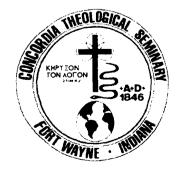
# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



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APRIL — JULY 1982	
Henry J. Eggold, Th. D., D.D.	<del></del> . 97
Announcement	101
Justification through Faith in Article Four of the Apology Martim C. Warth	105
Justification as a Doctrine of the Old  Testament	129
The Clarity of Scripture and Hermeneutical Principles in the Lutheran Confessions Erling T. Teigen	147
Evangelical Hermeneutics Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. Are Law and Gospel a Valid Hermeneutical Principle?	167 181
The Theology of the Word in John Gerhard Bengt Hägglund	209
Luther and Erasmus Daniel Preus "The Word of My Patience" in Revelation	219
3:10 Theodore Mueller	231
Ways of Saving Time and Labor in Parish Administration	235
Theological Observer	241
Book Reviews	
Book Comments	255
Books Received	259



# Justification through Faith in Article Four of the Apology

#### Martim C. Warth

Article Four of the Apology is an article of great consolation and certainty. It is the affirmation of free consolation through the remission of sins and of the certainty in Christ. Although one has to agree with Dr. C.F.W. Walther that "it is not an easy matter correctly to present the doctrine of justification," one has to thank God for such a fine and clear treatise on the articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae as Melanchthon has given the church. It was hard work; Melanchthon worked for months on the Apology, and a quarter of the Apology is dedicated to the doctrine of justification. This article required special reflection, dealing as it does with the heartbeat of the Reformation and, indeed, of the whole Christian existence. When the Apology finally was to appear in printed form at the end of April or the beginning of May 1531. Melanchthon still was not satisfied with the result, and at the last minute suppressed five and one-half already printed double sheets of the article on justification.<sup>2</sup>

### I. Introductory Matters

A. The Centrality of the Doctrine

It is not only the "lay theologican" in Melanchthon who struggles with the difficulty to describe correctly "the main doctrine of Christianity" (praecipuus locus doctrinae Christianae) (2), but it is also the thirty-four-year-old mature Christian who knows by experience "how difficult a thing faith is" (350). On January 1, 1531, he wrote Camerarius: "In the Apology I experience much trouble with the article of justification, which I seek to explain profitably."4 It was most certainly "the first manifesto of his 'mature' thought on this central doctrine,"5 although he had worked on it in his Loci Communes of 1521 and continued to do so in his Romans Commentary of 1532.6 He considers this doctrine the "most true and certain and indispensable for all Christians" (398), since it concerns "an important issue, the honor of Christ and the source of sure and firm consolation for pious minds" (156). It deals with "the purpose of the history" of Christ, namely, "the forgiveness of sins" (51). For this reason Melanchthon says that "this teaching about the righteousness of faith dare not be neglected in the church of Christ" (377).

#### B. Melanchthon's Sources

To prepare the defence of Article Four of the Augsburg Confession Melanchthon could not rely on good systematic or exegetical sources, since they were not yet available. Thus Melanchthon, the learned humanist, had to use his humanistic skills to set straight the relation between revelation and reason. He knew that he was preaching "the foolishness of the Gospel," thus knowing "how repulsive this teaching is to the judgment of reason and law and that the teaching of the law about love is more plausible; for this is human wisdom" (230).

As a humanist he inherited a respect for the opinion of others which gave him his ecumenical tendencies. But to preserve a true ecumenicity he had to become a confessor. He confessed his agreement with Scripture against the defenders of the Roman Confutation, declaring that "it is surely amazing that our opponents are unmoved by the many passages in the Scriptures that clearly attribute justification to faith and specifically deny it to works" (107). He confessed his agreement with the early church, since he found that "there are similar statements here and there in the holy Fathers" (103). But the opponents "have no more understanding than the walls that fling back an echo" (237). The time of the Augsburg Confession was past and Melanchthon had no more illusions about an agreement. Thus, the soft humanist can also say that the canonists have "twisted" and "distorted" (288) and that the opponents delight in "childish sophistry" (336). Their "trust is simply wicked and vain" (146). Melanchthon reminds his readers that the "opponents counsel pious consciences very badly" (285) with "harmful" modes of justification which reveal "ungodliness" (290). He concludes that the opponents "defend human opinions contrary to the Gospel, contrary to the authority of the holy Fathers, and contrary to the testimony of pious minds" (400). This statement reveals Melanchthon's main sources. The "pious minds" include especially his friend and co-reformer Martin Luther.7

