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ARCHIVES

# The Grace of God Gives Us Christ for Justification

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This essay was delivered by the author at the 1952 conferences sponsored by The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod in Berlin. It is presented to the readers of this journal as an example of current theological thought in some parts of the Lutheran Church in Germany. Of special significance is the author's emphasis on the proclamation of the Gospel by word of mouth (*viva voce*) as the message of the Church, reminiscent of the Dorpat school of some years ago. Noteworthy, too, among other things, is his criticism of the third use of the Law. This essay was matched by one prepared by one of the American essayists. Both essays were then discussed by a smaller group and finally by the entire conference.

In rendering the essay into English Dr. L. W. Spitz has sought to retain the full flavor of the original by adhering to the German idiom as much as possible. The title originally was: *Die Gnade Gottes gibt uns Christum zur Rechtfertigung*. — ED.

OUR theme is a confessional statement. The statement as a whole as well as each of its terms makes sense only as a confession. We must consider this for a moment at the very outset. In doing so, our thoughts tend in two directions. The realization that we are dealing with a confessional statement implies above all that the assertion of our theme is possible only within the Church. The little word "us" points unmistakably to this fact: "The grace of God gives us Christ for justification." In unfolding the content of our statement, we are speaking of ourselves. For that reason it is not a theoretical, speculative conclusion, but a purely theological assertion. The confessing "I," the confessing "we," is an inseparable part of it. If it were missing, our statement could be misunderstood as a part of a religious world view, whose correctness or incorrectness would be debatable with reasons and counter-reasons. But because this "I," this "we," is there, it must be taken seriously as a confession of faith, and one can only search for its meaning and content.

Here, however, lurks a second danger. Our statement must not

be understood as an assertion of anthropology. Confession within the Church is not communication regarding one's own, either really or presumably self-fashioned, inner life, but is response to the proclaimed and received Word of God. Hence, in Luther's *Small Catechism*, "the Creed" follows upon God's address in the First Commandment. Because man has heard, "I am the Lord, thy God," he can, in turn, confess to God, "I believe that Thou art my Creator, my Redeemer, and my Holy Spirit." As a confession our theme is neither the questionable declaration of an irrelevant truth, nor is it the expression of a mere consciousness, but a witness to the deeds of God, regarding which both facts must be considered: They take place *extra nos*, but they take place *pro nobis*.

If we now turn to our theme after these preliminary remarks, to which we must return ever and again, it will become apparent that it does not express a condition, but a movement. This movement starts at the grace of God, leads to Christ, and from Him to our justification; but it does not stop there, but again leads back to the grace of God. Hence one is here viewing a circular movement.

This fact raises the question at which point we must take hold if we are to see clearly in the matter. Purely theoretically it would be possible to enter this closed circle at every one of its significant points. And yet it appears inadvisable to me to proceed, for instance, from the grace of God; because the danger of a theoretical construction can then hardly be avoided; the grace of God is not a principle that one could manipulate, not an axiom on which one could rely; but just as little might it be advisable to begin with justified man, because the danger of anthropologizing then threatens to become overwhelming. Therefore we begin with the reality to which our theme "gives us Christ" points, that is, with the confession of the Church regarding Christ.

## I

What is its content? The theme certainly says Christ for a purpose. In spite of that, we must start with Jesus, that is, with the *Christ yesterday*. Luther indeed never tired of warning: "He that would ignore Christ's life and deeds and would now seek Him in his own way, as He sits in heaven, would again fail. He must seek

Him, as He was and walked on earth. There he will find the Life, there He came as Life, Light, and salvation for us. There everything occurred which we are to believe of Him." (*W.A.* 10, I, 1, 201.)

1. In doing so we must, of course, not think of the so-called historical Jesus. More radical than many historical-critical theologians, Martin Kähler showed exactly sixty years ago that the so-called historical Jesus is intangible for us. And today the verdict of the form-critical method, that we can grasp as original only the individual short paragraphs, the individual parable, indeed, the individual sentence, may be regarded as a generally accepted result of research. But also these tiny items, so transmitted, are already entirely engaged in the service of the message of faith for faith and make no claim of any kind to be parts of a biography. This, however, is doubly true of their editorial settings and construction.

