concluding with the soldiers on Golgotha who confessed, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matt 27:54). This tension between what Jesus says and does is resolved in Matthew's conclusion where the command to make disciples out of all the Gentiles makes no mention of the Jews (Matt 28:20). Israel has lost its exclusive claim to divine favor. Luke takes a separate but equal approach in letting each group live side by side. No integration here. Jesus is "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:32), and the disciples will be "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Jews are Jews, and Gentiles are Gentiles.

Another challenge to the traditional Pauline-Lutheran view of justification comes from the Finnish School's proposal that, for Luther, justification is God's indwelling in the believer, a fundamental doctrine in Eastern Orthodoxy now promoted by some Roman Catholic theologians under the code words *theosis*, divinization, or deification.<sup>13</sup> Roman Catholic scholars have shown a greater appreciation for Luther,<sup>14</sup> but without surrendering the role ascribed to merit in making the believer acceptable to God.<sup>15</sup> Whatever differences Lutherans and Roman Catholics have over

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(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 125; emphasis in original. See N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 3–144. Emphasis in original.

<sup>12</sup> Taking the New Perspective School one step further is the "radical new perspective." See John C. Olson, "Pauline Gentile Praying Among Jews," *Pro Ecclesia* 20 (Fall 2011): 411–431. Olson sees justification in terms of reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles as equal, but holds "that Paul remained within Judaism and observed the Torah, but opposed full Torah observance for the Gentiles," 431. A Messianic synagogue was one that would welcome Gentiles without requiring full observance and thus become "the multiethnic bridge that the first century Jewish *ekklesia* was," 430.

<sup>13</sup> Michael J. Gorman, "Romans: The First Christian Treatise on Theosis," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 5 no. 1 (Spring 2011): 13–34, and Stephen Finlan, "Deification in Jesus' Teaching" in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011): 21–41.

<sup>14</sup> Johann Heinz, *Justification and Merit: Luther vs. Catholicism* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 251–330.

<sup>15</sup> For a recent defense of merits in the Roman Catholic system, see Gary A. Anderson, "The Biblical Purgatory," *First Things* 217 (November 2011): 39–44.

justification, Pope Benedict XVI agrees with Luther that the fundamental question of human existence is the search for a gracious God.<sup>16</sup>

Every community of faith singles out one doctrine as its center—what Lutherans call the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. For Catholicism, it is recognizing the pope as the final arbiter of doctrine and practice, along with the practice of the Mass. Reformed theology gives center stage to God's sovereignty and the covenant. Feminist theology gives this honor to sexual equality, so that even its trinitarian understanding of God is compromised. Pentecostalism focuses on tongue-speaking. Evangelicalism is marked by defining faith as a decision for Jesus and allegiance to biblical authority. Each faith community regards outsiders as "separated brethren," to borrow a Roman Catholic phrase, and not apostates. Deviations from core beliefs can be found in every community, but if those beliefs are set aside completely, the fiber knitting the group together unravels. Since the Lutheran eggs are in the Pauline justification basket, we have the larger stake in the New Perspective<sup>17</sup> than do the Reformed, who see God's sovereignty at the center.

The New Perspective sees justification horizontally in that the sinner is justified and finds salvation by inclusion in the covenant, the analytical view.<sup>18</sup> Lutherans, like Roman Catholics, traditionally view justification vertically as God's acceptance of the sinner, though each provides a different way of achieving this. While Lutherans speak of justification by faith, faith is not a factor in one's acceptability to God. This point separates

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<sup>16</sup> Appended at the end of this essay is the address that Pope Benedict XVI gave on September 23, 2011, behind closed doors to representatives of Germany's Evangelical Church.

<sup>17</sup> In making alliances with faith communities that do not place justification as the core doctrine, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has already sacrificed its Lutheran identity; however, all this may have already happened at the 1963 Lutheran World Federation conference in Helsinki, when its member churches could not agree on a formula for justification. Though current proposals for redefining Paul's doctrine of justification are hardly confined to Lutheran scholars, alleged and real differences between Jesus and Paul on justification have greater consequences for Lutherans.