#### C. The Structure of the Article

Melanchthon "was a logical man," and his Apology was an "intellectual defense of the Augsburg Confession." In Article Four he reveals not only his intellectual and logical ability, but his theological ability as well. With Luther he had grasped the main thrust of Biblical theology and the critical centrality of the doctrine of justification. He helped Luther to systematize the theological concepts, so that they were not only accepted by Luther, Helped Luther and theology. Luther, but became standard for later Lutheran theology.

In Article Four there is no deviation from Luther's position, as some argue, 13 since both Luther and Melanchthon agree that "justification in the Pauline sense... signifies a declaration of justification" in a forensic sense. There is an imputation of alien righteousness. 14 But this is not "merely" a declaration of justification, as Haegglund reads in Melanchthon. Both Luther and Melanchthon know that through justification Christ Himself "becomes ours," 15 as Luther says, and that through justification "we are in Christ" (140) and "Christ still helps us to keep the law" (299), as Melanchthon says.

The main arguments in Article Four are determined by an anthropology that is completely different from the anthropological optimism of the Roman church, as seen especially in the Roman Confutation. This Melanchthon makes clear in the preceding article on original sin. In analyzing these arguments it is almost impossible to believe that Melanchthon really became a synergist. 16 He emphasizes all through Article Four the monergism of God. It is God who offers the promissio of the Gospel. The promissio is only propter Christum. The promissio creates faith, so that justification is received per fidem as a gift of God. Since the promissio is divine, the Holy Spirit comes with faith, so that now propter fidem begin in the believer the "battle of Christ" (192) and the "reign of Christ" (189). When Melanchthon adds a word "about reward and merit" (193) and says that "we teach that good works are meritorious" (194), he says only that God is rewarding His own work in the believer, since "through these works Christ shows his victory over the devil" (192). This is a total monergism of God. It guarantees the two main concerns in this controversy, namely, "the honor of Christ" and "the abundant consolation" for pious consciences (2).

# II. The Basic Presuppositions A. The Anthropological Predicament

For Melanchthon the anthropological predicament is an "important issue" (2). The opponents "confuse this doctrine miserably" (3), since they affirm that "men receive the forgiveness of sins because of their merits" (1) and so "they obscure the glory and the blessings of Christ, and they rob pious consciences of the consolation offered them in Christ" (3). This means that, for Melanchthon, the main question is the correct understanding of the benefits of Christ. This was already his concern in the Loci Communes of 1521: "Hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia eius cognoscere." There are two differing interpretations for the

"benefits of Christ" — the interpretation of the Confutatio and that of the Apology.

#### 1. THE ROMANIST ANTHROPOLOGY

Melanchthon gives the key to the correct understanding of God's revelation in Scripture. There are two chief doctrines, and "all Scripture should be divided into these two chief doctrines, the law and the promises" (5). The opponents selected the way of the law (7) to interpret the benefits of Christ. Since "reason can somehow perform" external, civil works (8) "without the Holy Spirit" (9), the opponents "claim to keep the law, though this glory properly belongs to Christ" (146).

There is a difference between "external works that reason can somehow perform" (8) and "keeping the law" (146). The Decalogue "requires other works far beyond the reach of reason, like true fear of God, true love of God, true prayer to God, true conviction that God hears prayer, and the expectation of God's help in death and all afflictions" (8). Keeping the law involves the first table of the Decalogue, especially the First Commandment, "which commands us to love God, to be sure that God is wrathful at our sin" (34).

Melanchthon has put the two commands together, the command to love God and the command to be sure about God's wrath, so that the opponents may recognize that it is altogether impossible to satisfy the law. For this reason Melanchthon repeats, at least nine times, that "the law always accuses ("lex semper accusat") us, it always shows that God is wrathful" (128, 38, 157, 167, 204, 260, 270, 285, 295). And he concludes that "we cannot love God until we have grasped His mercy by faith. Only then does He become an object that can be loved" (objectum amabile) (129).