It is understandable that historical interest will not be satisfied with this verdict and, accordingly, ever and again looks about for a secure basis in the face of criticism. Bultmann and Gogarten, one of his followers, believe that they can point to the message of Jesus in that sense. Regarding this one must say, however, that no agreement can be reached by the researchers with respect to what may be accepted as an indisputably true message of Jesus of Nazareth, and even less with respect to the order in which it is to be arranged: if, as Bultmann would have it, it belongs into Judaism (*Theol. Rundschau, Neue Folge* 1932, p.9), or if, as Gogarten believes, it is to be viewed as something entirely new (*Verkündigung*, 145). Above all, it should be said, however, that what is gained in this manner as the message of Jesus does in no manner comprise even approximately, not to say, exhaust, what Christianity means when it mentions the name of Jesus Christ. When we, therefore, speak of Him in our context, we are not thinking of this *historical Jesus*, especially since for us the Crucified and Risen One, too, belongs to the *Jesus yesterday*. Certainly, also the historical view has something to say of the cross of Jesus. And today it says of it not only that it was the proof of an upright, brave, pious man in the face of what had become the inevitable issue of His life. But is what it says today basically much more? Jesus — thus we can, perhaps, paraphrase Gogarten's exposition of this — in His death

obediently takes the wrath of God upon Himself and precisely thereby remains in the love of God, or, expressed in the words of the philosophy underlying this: His death is a function of His life. And to recognize just that, so we may possibly hear there, means to believe in His resurrection. When we speak of the Crucified and Risen One, we do not mean such a dying and such a resurrection of Jesus. We do not mean—permit us, for the sake of brevity, the further use of Kähler's expression, in spite of all modern modifications of the problem—the so-called historical Jesus, because a so-called historical Jesus can always be only one who is subject to analogism and comprehensible on the basis of causality. But His cross and His resurrection are not for us such historical data of that world which is comprehensible to us. Certainly some things which necessarily pertain to them can be demonstrated as historically trustworthy. It can be shown that when Pontius Pilate was governor, a Jewish Rabbi was executed on the cross as a criminal, and surely it can be established historically as very probable that the grave of Jesus was empty on Easter morning. I would say that less in view of the Gospels than of the testimony of Paul, Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:3. But even if the execution of Jesus and the empty grave can be established historically, their mere factuality is still in no manner what Christianity means, when it speaks of the Crucified and Risen One. It does not, indeed, mean a judicial murder of a noble enthusiast, and it knows—and not first since Reimarus—that the empty grave could be explained altogether differently than by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And hence, for the last time: When we speak of *Jesus yesterday*, we are not thinking of an in-some-manner-tangible historical Jesus.

2. But whom then? Perhaps I may once more reply with the formulation which Martin Kähler, mentioned above, has coined: "the historical-Biblical Christ." With that I mean, in the sense of Kähler, something that also Wilhelm Mundle recently again emphasized: the preached and believed Christ of the New Testament, or, in the words of the *Studiendokument* of the theological section of the plenary meeting of the Lutheran World Federation in Hannover: Jesus Christ as the living Word as the Holy Scripture presents Him to us.

a. Thus we are, on the one hand, really standing on historical ground. For the manifold and yet uniform testimony of earliest Christianity regarding its Lord Jesus Christ can well be attained with the means at our disposal. To mention but one unsuspect witness, I can here point to Martin Dibelius, who makes use of this fact in his sense when he evaluates "the Gospels as sources for the post-Easter, the Christian era" (*Jesus*, p. 80). Though this be granted, the Gospels do not lose their value for Christianity; on the contrary. For the same is said at the close of the Gospel according to John in the words of Scripture itself, where, as is well known, John says (20:31): "But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through His name."