<sup>18</sup> N.T. Wright, "Justification: Yesterday, Today and Forever," *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 54 no. 1 (March 2011): 49–63, "I have said enough to remind you that the major context of Paul's major 'justification' passages is not individual search for a gracious God but the question of how you know who belongs to God's people." And again, "My main point, then, about the context of Paul's justification-language is that the question of justification is always bound up with the question of Israel, of the coming together of Jews and Gentiles in the Messiah," 55.

them from Evangelicals. Justification is a prior reality in Christ (*extra nos*) and precedes faith (1 Cor 1:30). When viewed from God's perspective, it is either called objective justification because it occurred once and for all in Christ's resurrection (Rom 4:25), eliminating any possibility of human contribution, or it is called universal justification, to indicate that all humanity condemned in Adam is justified in the greater Adam, Jesus Christ. Here, it is better to speak of justification in the singular and not the plural. Justification of individuals, however, takes place only by faith.<sup>19</sup> Hans Küng called this general and personal justification and adds, "[B]oth must be seen as the two sides of a single truth: *All men are justified in Jesus Christ and only the faithful are justified in Jesus Christ.*"<sup>20</sup>

One reason Roland Ziegler offers for why Eduard Preuss, an Old Testament professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, joined the Roman Catholic Church was that on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount he thought that works of mercy and not simply a confession of Jesus were required. He sided with Jesus and James.<sup>21</sup> This was simply the reverse side of Luther's argument in siding with Paul against James, severing the latter from the canon. Lutherans allow for canonical abridgment, but rarely exercise the privilege. James is retained by imposing a Pauline template on the controverted epistle. This is not really playing according to Hoyle, but replacing a rusty bolt in an embarrassing epistle is easier than readjusting the overarching construct.

Essential for any theological system is leaving the central article intact, but readjustments come with the price of damaging a writer's intentions. McKnight observes that Evangelicals fit the theology of Jesus and Paul into each other,<sup>22</sup> though we have all been doing this since the apostolic era. He notes that while the preaching of Jesus is riddled with kingdom language, Paul has less than fifteen references to the kingdom. The pro-Jesus side identifies the gospel with the kingdom, and Paul's supporters see the gospel as synonymous with justification by faith. McKnight resolves these differences by saying that both approaches rest on a christological

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<sup>19</sup> According to Karl Holl, "Luther envisions the event [of justification] from above as an act of God, the other from below as the experience of the human being." *Die Rechtfertigungslehre in Licht der Geschichte des Protestantismus* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1906), 8, quoted in Gregory Walter, "Karl Holl (1866–1926) and the Recovery of Promise in Luther," *Lutheran Quarterly* 25 (Winter 2011): 400–401.

<sup>20</sup> Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), 223; emphasis in original.

<sup>21</sup> Roland Ziegler, "Eduard Preuss and C.F.W. Walther," *CTQ* 75 (July/October 2011): 294.

<sup>22</sup> McKnight, "Jesus vs. Paul," 26.



foundation, a position with which we can resonate at least for the moment. "The gospel is first and foremost about Jesus. Or, to put it theologically, it's about Christology."<sup>23</sup> This means that Jesus preached about himself, as did Paul and other apostles. As much as McKnight's understanding of theology as christology is commendable, he includes not only Christ in his concept of what the kingdom is, but also the people and territory of Israel and the Torah by which the people are governed.<sup>24</sup> For Lutherans, kingdom is Jesus' self-referent, or at least it should be understood this way. He is the preacher, the sermon, and the content. All this is very Luther-like and a position Pope Benedict XVI supports,<sup>25</sup> but several problems remain. Even if the gospel is foundational for both Jesus and Paul, in Paul it is present only in outline and it in no way matches the quantitative, historically detailed magnificence of the Gospels. McKnight does not make it clear that the source of the gospel for Paul was even in some small way the written Gospels. That is a question for critical studies; our question is whether Jesus taught Paul's doctrine of justification, a position that Pieper held.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from traditional Lutheran and Roman Catholic differences, justification for both is forensic in that it implies a trial of the accused in a courtroom with the hope that the judge will render a favorable verdict. A secular version of this kind of justification, based on the evidence, may be detected in how Steve Jobs viewed his accomplishments. He did not seem to believe in a personal God, but hoped that his extraordinary talents would vindicate him for at least the next fifty years. Accordingly, it may be argued that forensic justification is not foreign to the human experience. Our task is now locating a doctrine of justification in the synoptic Gospels, especially Matthew, for whom God has already come, is coming now, and will come again in judgment.