The opponents "teach the law in such a way as to hide the Gospel of Christ" (286). So the benefits of Christ are interpreted in a way that is false and detrimental to the Gospel, the promise of the forgiveness of sins. Their "whole system is derived either from human reason or from the teaching of the law rather than the Gospel" (287). They teach two modes of justification — one based upon reason, the other based upon the law. "Neither one is based upon the Gospel or the promise of Christ" (287).

The first mode of justification, according to the opponents, "is that men merit grace by good works — first by the merit of congruity, then by the merit of condignity" (288). This doctrine can teach only those who are blind to the uncleanness of the heart.

Those who feel the "terrors of conscience" add still "many other painful sorts of works to appease the wrath of God." So they later "thought up monastic orders" to counteract "the terrors of conscience and the wrath of God," although "the Fathers had enacted them" not to seek righteousness, but "for the sake of social tranquility" (288).

The second mode of justification "teaches that we are righteous through a certain disposition (which is love) infused by God" (gratia infusa) (289). With this infused grace, the Romanists say, "we obey the law of God both outwardly and inwardly." This obedience of the law is supposed to be "worthy of grace and eternal life" (289). This doctrine "imagines that we produce an act of love whereby we merit the forgiveness of sins" (290). Justification is, therefore, progressive in this system. It is the reward of virtue, and depends on what man accomplishes. 19

The benefits of Christ, in this system, provide the prima gratia necessary to merit de congruo. But they provide also the gratia infusa available through the sacraments and the church to merit de condigno (17, 288). Melanchthon calls attention to the fact that works and merits before and after the first grace are identical, and that if a man has received the first grace, he no longer would really be meriting de congruo, but already de condigno. He says that in this distinction the Romanists are only "playing in order to avoid the impression that they are outright Pelagians" (19). Infused grace would be necessary only to "love God more easily" or to "do so more freely" (17). But Melanchthon argues that this is nonsensical, since "they bid us merit this first disposition by our preceding merits."

The Council of Trent would later declare that faith is the beginning of salvation (initium salutis), that faith is notitia historica of the benefits of Christ, and that faith is partly a gift of God and partly an achievement of the will of man. Today Roman theology insists that faith is not even that beginning, but that the way to faith is already prepared by inclinations (inchoationes fidei) which man has through the universal grace which God gives even to all pagans. Those pagans who have never had contact with the Gospel "ought to reach grace through a purely interior way." According to Roman doctrine, there are as many extraordinary ways of salvation as there are men who are "outside the salvation order." When these external (universal grace) and internal (man's virtue) circumstances are favorable, the free will of man will itself decide to make of this grace an effective grace (gratia congrua). This grace is still supposed to be the result of the

benefits of Christ, but it is no longer bound to the *notitia historica* of the Gospel — the correlation of word and faith.

Since the universal grace of God cannot be known apart from the Word, Melanchthon is right when he says that the Romanists "bid us merit this first disposition by our preceding merits" (17). The benefits of Christ are downgraded and human virtues are extolled. Roman anthropology asserts that "nature is not evil" and that "nothing is sin unless it is voluntary" (Ap. II:43). The Romanists do not recognize their evil, and so they cannot acknowledge the benefits of Christ correctly, since Melanchthon says that "we cannot know his blessings unless we recognize our evil" (Ap. II: 50). This is why Article Four of the Augsburg Confession simply says that "men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, . . . or satisfactions."

#### 2.MELANCHTHON'S ANTHROPOLOGY

Melanchthon asserts that when the article on justification is properly understood, "it illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ and brings to pious consciences the abundant consolation that they need" (2). With this introduction he points to two important issues: First, the "recognition of original sin is a necessity." Secondly, we cannot "know the magnitude of the grace of Christ unless we acknowledge our faults" (Ap. II: 33). Thus, Melanchthon knows that there is need for "abundant consolation" and that this consolation is available only through "the magnitude of the grace of Christ."