b. Thus, however, already a second point has been added. The testimony regarding the historical-Biblical Christ not only puts us on the safe historical ground of the pristine Christian faith, but at the same time it gives us, wherever it is preached, heard, and believed, the *Jesus yesterday*. We do not, then, believe in Christ for the Bible's sake, but the faith in Christ, to which the hearer comes under the *viva vox evangelii*, brings him to faith in the Bible. Not that he would in this manner obtain historical knowledge illegitimately. But the Bible becomes for him the trustworthy witness to the Church-founding sermon. Martin Dibelius, speaking of this with a slightly derisive undertone, once said: "There are people to whom Jesus means so much, and the view of the cosmos propagated by natural science so little, that they see no problem here" (the signs and wonders of Jesus are meant) (*ibid.*, p. 70). No, the problems do not vanish, but, in spite of them, the believer becomes certain that God the Holy Spirit gives him trustworthy information regarding everything which he needs for his salvation; therefore he will ever again trustfully hear it. He thereby becomes certain of the *Jesus yesterday* in a much wider and deeper sense than would be possible in any conceivable historical way.

c. On this *Jesus yesterday* everything depends, everything that our theme implies, and thus all of salvation in time and eternity. Even if we do not know whether it happened in the year 30 or 33 or in another year near these two, only this is important, that it — let us for the present permit this indefinite expression — happened

on this earth, at a specific place, in a specific hour: ἐφάπαξ, as the Scripture says (Rom. 6:10 and again in Hebrews), something we today have every reason to recall. Pontius Pilate, who according to Josephus was procurator for ten years between the years 26 and 37, is mentioned in the Creed for a purpose. That of which we witness in the Church, in which we believe, and through which we live, is an event in history, a fact. And we look back to this fact, which occurred 2,000 years ago. Most certainly it was prepared in a pregnant history, extending through centuries, and most certainly it continues to work till the hour in which we are meeting here right now. But this fact itself is the turning point in time.

3. What happened? Well, according to the testimony of the Sacred Scripture, the simple faith of Christianity, and the confession of the Church, exactly that happened which today is called *mythos*: ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, whereby subject and predicate are equally valid, to wit: the λόγος who was in the beginning and was with God and was God, He through whom all things were made; and σὰρξ, truly flesh in His completely being surrendered to the world; γενέσθαι, truly "to become something," with the exclusion of all docetism, hence not merely in the sense of a change of attributes, like becoming fishers of men, Mark 1:17, becoming a traitor, Luke 6:16, but in the sense of a change of being, like, perhaps, the way stones become bread, Matt. 4:3. At any rate, the assertion speaks of the true God who became true man. He labored in Jesus Christ on this our earth, He was here rejected by men like us, and, forsaken of God, He died on the cross; Him God raised from the grave. One may say that these assertions are those of an obsolete world view and are incompatible with that prevailing now; one can say that these assertions have a meaning which we can only get through an existential interpretation, that is, one which seeks an understanding of the actual meaning, and that only what supposedly is meant in the Biblical manner of presentation is important; but whatever it may be, one must be aware of the fact that whenever one reduces the so-called *mythos* to significations, one loses neither more nor less than the *Jesus yesterday*, the historical-Biblical Christ, no matter how impressively and forcefully one may speak of the proclamation of Jesus Christ. If we subjectivize the objectivizing statements, we

no longer testify and can no longer testify what Holy Scripture testifies. For it really means what it says; it really means an event in space and time and an event which as such is in its oneness and actuality of fundamental and lasting importance.

4. It is indeed a matter of meaning or, if you please, of signification. We must not forget, however, that on the basis of the New Testament the Church has something to say regarding Christ's being: true God and true man. These assertions must not merely be understood as two different designations of the man Jesus; they do not merely designate a different manner in which Jesus "is ours" (Gogarten p. 367); they are not, to use the older term, value judgments, reached on the basis of the impression, which the life and labor, suffering and death, of Jesus of Nazareth, above all, also His proclamation, make on impressionable men, but they are meant as judgments of being, and only as such do they accomplish what they are to accomplish. Only if the man Jesus is not merely held to be God, evaluated as God, but is really God, entirely independent from any recognition or rejection which He receives, can He be a true help to us at all. For that reason Luther always emphasized again and again that one must begin with the humanity of Jesus, but dare not stop there. "One must begin at the bottom and thereupon come up . . . to a Lord over all creation, thereupon to a God" (*W. A.* 10, 12, 297). At the same time we fully realize how impossible it is to comprehend what these statements mean. We also purposely decline to repeat in any manner the attempts which indiscreetly and irreverently try to answer the unanswerable questions that here arise. To preserve the mystery of God's becoming man, we can only repeat the delimiting designations of the Chalcedonian Creed: ἀσυγχύτως, ἀτρέπτως, ἀδιαιρέτως, ἀχωρίστως. We may, then, in the language of the history of dogma, use the enhypostasy-Christology, which, after all, is based on the Prologue of the Gospel of John, and which Leontius of Byzantium inaugurated in further developing the doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria, and insert in it the Chalcedonian formula. (Cf. Brunstädt, *Theologie der Bekenntnisschriften*, p. 36ff.) If anyone deems it necessary, in this connection, to call attention to the fact that this means to make the assertions regarding Christ dependent on the result of the intrigues of the court camarilla of the 4th century, one may