The Creed's "and he will come again to judge the living and the dead" implies that, even as we look toward the future, a judgment has already taken place in the past. This can be extracted from Matthew's genealogy with its four references to Babylon (Matt 1:11-12, 17), the place where Israel lost her national identity. This theme is immediately repeated in

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<sup>23</sup> McKnight, "Jesus vs. Paul," 28.

<sup>24</sup> McKnight, "Jesus vs. Paul," 27.

<sup>25</sup> See the pope's *Address to the Evangelical Clergy*, appended to this essay.

<sup>26</sup> "When Jesus declares that the Son of Man is come to give His life a ransom for many, that He shed His blood for the remission of sin (Matt 20:28; 26:28), He makes the 'Pauline doctrine of justification' the center of His teaching and leaves no room for a justification based on the 'morality of man,'" *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:513; cf. *Christliche Dogmatik* 3:618.

Matthew's account of the slaughter of the boy children over whom Rachel weeps as Israel is taken away into Babylon (Matt 2:18). John the Baptist continues the theme of a present justification as judgment in the metaphor of the ax laid against the roots (Matt 3:10). In the place of Israel, God raises stones, the Gentiles, as Abraham's children. Status as God's people can only be retained by bringing forth fruits of repentance (3:7-8; i.e., Israel acknowledges her sins, believes in Jesus, and demonstrates a change of heart by her actions). Faith is crucial in receiving John's Baptism, but the justification at the Jordan requires some evidence of faith. John the Baptist plays the role of Elijah the prosecutor, laying out God's accusations against Israel. To his chagrin, the divine judge himself appears disguised as a defendant to be baptized with sinners and before whom John presents himself as a defendant (Matt 3:11, 14).

Nothing here resembles Paul's doctrine of justification in which works are not a factor. Rather, for the Baptist justification requires that one present the evidences of faith to the judge. Jesus makes his formal appearance as the new Moses, the new lawgiver, in the Sermon on the Mount, in which he sets down the terms of the kingdom (Matt 5:1-8:1). He also assumes the role of judge, sentencing to exclusion from the Father's kingdom those who have not done his will (Matt 5:21-23). In the more elaborate trial towards the end of the Gospel, Jesus examines the works of the sheep and the goats, pronounces a verdict, and issues appropriate sentences—all very judicial, all very forensic (Matt 25:31-48).

In his epistle, James describes Jesus in this double role as "the one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy" (εἷς ἐστὶν νομοθέτης καὶ κριτὴς ὁ δυνάμενος σῶσαι καὶ ἀπολέσαι, Jas 4:12), words that echo Jesus' own words, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). Though commentators see this as a reference to God, within the terms of Matthew, the judge is Jesus himself. The intervening second, third, and fourth discourses develop the terms of the Sermon on the Mount and present those who have met or failed the standards with appropriate rewards and penalties. By self-inclusion in the Beatitudes, Jesus makes himself the standard for the kingdom and the final judgment, in which sheep and goats learn of their sentences. The works by which they are judged are the works Christ does. This is not a private but a public trial in which the judge lets himself be questioned by those whom he sentences about the justice of his verdicts. Jesus steps into the witness box to be questioned by those whom he finds innocent and acceptable. Here we can interject McKnight's observation: "We can't find much in the

Gospel that shows Jesus thinking in terms of justification by faith."<sup>27</sup>

Clouding matters for Lutherans is a law-gospel paradigm in which the law condemns and the gospel saves. For Matthew, however, law means the Old Testament, while gospel means the account of the life Jesus. As Matthew nears the end of his account, he sees what he has written as the gospel itself (Matt 24:14, 26:13), though scholars might even be more hesitant to concede this point. Jesus is lawgiver in the sense that he sets down terms for the kingdom. Though this might sound strange in Lutheran ears, these terms are the gospel. While some passages might be interpreted in the Pauline sense that Jesus came to fulfill the law in our place, they are his self-descriptions as the Messiah who had come to fulfill the Old Testament. For example, "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Matt 5:17-18).