The Roman opponents make one great mistake: "They utterly overlook that eternal law, far beyond the senses and understanding of all creatures. 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart' (Deut. 6:5)" (131). At the beginning "man was created in the image of God and after his likeness (Gen. 1:27)" (Ap. II:18). This image was the "wisdom and righteousness and truth" which God had "implanted in man," a wisdom and righteousness by which man "would grasp God and reflect him" in truth (Ap. II: 18, 20). Melanchthon mentions three fundamental gifts which were received with this image — first, the knowledge of God," second, "the fear and love of God," and third, "the trust in God" which in the restoration of the image reappears as faith (Ap. II: 7, 18, 23, 26).

Melanchthon understands that all this was lost through the fall. In place of the image of God there is original sin, which has two aspects — imputed guilt (Ap. II: 35, 36) and inherent consupiscence, which Melanchthon calls a "continual inclination of

nature" (Ap. II: 3) and a "disease since human nature is born full of corruption and faults" (Ap. II: 6). This is what Melanchthon reads in the "old definition" which held that "original sin is the lack of original righteousness" (Ap. II: 15). Melanchthon's definition of original sin "denied to man's natural powers the fear and trust of God" (Ap. II: 14), denying to man the ability to keep the First Commandment. Original sin involves such faults as "ignorance of God," "contempt of God, lack of fear and love," so that "man hates God," and "lack of trust," so that "man cannot believe in God, man despises the judgment of God, and man trusts in temporal things" (Ap. II: 8, 14, 17, 24). So "all righteousness of man is mere hypocrisy before God unless we acknowledge that of itself the heart is lacking in love, fear, and trust in God" (Ap. II: 33). Man is not "neutral" in spiritual matters (Ap. II: 45). The penalty for original sin is that "human nature is subjected not only to death and other physical ills, but also to the rule of the devil" (Ap. II: 46). The only one who is able to re-establish fellowship with God is the Faithful One, the God-man Jesus Christ. "Christ was given to us to bear both sin and penalty and to destroy the rule of the devil, sin, and death; so we cannot know his blessings unless we recognize our evil" (Ap. II: 50).

#### B. God's Monergism

Because of the "inner uncleanness of human nature" (Ap. II: 12) it is impossible for man to be "justified before God by philosophical or civic righteousness, which we agree is subject to reason and somewhat in our power" (Ap. II: 12), for this would attribute "more than [is] proper to free will and to 'elicited acts'" (Ap. II: 12). It is impossible, since concupiscence is "the continual inclination of nature" (Ap. II: 3) and it remains in the mortal flesh" (Ap. II: 36), as Melanchthon affirms with Augustine. In other words, all synergism and all Pelagianism is excluded, since concupiscence, the flesh, the carnal inclination, remains until the Last Day.

But the promise which God gives to sinful man is that sin "is not imputed to those who are in Christ" (Ap. II: 40). Melanchthon employs Luther's doctrine of Baptism "condemned by Leo X" (Ap. II: 35) and affirms that "Baptism removes the guilt of the original sin" but that consupiscence, the "material element" of original sin, remains in the baptized one. God promises to "those who are in Christ" through Baptism that the guilt is not longer imputed, and this faith in Christ simultaneously "brings the Holy Spirit" (116), "given in Baptism" (Ap. II: 35), who "begins to mortify lust and to create new impulses in man" (Ap. II: 35). This

reference to Baptism introduces and summarizes Melanchthon's whole essay on justification in Article Four.

## II. Justification through Faith A. The Basis of Faith

Melanchthon charges that the opponents have chosen the way of the law to find justification. It is Melanchthon's contention in the Apology, however, that "we obtain justification through a free promise," and that "the Gospel is, strictly speaking, the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ" (43). Justifying faith is based on the following three elements which belong together: first, "the promise itself," second, "the fact that the promise is free," and third, "the merit of Christ as the price and propitiation" (53).

#### 1. THE PROMISE

We have already seen that Melanchthon accepted Luther's interpretation of Baptism; so when he says that "justification takes place through the Word" (66), he affirms that the sacrament of Baptism justifies because of the Word of God comprehended in it. Since the Gospel "proclaims the righteousness of faith in Christ" (43), it "compels us to make use of Christ in justification" (291). It is even "the command [mandatum] to believe that we have a gracious God because of Christ" (345). Melanchthon can say that the promise is "a command," because he knows that it can "be obeyed" only when there is a gift on both ends—the gift of the promise and the gift of faith. That faith is a gift is "Paul's chief argument, which he often repeats (Rom. 4:16, Gal. 3:18)," since it is "based upon the nature of a promise" (84). Paul "denies us any merit" and adds that "the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification is a gift, and further that the promise can be accepted only by faith" (84), since only the gift of "faith can accept a promise" (50, 264).