simply answer that it makes no difference in which manner a doctrinal formulation of the Church has come about, but one need only ask whether it expresses the record of Scripture in a proper manner and guards it against false interpretations and human officiousness. And that is the case here. God the Holy Spirit uses also the mistakes and the wickedness of men to reach His goal. He cannot do otherwise; else He would have to forego the co-operation of men altogether. Hence we confess gratefully, reverently, and with complete confidence: God gives Jesus Christ, that is, He gives Himself, true God in the true man. And we mean that in the sense of Luther altogether as Person. So it is not a matter of a unity of deity and humanity, however it may be imagined, but of the One, who is God in Person and man in Person and as such becomes our Lord and God.

5. Now, that is indeed something unheard of. If we wish to view this somewhat more closely, we can do no better than to remember what the Confessions say of Christ's obedience. On the basis of the New Testament, they again and again speak of the obedience which Christ rendered to the Father as God and man even unto death and both in doing and in suffering, in life and in death, so that the work of the incarnate Son is simply obedience to God's Law, through which God is wrathful and kills (SD III 15, 55). Biblically, of course, Phil. 2, 5-11 is of prime importance. Though this passage may be variously interpreted and one may doubt whether here the reference is to the λόγος ἁσαρκος, so many today, or ἔνσαρκος, so Luther and at one time all Lutherans, but also Loofs and others: this uncertainty can apply only to the "made Himself of no reputation"; whereas the obedience, without contradiction, pertains to the earthly Jesus, and this obedience is, as expressly stated, an obedience unto death. As far as the Bible is concerned, however, death and sin, death on the tree and the curse of God, belong together (Gal. 3:13). The fact that Jesus Christ was born of a woman and put under the Law implies, at the same time, as also Luther emphasizes in his Large Commentary on Galatians (W. A. 40 I 499), that He was made sin and a curse. There is little value in distinguishing in this obedience between an *oboedientia activa* and *passiva*, for Christ's obedience consists in His complete surrender, is unreserved deliverance to God and man.

The well-understood *theopaschite* formulation, to which Elert has again drawn attention (*Tb. L. Z.* 1950), is thus justified to the same extent as the choral: "O grosse Not, Gott selbst ist tot," or Luther: "He who kills Christ, has killed God's Son, God and the Lord of Glory Himself."

## II

God became man. (Cf. Luther's sermon, 1525, on Phil. ch. 2 — *W. A.* 17 II 237 ff.) If that occurred in the profound seriousness and the undiminished reality, to which the Church's doctrine, on the basis of the New Testament, tries to cling, it has an unprecedented reason.

1. One can develop a Christian anthropology from various angles and view the phenomenon of human lostness from various angles, but certainly from none so inevitably as that of the divine incarnation. The fact that God gave Christ reveals, as nothing else could, that man on his part does not possess the slightest ability to save himself. If man had been able to do that in any possible manner, God would never have suffered the sacrifice of His only-begotten Son. There is no more powerful, impressive, convicting sermon of repentance than this truly staggering fact. In this sense Luther is able, ever and again, not only to denote the proclamation of the suffering and death of Jesus as preaching of the Law, but also to portray it in its terrifying effect as Law. In delivering up His Son, God, therefore, applies Law to uncover man's sin and to reveal His wrath over sin and the sinner.