Acknowledging Jesus as God is necessary for inclusion in the kingdom, but this confession is not enough. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 7:27). In theological parlance, repentance is regarded as a synonym for sorrow, but in the gospels its chief component is faith. Matthew's "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2) is clarified by Mark, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Matt 1:15). The "and" is an exegetical *kai*. Verdicts are rendered on the evidences of what the believers have done (i.e., their works). Relief is found in John's baptism, but God requires faith in the judge who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire and "whose winnowing fork is in his hand, and [who] will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matt 3:11-12), language reminiscent of the Apocalypse where Jesus' "eyes were like a flame of fire" (Rev 1:14). More than any other New Testament book, Matthew's apocalypticism most closely resembles the terror of the Book of Revelation, the apocalypse of God's judgment.

Justification as judgment is an event that appears at the conclusion of periods in the history of salvation when that salvation is rejected. Judgment punctuates each of Matthew's first four discourses, highlighting how God has already carried out a judgment from which no escape is again provided. Thus, in the first discourse, those who do not take

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<sup>27</sup> McKnight, "Jesus vs. Paul," 28.

seriously Jesus' words of the Sermon in the Mount are like a house destroyed by floods, a scene reminiscent of the Noahic flood (Matt 7:24–28). Jesus picks up this theme in the pericope of the unknown hour of his death, designating it as a world judgment (Matt 24:37–38; cf. 27:45). Despising the apostolic proclamation, the subject of the second discourse, brings about a fiery fate worse than Sodom and Gomorrah's (Matt 7:15). Bad fish, like tares, are consumed by fire (Matt 13:30; 49–50). In the fourth discourse, eternal incarceration awaits the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:34). In the fifth and final discourse, sheep find safety at Jesus' right hand, but goats head off to everlasting fire (Matt 25:34, 41). Judgment as justification comes to a climax in Jesus' death and resurrection, historical events accompanied by the apocalyptic ones of the rending of the temple curtain, earthquakes, tombs yielding their dead, and a bright angel descending from heaven (Matt 27:51–54; 28:2–4). Judgment is no longer an event distant in time, but one that has begun to take place. These pericopes individually or collectively do not yield Paul's doctrine of finding a gracious in God in faith, but a justification in which God is gracious to those who have been gracious to others and passes judgment on those who are not. This is an analytical justification (i.e., God looks at the evidences and renders the sentence). N.T. Wright may be right that justification consists in belonging to the right group.

Our argument about justification in the preaching of Jesus will center on three pericopes in Matthew: wisdom being justified by her works (Matt 11:19), the rich young man sorrowing over the challenge of Jesus to sell all his possessions to give to the poor and failing to do so (Matt 19:16–22), and the judgment of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31–46). The latter two are best understood against the background of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1–8:1). Matthew 11:19 sounds Pauline, "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds" (καὶ ἐνδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς).

In view here is the justification not of the sinner but of Jesus, whose enemies use his alleged public gluttony and inebriation in the company of society's outcasts as evidences that he is not God's prophet. Jesus turns the table on his opponents by showing the inconsistency of their belief that John's abstention is evidence he had a demon (Matt 11:18). Jesus does not question the integrity of the evidences against him, but proves he is the God who is happily found in the company of sinners. One might call it the doctrine of objective justification in practice. God loves the sinners and so associates with them. In keeping company with sinners, Jesus is justified.

His actions show who he really is. Similar is Abraham's justification by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, and Rahab putting her life on the line to save the lives of the spies (Jas 2:23–25). The RSV and the ESV translation of τῶν ἔργων as "deeds," as in "Wisdom is justified by her deeds," and not "works" weakens the theological import that works do count. John's fruits of repentance correspond to the works done by Abraham, Rahab, and Jesus. Their works are the norm and standard for ours, what our confessions call the 'third use of the law' (FC SD VI). Luke's parallel, "Yet wisdom is justified by all her children (καὶ ἐνδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς, 7:35), is intriguing in that he substitutes "children" for "works," suggesting Christians are evidences of who Jesus really is as God. Clearly the deity of Jesus is in view in Matt 11:49, "Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute.'"