Melanchthon finds that "the promise is involved even in the word 'redeem.' It signifies that the forgiveness of sins is possible, that sins can be redeemed, that the obligation or debt can be removed, that the wrath of God can be stilled" (264). But this is not a mere possibility; it is a certainty. "Let us remember that the Gospel promises the forgiveness of sins with certainty. It would clearly be an abolition of the Gospel if we were to deny that the forgiveness of sins must surely be given by a promise" (264). For Melanchthon "we are justified by promise, in which reconciliation, righteousness, and eternal life are assured to us for

Christ's sake" (297), and "faith alone accepts the forgiveness of sins, justifies, and regenerates" (292).

#### 2. THE GRACE OF GOD

The second aspect of the basis of justifying faith is "the fact that the promise is free" (53). Melanchthon says that "the promise... offers mercy gratis" (339) and that this "mercy toward us" is "God's grace" (381).<sup>23</sup> Grace, therefore, is not "a disposition [habitus] by which we love God" (381), as the opponents hold, but it is God's "promise of mercy" (55), "the mercy promised because of Christ" (79). This mercy is not as in the "courts of human judgment," where "mercy is uncertain"; "the judgment of God is another thing altogether. Here mercy has God's clear and certain promise and his command" (345). "So whenever mercy is spoken of, faith in the promise must be added" (346), since "the promised mercy correlatively requires faith and ... only faith can take hold of this mercy" (324).

When Melanchthon says that "faith is that which grasps God's free mercy because of God's Word" (153), he agrees completely with Luther. Jörg Rothermundt recalls in his "Report on LWF Studies, 1958-1963," that

the decisive difference between Luther on the one hand and Thomism and mysticism on the other [is]: Only Luther speaks here of the word, only he knows the gospel as the living pronouncement of salvation here and now, and faith as the necessary correlate of the word. The concept of alien righteousness, which in itself could be understood mystically or Thomistically, also receives its Reformation precision only through the statement: This alien righteousness is appropriated through the word, the word which can be heard only in faith.<sup>24</sup>

Here again we recognize Melanchthon as the systematizer of Luther's theology. Melanchthon knows that the free grace of mercy provides a justice which is alien, but which is imputed by the Word of promise through justifying faith. He says that "faith alone justifies," and that "the reconciled are accounted righteous and children of God... by mercy on account of Christ, if they grasp this mercy by faith." We are "accounted righteous before God" because faith "receives God's promise that for Christ's sake he wishes to be propitious to believers in Christ" (86).

#### 3. THE BENEFITS OF CHRIST

"The merits of Christ as a price and propitiation" (53) are the third aspect of the basis of justifying faith. Melanchthon affirms against his opponents that "it is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, and was raised unless we add this article, the purpose of the history, 'the forgiveness of sins.' The rest must be integrated with this article, namely, that for Christ's sake [propter Christum] and not because of our own merits the forgiveness of sins is bestowed upon us" (51). The "opponents suppose that Christ is the mediator and propitiator because he merited for us the disposition of love" (81), but "it is an error to suppose that he merely merited 'initial grace' and that afterward we please God and merit eternal life by our keeping of the law. Christ remains the mediator" (162, 163). Melanchthon insists that "we must always hold that we are accounted righteous by faith [per fidem] for the sake of Christ [propter Christum]" (163), since "Christ does not stop being the mediator after our renewal" (162). It is difficult to exaggerate Melanchthon's emphasis on the merits of Christ: "But what is the knowledge of Christ except to know Christ's blessings, the promises which by the Gospel he has spread throughout the world?" (101); Christ is "the price for our sins" (57); the "name of Christ [is] the cause or price on account of which we are saved" (98); he became "a sacrifice for us" (179); by his death "our sins are blotted out"; "God has been reconciled to us because of Christ's suffering"(382).