2. But even as God in delivering up His Son causes the Law to become effective, He at the same time also causes His complete love to become effective. For when God gives His Son, the Law at the same time attains its τέλος in the double sense of end and fulfillment, of conclusion and goal, and this conquest of the Law by Him is the Gospel, "pure grace and mercy, shed upon us and spread over us in Christ." Christ's work of judgment is *opus alienum*; His *opus proprium* is justification. God gives us Christ for His justification. All of this merely describes what Paul sums up in that pregnant declaration: "(God) hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Thus we have reached the very heart of our entire problem and the decisive point of our

study: the doctrine of justification is rooted in Christology; indeed, it is only its other side, the side turned toward mankind. The *simul iustus, simul peccator* is only a special case of the "true God and true man." The fact that these belong together is conceded today by many, but often (Bultmann) in a manner which is just the opposite of our own. For some deduct Christology from the doctrine of justification and then make the two terms synonymous. But after the tardy recognition that not only Luther's doctrine of Holy Communion, but also that of the Trinity must be understood from the viewpoint of his Christology, Maurer recently (1950) showed emphatically in a larger way that also Luther's doctrine of justification is based entirely on his Christology, newly recovered from the ancient Church (Cf. Kinder *ELKZ* 1952, 2). This must be firmly kept in view. For if that is not done, Christology becomes a religious-philosophical speculation, and the doctrine of justification glides off into a religious-existential philosophy. But if both, Christology and the doctrine of justification, are understood in a clear and solid relationship to each other, they are qualified, jointly to express fully the entire content of the Christian *kerygma*. To illustrate this, one can point to the exchange between Christ and His own, which Luther often likes to mention: Christ gives to His own His entire salvation and all His goods and receives from His own their entire human sinfulness (for example, *Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* 12). Because Christ is true God and true man — indeed, in Himself, but not only in Himself, but at the same time for us — therefore we can be *simul iusti, simul peccatores*. God made Christ to be sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

b. We know that Luther's translation "die vor Gott gilt" is already Reformation exegesis. The Greek, as is well known, has only δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ. But Luther's translation is nevertheless correct. For, as a matter of fact, the point is that God, beyond all understanding, permits the sinner to exist before Him, indeed not because God recognizes any one of his works, but because He approves of him wholly as a person (*AS C*, XIII, 2). To the sinner, who can make no demands on Him, God imputes righteousness and thus makes it man's own. God's justifying judgment, as God's justifying judgment, is never merely judgment, but embodies reality.

c. Since God deals with the sinner in justification, the sinner obtains the righteousness before God in this that God forgives him his sin, does not impute it unto him, and therewith gives him full salvation, for where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation (*C. A.* IV, 1; *Ap.* IV, 76). By virtue of the justification realized through the forgiveness of sin, this applies to us, "that we have a God, that is, that God is concerned about us" (*Ap.* IV, 141. 143; *Lat.*); "have a Father in heaven, who sees also us at all times . . . who is to be feared, loved, and whom we should sincerely thank . . . who hears our prayer, also our desiring and sighing." (*German.*) In brief, we belong to God altogether and please Him.

d. All of this applies, in the first place, personally to the individual Christian, whom the Word of justification addresses and who believes it. But it must not be restricted in any manner and misunderstood individualistically. Luther clearly showed that when, in the *Large Catechism*, in the explanation of the Second Article, he not only says that Christ did enough and paid for me, but at once explains that He brought back His own out of the realm of the devil to be under the rule of the Father (II, 28 ff.). Justification is therefore a deed of God, which is done indeed just for me, but it is at the same time an entering into the Kingdom of Christ as a member, an incorporation in His body.

e. There has been a difference of opinion whether justification has a beginning and a continuation, whether there is in it a growing and a status. The Confessions are manifestly not particularly interested in these questions. They are eager that every person should repent and receive forgiveness. For for them there is justification always only *in actu* and not as *habitus*. For no man ever is justified otherwise than as *homo simul iustus, simul peccator*. The gift of justification is certainly at once an "already" and still a "not yet." "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be" (1 John 3:2). "For we are saved by hope" (τῇ γὰρ ἐλπίδι ἐσώθημεν) (Rom. 8:24). Thus the gift of justification is actually received, but it attains its goal only in the perfection of eternity, when and where there will be neither Law nor Gospel any more. In this sense justification is a truly eschatological fact of the first order (*Gr. Kat.* II, 58); and justification remains

most intimately bound, as the most important content of a *theologia viatorum*, with the situation that is set forth in the two words "Law and Gospel," or, in other words: it views man in his inescapable guilt and acknowledges him in his imputed righteousness.