Imposing a Pauline template onto the account of the rich young man (Matt 19:16–22; Luke 18:18–23; Mark 10:17–22) results in a conclusion that no one can really do what Jesus wants, an approach often taken with the Sermon on the Mount. Only the gospel will redeem the poor fellow. Matthew (19:16–17) and Luke (18:18–19) introduce their accounts with Jesus discoursing on the young man's address of him as good, a greeting that implies that he recognizes that in some way Jesus is God. Jesus then tries to develop this idea by asking, "Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good" (Matt 19:17). In asking how to inherit eternal life, Jesus directs him to the commandments and commends him for keeping them. The final step to eternal life is perfection, which is attained by selling his possessions and giving to the poor. Then he will find treasure in heaven. Apart from the context, the preacher is tempted to intervene with the gospel so that the congregation and perhaps eventually the young man himself can have the assurance that their faith will save them from not taking the challenge seriously. However, Matthew goes in the opposite direction by pursuing the idea that works deserve rewards. In reflecting on the encounter, Jesus' disciples remind him that what the young man could not do in giving up his possessions they have done and, accordingly, ask for remuneration. Jesus responds that they will be rewarded with thrones next to his (Matt 19:27–30), though what he gives with one hand he takes away with the other.<sup>28</sup> Those with proximity to

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<sup>28</sup> Huub van de Sandt sees 19:16–22, 23–26, and 27–30 as subsections of one account. See "Eternal Life as a Reward for Choosing the Right Way: The Story of the Rich Young Man (Matt 19:16–30)," in *Life Beyond Death in Matthew's Gospel: Religious Metaphor or Bodily Reality?*, ed. Wim Weren, Huub van de Sandt, and Joseph Verheyden (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 105. I would add that the parable of the workers in the vineyard is a

Jesus will receive no greater rewards than those who come later (Matt 19:30–20:16). “The first shall be last and the last shall be first.”

Since the young man asks about inheriting eternal life, the account has to do with justification at the judgment, a theme that underlies the entire Gospel of Matthew. He is caught between the two incompatible alternatives of serving God and mammon, a theme Jesus introduces in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:24). Also at play is the choice of the individual between the way that leads to eternal life and the way that leads to death (Matt 7:13–24). The former is recognized by good deeds and the latter by evil deeds.<sup>29</sup> More is in view than refraining from what is prohibited in the Ten Commandments. His assertion that he has kept the commands, *τήρησον τὰς ἐντολάς*, corresponds to Matt 28:20, where Jesus requires that his disciples teach the Gentiles to keep or treasure all he has commanded, *τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμεν ὑμῖν*.

The Beatitudes introduce the Sermon on the Mount by setting forth positive behaviors as the standards (e.g., Jesus’ words, “those hungering for righteousness shall be filled,” which are echoed later in the parable concerning the trial of the sheep and the goats<sup>30</sup>). The rich young man’s reply that he has kept the commandments is not quite a confession, but at least he knows the teachings of Jesus. He is on the brink of faith. His hesitancy to commit himself is anticipated in the parable of the two houses, one representing those who only hear the words of Jesus and do nothing, and the other representing those who hear, believe, and do something. He thinks he has passed the first part of the exam for discipleship, but Jesus adds this requirement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 19:19). These words, which summarize the second table of the law, are carried out in giving to the poor. Refusing to do this, he shows he does not really love neighbor, the same reason for which the goats are condemned (Matt 25:41–25).

A theological exposition of the account of the young man is provided in Jesus’ response to the question of the great commandment:

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” [*ποῖα ἐντολὴ μεγάλη ἐν τῷ νόμῳ;*] And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your

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homiletical reflection on the section that begins with the account of the rich young man.

<sup>29</sup> van de Sandt, “Eternal Life as a Reward,” 108.

<sup>30</sup> David Wenham, “The Sevenfold Form of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew’s Gospel,” *The Expository Times* 121 (May 2010), 378.

mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:36–39).

Loving the neighbor shares in the importance of loving God, an issue implied in the account of the young man. Who the young man thinks Jesus is belongs to his reach for perfection. Setting the goal of perfection before the man might provide the opportunity for the intrusion of the Pauline doctrine of the law's impossible demands, but the three uses of τέλειος ("perfect") in Matthew have something else in view. In the Sermon on the Mount, the perfection required of believers is modeled after the perfection of the heavenly Father, who shows his love for his enemies by providing for them (Matt 5:48). Because the man is required to give his treasures to the poor, in a strange way he may have come to see them as his enemies, thieves who will take away what he sees as rightfully his own. In loving and providing for his enemies, God makes himself subject to the command to love the neighbor. Or, to put it another way, the command to love the neighbor tells us about the God who is love. Strange as it seems, God's enemies become his neighbors for whom he provides (Matt 5:45). Indiscriminate love is required for inclusion in the kingdom.