Although such statements teach or assume what we have come to call "objective justification," it is clear in the Apology that "Christ's suffering benefits us" only "when frightened consciences are consoled by faith and believe," since "Christ is a propitiation, as Paul says, through faith" (382). "Faith alone justifies" (86) as far as the appropriation of justification by the individual is concerned (subjective justification). Therefore, "when a man believes that his sins are forgiven because of Christ, this personal faith obtains the forgiveness of sins and justifies us" (45). And "by freely accepting the forgiveness of sins, faith sets against God's wrath not our merits of love, but Christ the mediator and propitiator. This faith is the true knowledge of Christ" (46).

From the beginning Melanchthon is concerned about the honor and glory of Christ. For this reason he adds that "if somebody doubts that his sins are forgiven, he insults Christ because he thinks that his sin is greater and stronger that the death and promise of Christ" (149). And "if somebody believes that he

obtains the forgiveness of sins because he loves, he insults Christ" (150). "Therefore it must be faith that reconciles and justifies" (150), since the Gospel "compels us to make use of Christ in justification. It teaches that through him we have access to God through faith (Rom. 5:2), and that we should set him, the mediator and propitiator, against the wrath of God" (291).

After we "are saved by trust in the name of Christ" (98) we are invited also to rely on Christ in all other situations of life, for Christ is the "high priest" (165) who intercedes for us. Furthermore, since "he is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4)" (372), "Christ still helps us to keep the law" (299). Melanchthon is very conscious that, even though "the law cannot be satisfied" (166) since "the law always accuses" (38), it is necessary that "the keeping of the law should begin in us and increase more and more" (136). But it is "clear that without the help of Christ we cannot keep the law" (315, 388) and we "cannot correctly keep the law unless by faith we have received the Holy Spirit" (132). Even then all our good works represent only "the reign of Christ" (189), the "battle of Christ," (192) and "battles of God" (191).

#### B. The Creation of Faith

Melanchthon's affirmation that "one cannot deal with God or grasp him except through the Word" (67) reveals his conviction that the Word is primarily the Gospel, which "is the power of God," through which "justification takes place" (67). This power he knows also to exist in the sacraments (73), especially in Baptism (103). Even "absolution is the spoken Gospel" (271). When Melanchthon affirms that "the forgiveness of sins is a thing promised for Christ's sake" and that "therefore it can be accepted only by faith" (84), it follows that "faith alone justifies because we receive the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit by faith alone" (86). And when he affirms, at the same time, that, according to Luther, "Baptism removes the guilt of original sin" and "that the Holy Spirit, given in Baptism, begins to mortify lust and to create new impulses in man" (Ap. II: 35), it follows that Baptism is part of that Word of God, the Gospel, which is the "power of God" that creates faith. When Melanchthon approvingly adds the affirmation of Ambrose, "He who is righteous has it as a gift because he was justified after being washed" (103), it follows that faith is a gift, a creation of God, in which creation man has no active participation. Man is pure passive, as Luther asserts.25 And since Baptism creates faith, faith cannot be defined "as the conscious acceptance of the grace of God."26

This justifying faith is "conceived by the Word" (73), it exists "because of God's Word" (153), it "rests on the Word" (346), and "it is received through the Word" (66). Therefore the Gospel "must be retained in the church" (120). The Gospel creates the church and its unity through the gift of faith. But this faith has to be confessed in concord in order to retain the Gospel which creates the unity. Melanchthon points to this need when he says that "in order to keep the Gospel among men, he [God] visibly pits the witness of the saints against the rule of the devil; in our weakness he displays his strength" (189).

The Gospel is the power of God because it is the Holy Spirit's Word. He gave the Word and he acts through the Word. He is the real cause of the justifying faith. Faith "is a work of the Holy Spirit" (64, 115), there is "a divine power that makes us alive" (250), faith is efficacious "through the power of God" (250), and faith is "a supernatural thing" (303). Melanchthon says that "a faith that truly and wholeheartedly accepts the promise of grace" and "which believes that God cares for us, forgives us, and hears us" is a faith that "does not come without a great battle in the human heart," for "of itself the human mind believes no such things about God" (303). With such words Melanchthon is certainly saying two things: (1.) Faith is "a supernatural thing"; the Holy Spirit has to create in us a new being, effecting the "conversion of the wicked" (65), who resists in his self-righteousness. (2.) This faith created by the Holy Spirit necessarily brings along the Holy Spirit, who "in our hearts battles against such feelings" as distrust, defiance and doubts of the flesh (170). Melanchthon does not say that man has to fight "a great battle" before he may receive faith, but that the gift of faith results from the Holy Spirit's battle. This position is again clear when he says that "justification is strictly a gift of God" (362).