3. Thus we have once again come face to face with the question of Law and Gospel, which after a long time is today again receiving much consideration, and we must here briefly give it our attention.

a. We are not interested in it as a metaphysical, sociological, or psychological problem, but our interest centers in its kerygmatic implication. The correct understanding of the very involved relationship between Law and Gospel as the two Words of God has, in the main, the simple purpose of safeguarding the *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and thereby preserving consolation for frightened consciences. God gives us Christ for justification, Him, Him only, and hence not the Law. This cannot be overemphasized. For this decides whether we are teaching Reformationally or in some manner "enthusiastically" (*schwärmerisch*). The Law is not given us for justification. And thus every dependence on the activity of culture as a proof for God's relationship naturally disappears, but also all confidence in a cultus which supposedly pleases God, all reliance on churchly tradition, and therewith also on one's own Confession. As valuable and important as our Confession may be—I call to remembrance the well-known word of Nathan Söderblom that he thanked God daily for letting him be born a Lutheran—nevertheless, no one is justified for the reason that he is a Lutheran. The Law is not given us for justification, that is, there is no possibility for man to stand before God by virtue of any kind of performance. Nothing in the world which may in any way be at his command can shield him against God.

b. The Law has its own entirely different and sharply defined purpose. God imposed it upon men because of sin. Accordingly, God keeps men's lives in an external bearable order through the Law in the *usus civilis seu politicus*, and with the *usus theologicus seu elenchticus* He brings man to a knowledge of his sin and loss. No matter, however, where and how man may ever perceive the Law, he always hears its "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" as one who has need of this "Thou shalt," "Thou shalt not," hence

always as a transgressor of the Law, and therefore before God he can never find comfort in his morality. *Lex semper accusat* (*Ap.* IV, 38).

There can be no *tertius usus*, in which the Law functions as man's friendly, instructing guide. Luther did not teach it. The *Formula of Concord* neutralized Melanchthon's teaching regarding the third use of the Law. For it the difference between the second and the third use did not depend on the function of the Law, but only on the scope of its jurisdiction. In the second *usus* it strikes the still unregenerated with its sin-reproving effect; in the third *usus* the already regenerated. But since regenerated and unregenerated do not constitute two groups of men, but we recognize, with Luther, only the one man, who is *simul iustus, simul peccator*, the difference between the second and the third use of the Law, still maintained by the *Formula of Concord*, vanishes. To the question asked by the terrified man who craves assurance: "What shall I do to inherit life?" there is only one answer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

c. But therewith the question regarding Law and Gospel as it pertains to our subject is not yet fully answered. It must be added that precisely because God gives us Christ for justification, the Law is confirmed. The Law, which claims the whole man for God, is God's eternal, holy, immutable will; it has the right to accuse self-seeking, self-justifying man (*Ap.* IV, 179). Jesus Christ does not abolish, but fulfills it. God gives Christ in order that that may happen which is the content of the Law; and in this manner God fulfills His eschatological promise, Jer. 31:31, of the new covenant (*Ap.* IV, 123, ff.). Thus the Law is confirmed through Christ, and, at the same time, loses its power through Him. Law and Gospel are the two fundamentally different Words of God with which He affects men. A transcendent unity of the two cannot be perceived by us. Only this may be said, that of these two Words, which are both thoroughly God's Words, the Law, with its accusing and convicting effect, is in the service of the Gospel as the παιδαγωγός εἰς Χριστόν, as the necessary παιδαγωγός, but as the παιδαγωγός εἰς Χριστόν. God gives us Christ, *Christum solum*, for justification.

d. Whoever believes that he can exchange Christ for anything else — and that could certainly only be the Law in some form —

not only misunderstands the Law as a means of salvation, but scorns and despises Christ and buries Him anew. (*Ap.* IV, 81; *C. A.* XXIV, 24.) The people who do not know what grace and faith are *obscurant gloriam et beneficia Christi* (*Ap.* IV, 3). And work-righteousness is a "horrible blasphemy" (*Ap.* XX, 4).