The account of the rich young man serves as a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount and anticipates the judgment of the sheep and the goats. It also serves as christological commentary in reverse. This is not poverty for the sake of poverty, but poverty for the sake of assisting those who have nothing, a thought that might be behind Paul's description of Jesus' humiliation: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). Applying the imagery of the rich young man to Jesus is the counter-reflection of the rich young man who could not divest himself of his riches. Held before the man is not impossible law but the christological model, the *homo factus est*, the emptying of God for the enrichment of the world, a concept that properly belongs in the Lutheran understanding of the third use of the law.

Jesus' teachings in Matthew are bracketed by the opening words in the first of the formal discourses, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:3), and the parallel and final phrases in the fifth and last discourse, "'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. . . Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt 25:45–46). We have come full circle. He who is poor in spirit is found in the poverty of the sick, hungry, naked, and imprisoned, but he is also present

in those who in helping the poor are unaware that their good deeds have been done to Christ. God's verdict of justification is rewarding eternal life to those who are unaware of the good they have done and sentencing to the eternal fire those who have attended to their own needs but not those of others. Within the context of Jesus' teachings, the conclusion of the Athanasian Creed is not so striking.

At his coming all human beings will rise with their bodies and will give and account of their own deeds. Those who have done good things will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil things into eternal fire. This is the catholic faith; a person cannot be saved without believing this firmly and faithfully.<sup>31</sup>

As much as Lutherans side with Paul, their confessional allegiance brings them face to face with another reality.

Lutherans and other pro-Paul Protestants will never cease in trying to make Jesus look like Paul. John Piper finds a point of entry for the Pauline doctrine of justification into the Gospels in Luke 18:14, where the Pharisee is not justified but the tax collector is: "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified."<sup>32</sup> According to the Pauline perspective, the tax collector was justified by faith in contrast to the Pharisee's attempt to justify himself by works. A simple and attractive solution, but it was the tax collector's poverty of spirit that showed him to be just in God's eyes. This comports with Luke's portraits of Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:6) and Simeon (Luke 2:25), who in having nothing are righteous before God. It almost seems that Luke's Gospel with its accumulation of poor people from the shepherds to the thief on the cross is an exposition of Matthew's first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens"—all of whom were found righteous in God's eyes.

At the beginning of this essay, we posited the solution for differences between Jesus and Paul by suggesting that each is looking at humanity's legal accountability to God at different places in the courtroom trial. Works, especially when we admire our own, can never be the assurance of salvation, a program that Pietism offered with the addendum that we keep

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, tr. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 25.

<sup>32</sup> "At one pastor's [sic] conference, Piper asked a simple question: Did Jesus preach Paul's gospel? . . . To answer this question, Piper probed the one and only time the word *justified* in a Pauline sense appears in the Gospels," McKnight, "Jesus vs. Paul," 27; emphasis in original.



track of our self-improvement. Justification at the end time comes through works that identify us with the Father, who does good because he is good. Jesus was sinless and was not confronted with seeking justification through being assured his sins were forgiven. He was confronted with having to justify himself before the world; and in the end God justified him by raising him from the dead. Jesus offered a different perspective on justification from what Paul, and for that matter Luther, offered because throughout all of his life and in his preaching he was, as James says, the lawgiver in setting down the terms of salvation and the judge. This was realized eschatology in spades.

### Appendix

Here follows the full address that pope Benedict XVI gave on September 23, 2011, behind closed doors to representatives of Germany's Evangelical Church.<sup>33</sup> He recalled the question once asked by Martin Luther, which gave rise to Lutheranism: "What is God's position towards me? Where do I stand before God?" The pope went on to say that this question is still relevant, and one that each person must ask and finally confront.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I begin to speak, I would like first of all to thank you for this opportunity to come together with you. I am particularly grateful to Pastor Schneider for greeting me and welcoming me into your midst with his kind words. At the same time I want to express my thanks for the particularly gracious gesture that our meeting can be held in this historic location.