#### C. Faith as the Means of Justification

Melanchthon has many things to say about faith, especially in relation to its fruits. But when he comes to speak of justifying faith — when faith is being considered as the means of the remission of sins — it has no dimension, no degree, no intensity. Justifying faith is, as also in Luther, a mathematical point, or rather, a mathematical line all through life. The non-dimensional reality of faith is clear when Melanchthon says that "the forgiveness of sins is the same and equal to all, as Christ is one, and it is offered to all who believe that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. The forgiveness of sins and justification are received only by faith, not because of works" (195). If works are excluded, then all effort of

man, even his psychological awareness, is excluded. There is only "personal faith" (45), that is, an "I," which Werner Elert calls the "transcendental I," and "faith," which Melanchthon identifies directly with "righteousness." He says that "faith is righteousness in us by imputation" (307), "faith is truly righteousness" (308), "righteousness is faith in the heart" (263), "faith is the very righteousness by which we are accounted righteous before God" (86), "it is faith, therefore, that God declares to be righteousness" (89), and "faith is the righteousness of the heart" (92).

With this identification Melanchthon wants to emphasize that there is no temporal sequence between faith and justification. It is not necessary first to believe in many things before finally God justifies man. But the moment of the beginning of faith is the moment of the forgiveness of sins and justification. Or, better, the moment the Holy Spirit touches the heart with the Word of promise so that it kindles faith, man is justified. Faith is the human side of justification, while justification is the divine side of faith. It is in this sense that faith has no dimension but exists only as the means of justification. Both faith and justification are gifts of God, promised in the Gospel for the sake of Jesus Christ. For this reason Melanchthon can say that "this faith makes the difference between those who are saved and those who are not. Faith makes the difference between the worthy and the unworthy because eternal life is promised to the justified and it is faith that justifies" (347). Faith is the gift, the "grace that makes us acceptable to God (gratia gratum faciens)" (116).

Melanchthon understands that justification and faith form a mathematical line all through our life. Melanchthon says that "it is clear that justification does not mean merely the beginning of our renewal, but the reconciliation by which we are later accepted" (161). This is so because "Christ does not stop being the mediator after our renewal" (162). "Therefore we must always go back to the promise" (165). And if we must always go back to the promise, this righteousness never becomes our inherent righteousness and infused disposition (habitus), but it remains an alien righteousness which must always be received through the promise of the Gospel. Melanchthon insists that "we must always hold that we are accounted righteous by faith for the sake of Christ" (163),28 since "our righteousness is the imputation of someone else's righteousness" (306), namely, the beneficia Christi (101).

In summary, then, justification is first the non-imputation of our sins or the "forgiveness of sins" (195) and, secondly, the

imputation of an alien righteousness, namely, "the death and satisfaction of Christ, bestowed upon us to assure us that because of this satisfaction and not because of our keeping of the law we have a gracious God" (178). So "justification is strictly a gift of God; it is a thing promised" (362), and only the gift of "faith can take hold of the promise" (324).

#### D. Faith as the Power of Sanctification

Melanchthon is well aware that justification and sanctification are absolutely simultaneous, so that there is no justification without sanctification, and there is no sanctification without justification. There is only a logical precedence of justification over santification, not a temporal one. Melanchthon calls attention to this fact when he speaks of a first and of a second—"faith precedes while love follows" (141). He states more fully (293):

faith is accounted for righteousness before God (Rom. 4:3,5). When the heart is encouraged and quickened by faith in this way, it receives the Holy Spirit. Through his renewal we can keep the law, love God and his Word, obey God in the midst of afflictions, and practice chastity, love toward our neighbor, and so forth. Even though they are a long way from the perfection of the law, these works please God on account of the justifying faith that for Christ's sake we have a gracious God.