4. The total exclusiveness of the gift of God in Christ extends also to man's receiving it. Really Christ alone is our justification and not, for instance, also our faith. We can merely sketch in brief propositions the role that faith plays.

a. In the first place, it is certain that faith does not merely apprehend the Word (*Ap.* IV, 48), but comes through the Word: ἄρα ἡ πίστις ἐξ ἀκοῆς (Rom. 10:17; *Ap.* IV, 74). Faith is always secondary, never primary. Thus it is bound to an historical element, the testimony of the Church, in which the Word of God's promise in Christ encounters man. Faith, however, is not thereby a judging of the Word by man; but man believes as he with his whole being lets himself be planted upon this Word. This warrants the relative correctness of the currently emphasized identification of faith with obedience, which in the manner in which it is being presented, is not in accord with the New Testament, (Bultmann, *Urchristentum*, S. 256 Anm. 25). The Confessions, furthermore, emphasize that faith always exists only in actual subduing of the temptation which would cause the Christian to doubt God's promise and to reach for human assurances (*Ap.* IV, 20. 36. 142). Faith is therefore never situation, but always event. It overcomes temptation, as it, in hearing the Word of the Gospel, ever again learns to recognize in temptation the good and gracious dealing of God with men.

b. This faith the Confessions often call justifying faith. This wording appears as though faith created, effected, or even merited justification. But that is not at all the intention of the Reformers. To them it is much rather "the certain trust in the heart, when with my whole heart I regard the promises of God as certain and true," "not my doing, not my presenting or giving, not my work or preparation" (*Ap.* IV, 48), but altogether a receiving (*Ap.* II, 56). And it is the Holy Spirit who creates it (Rom. 15:13; Phil. 1:29: "For unto you it is given (ἐχαρίσθη) to believe" (*C. A.* V, 2; *Ap.* IV, 99). That this faith is then "a live, creative, active, mighty

thing" toward the neighbor, is closely connected herewith and does not contradict our conclusion. With respect to God faith is pure receiving, and hence the Confessions usually also say, whenever they speak of the significance of faith for justification, that man is justified *per fidem*.

c. Certainly they can also, at times, use the formula *propter fidem* (*Ap.* IV, 177. 189); Luther, too, does that occasionally. But that is possible only because Christ and faith belong together most intimately and can therefore also sometimes be exchanged for each other (*W. A.*, 10 II, 449ff.). For *fides*, indeed, is not merely regarded as *fides qua creditur*, but at the same time also as *fides quae creditur* (*Ep.* V, 5). Faith is certainly not a faith *in genere*, that is, a faith which believes in general that there is a God, etc. (*Ap.* XII, 60), but always an existential being struck by the "for me"; it is also not a mere historical faith, that Christ is born, suffered, etc., but in it the whole heart embraces this great treasure (*Ap.* IV, 48); faith, on the other hand, is, however, also not mere emotion on the part of man, but always, at the same time, a reality of definite content. From this point of view the *propter fidem* must be understood. We can rightly say: Faith is justification itself, and that because it receives all that God gives in Christ. Therewith it gives God the honor due Him and which He demands. Luther expresses this thought more methodically when he says that faith is justification for the very reason that, in purely receiving the gift of God in Christ, it fulfills the Law, which, in reality desires no more than that man should recognize God in His deity (*e. g.*, 4. *Disputation gegen die Antinomer*, *Theses* 33—36).

### III

Thus we have arrived at that point of our discussion where the basic assertion of our theme automatically comes to a focus.

1. If God gives us sinners Christ, His only-begotten Son, for justification, then this giving is grace. The term χάρις indeed embraces a wealth of associations in the New Testament; but following the Reformers, we no doubt seize upon the deciding point if we take χάρις as *favor dei*, God's favor, freely granted to the sinner, and, in so doing, do not conceive of it as an enduring sentiment, but as an act of salvation.

2. If God's giving is understood in this sense, then something is thereby said of man as well as of God. With regard to man, God's gift is designated as something altogether undeserved, in view of the term "grace." Man has no claim to this gift. If man confesses Christ as this gift of God, for his justification, then he surrenders himself fully, renounces every self-justification, recognizes himself as totally lost in evil and good days, in his entire being.