As the Bishop of Rome, it is deeply moving for me to be meeting representatives of the Council of the Lutheran Church of Germany here in the ancient Augustinian convent in Erfurt. This is where Luther studied theology. This is where he was ordained a priest in 1507. Against his father's wishes, he did not continue the study of law, but instead he studied theology and set off on the path towards priesthood in the Order of Saint Augustine. On this path, he was not simply concerned with this or that. What constant-

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.romereports.com/palio/popes-speech-in-lutheran-church-salvation-comes-with-a-faith-thats-lived-out-english-4974.html#.UImjWfGW-o> (accessed October 25, 2012). Translator unknown.

ly exercised him was the question of God, the deep passion and driving force of his whole life's journey. "How do I receive the grace of God?" This question struck him in the heart and lay at the foundation of all his theological searching and inner struggle. For him theology was no mere academic pursuit, but the struggle for oneself, which in turn was a struggle for and with God.

"How do I receive the grace of God?" The fact that this question was the driving force of his whole life never ceases to make an impression on me. For who is actually concerned about this today—even among Christians? What does the question of God mean in our lives? In our preaching? Most people today, even Christians, set out from the presupposition that God is not fundamentally interested in our sins and virtues. He knows that we are all mere flesh. Insofar as people today believe in an afterlife and a divine judgement at all, nearly everyone presumes for all practical purposes that God is bound to be magnanimous and that ultimately he mercifully overlooks our small failings. But are they really so small, our failings? Is not the world laid waste through the corruption of the great, but also of the small, who think only of their own advantage? Is it not laid waste through the power of drugs, which thrives on the one hand on greed and avarice, and on the other hand on the craving for pleasure of those who become addicted? Is the world not threatened by the growing readiness to use violence, frequently masking itself with claims to religious motivation? Could hunger and poverty so devastate parts of the world if love for God and godly love of neighbor—of his creatures, of men and women—were more alive in us? I could go on.

No, evil is no small matter. Were we truly to place God at the centre of our lives, it could not be so powerful. The question, "What is God's position towards me, where do I stand before God?"—this burning question of Martin Luther must once more, doubtless in a new form, become our question, too. In my view, this is the first summons we should attend to in our encounter with Martin Luther.

Another important point: God, the one God, creator of heaven and earth, is no mere philosophical hypothesis regarding the origins of the universe. This God has a face, and he has spoken to us. He became one of us in the man Jesus Christ—who is both true God and true man. Luther's thinking, his whole spirituality, was thoroughly Christocentric: "What promotes Christ's cause" was for Luther the

decisive hermeneutical criterion for the exegesis of sacred Scripture. This presupposes, however, that Christ is at the heart of our spirituality and that love for him, living in communion with him, is what guides our life.

Now perhaps you will say: all well and good, but what has this to do with our ecumenical situation? Could this just be an attempt to talk our way past the urgent problems that are still waiting for practical progress, for concrete results? I would respond by saying that the first and most important thing for ecumenism is that we keep in view just how much we have in common, not losing sight of it amid the pressure towards secularization—everything that makes us Christian in the first place and continues to be our gift and our task. It was the error of the Reformation period that for the most part we could only see what divided us and we failed to grasp existentially what we have in common in terms of the great deposit of sacred Scripture and the early Christian creeds. The great ecumenical step forward of recent decades is that we have become aware of all this common ground and that we acknowledge it as we pray and sing together, as we make our joint commitment to the Christian ethos in our dealings with the world, as we bear common witness to the God of Jesus Christ in this world as our undying foundation.

The risk of losing this, sadly, is not unreal. I would like to make two points here. The geography of Christianity has changed dramatically in recent times, and is in the process of changing further. Faced with a new form of Christianity, which is spreading with overpowering missionary dynamism, sometimes in frightening ways, the mainstream Christian denominations often seem at a loss. This is a form of Christianity with little institutional depth, little rationality and even less dogmatic content, and with little stability. This worldwide phenomenon poses a question to us all: what is this new form of Christianity saying to us, for better and for worse? In any event, it raises afresh the question about what has enduring validity and what can or must be changed—the question of our fundamental faith choice.