In this sense it can be said that grace contains Law (Elert, *Ethos*, p. 370). It is the gift, which leads to repentance exactly as undeserved favor. Only he receives this gift who has become conscious of his lostness. But it is and remains completely a gift. For only if he finds himself completely helpless is man as God would have him. To live by grace, i. e., to give God the honor, means to believe and thus really to be justified.

3a. God's gift in Christ is, however, grace also with regard to God. One certainly cannot distinguish that from the previous in fact, but only in expression. But this distinction in expression is important. If God gives Christ, He would help mankind. Then He in mercy takes the initiative. Then He would win man for Himself. Here is where John 3:16 comes in. God's love stands at the head of His dealing with humanity. Paul says the same, 2 Cor. 5:19: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," and it is man who is told: "Be ye reconciled to God." In this sense also Luther can say: "Christ does nothing else than to make the Father sweet for us and to bring us through Himself to the Father" (*W. A.* 10, III, 161).

b. As unambiguous and important as this is, not everything would be said that here must be said if one were to ignore the other side. It would imply the falsification of the Biblical testimony if one were to pretend that also God was not being reconciled. This is the only approach of the Confessions (*Ap.* IV, 80). Christ is to them a mediator and reconciler, a treasure, a price paid for our sins (*IV*, 57), the *hostia non tantum pro culpa originis, sed etiam pro omnibus actualibus hominum peccatis* (*C. A.* III, 3 etc.; *C. A.* IV, 2; *Gr. Kat.* 2, 31; *Ap.* IV, 179; XXIV, 56). Though man is indeed to gain confidence in God's goodness and is indeed to give up the fear of God's wrath, it is just as certain that the wrath of God is not the figment of the imagination of man. By

the fact that God gives Christ for justification, man is not to be disabused of an error, to which he had been subject with regard to the essence and the sentiment of God, but he is to become certain that God Himself has assumed a new attitude toward him, that God no longer treats him as a transgressor of the Law, but has very really given up His very real wrath toward him as the Father of Jesus Christ *propter Christum* or also *in Christo*, whereas His wrath remains (μένει) on him who does not believe in the Son (Joh. 3:36). The Biblical testimony regarding this is clear (Rom. 5:9-11; 1 Thess. 1:10; Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). Of course, the New Testament does not have a fully developed theory regarding the reasons for which and the manner in which the work of Christ influences God. It is, moreover, of little value to construct such a theory on the basis of the various expressions which the New Testament uses regarding this, such as sacrifice, ransom, and others. The assurance that God, for Christ's sake, approaches the sinner in a new manner must and can suffice us. It would be entirely wrong to describe this understanding of the grace of God, which in the overcoming of His wrath through Christ is grace, as a rationalization of the divine relationship. For what takes place within God still remains a complete mystery. Only the Biblical testimony is presented, and man receives no kind of guarantee for his faith, but must rely only on the testimony of that God who as the Father of Jesus Christ transforms His wrath into grace. *Propter Christum* and *in Christo*: it is well and noteworthy that both formulations occur. They are one and mutually explain each other: the *propter Christum* guards the *in Christo* against mystical misunderstanding, and the *in Christo* prevents the rationalization of the *propter Christum*.

#### IV

The grace of God gives us Christ for justification. We still have to consider, in conclusion, that the little word "gives" is in the present tense. We have spoken at length of the *Christ yesterday*. Neither is anything to be retracted. But we must still briefly give our attention to the *Christ today*. There certainly can be no dying and rising again with Christ if He did not at one time die and rise for us; no one can receive Christ for justification if God's grace did not at one time give Him into this world and if He did not

die on the cross and was not resurrected from the grave. But this "at one time," this "yesterday" and "there," becomes real and effective for me ever again today and here, only because and as God gives me Christ personally. He does it in having the Word with Christ as its content proclaimed to me in the Church and in having the Sacrament given me in which Christ is bodily present and so received. Thus it is true; thus it is something wholly different from a mere speculation; thus it ever again becomes a glad, grateful, prayerful confession in the Church:

*The grace of God gives us Christ for justification.*

Glossary of Abbreviations

Ap.	—	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
AS C	—	Smalcald Articles, Part III
C. A.	—	Augsburg Confession
Ep.	—	Formula of Concord, Epitome
Gr. Kat.	—	Large Catechism
S. D.	—	Formula of Concord, Solida Declaratio