Melanchthon, of course, understands that justification is a "forensic" act of God, since "'justify' is used in a judicial way to mean 'to absolve a guilty man and pronounce him righteous,' and to do so on account of someone else's righteousness, namely, Christ's, which is communicated to us through faith" (305).29 But the faith which is a means of justification is at the same time the power of God in the believer, since it "brings the Holy Spirit" (116), so that man is "led by the Spirit of Christ" (372). Therefore, "since faith brings the Holy Spirit and produces a new life in our hearts, it must also produce spiritual impulses in our hearts" (125). Faith is, then, already "work worthy in itself," but it is not for this reason that faith justifies (86). Any awareness of faith or of justification is already in the area of the effects and therefore in the area of reflexive faith and santification. With respect to the effects of faith and justification three main areas have to be considered: first, the awareness and confession of faith and the expression of confidence and trust through prayer; second, Christian love, in conjunction with the simul of flesh and Spirit and with continual repentance; and third, the Christian hope for final sanctification and eternal life.

#### 1. THE CONFESSION OF FAITH

In the description of justification Melanchthon speaks in an empirical manner when he says that "'to be justified' means to make unrighteous men righteous or to regenerate them, as well as to be pronounced or accounted righteous. For Scripture speaks both ways" (72, 78, 117). He identifies justification with reconciliation (114, 161, 181), with regeneration (72, 78, 117, 181, 292), with remission of sins (72, 75, 114), with forensic righteousness (72, 305), and with vivification (250).

According to Article Three of the Solid Declaration (18-21), which was partially written by Melanchthon's "devoted disciples" Martin Chemnitz, Nicholas Selnecker and David Chytraeus, 30 who understood Melanchthon's theological terminology, the word "regeneration" is used in the Apology in a limited sense, where it means only "the forgiveness of sins and our adoption as God's children." The same is said about the term "vivification." Melanchthon seems to use the word "regenerate" also in another sense, which the Formula considers the first use, namely, the one which includes "both the forgiveness of sins . . . and the subsequent renewal." This meaning Melanchthon might have in mind when he says that "this personal faith obtains the forgiveness of sins and justifies us. In penitence and the terrors of conscience it consoles and encourages our hearts. Thus it regenerates us and brings us the Holy Spirit" (45). He seems to mean the same thing when he says that to "have spiritual and holy impulses" cannot happen "until, being justified and regenerated, we receive the Holy Spirit" (125, 126). To describe clearly the change in man Melanchthon uses expressions like these: "faith brings the Holy Spirit and produces a new life in our hearts" (125); "through his renewal we can keep the law" (293); "this same faith quickens because it brings forth peace, joy, and eternal life in the heart" (100); and "reborn in this way, they bring forth fruits" (263).

Again, Melanchthon sometimes speaks in an empirical manner of faith as including activity which is possible only after justification has taken place. Such is always the case when he uses the expression "to believe that," which presupposes an intellectual activity and a movement of the will which are possible only after God has already given the gift of faith. So also he uses expressions like the following: "this faith brings to God a trust...

in the promise of mercy in Christ" (44); "this personal faith obtains the forgiveness of sins and justifies us" (45); "freely accepting the forgiveness," "faith sets against God's wrath... Christ," "faith is the true knowledge of Christ" (46); "we can accept this promise only by faith" (43); "to want and to accept the promised offer of forgiveness of sins and justification" (48); "a firm acceptance of the promise" (50); "they received free mercy and the forgiveness of sins by faith" (57); "that we accept his blessings or receive them" (60); "take hold of the name of Christ" (83); "they grasp this mercy by faith" (86); "justification is obtained by faith" (106); "to believe means to think of Christ in this way... as the Messiah," "take hold of him" (154); "make use of Christ in justification" (291); "a faith that truly and whole-heartedly accepts the promise of grace" (303); and "therefore we conclude that we are justified before God, reconciled to him, and reborn by a faith that penitently grasps the promised grace, truly enlivens the fearful mind, and is convinced that God is reconciled and propitious to us because of Christ ... Christians need to understand this faith" (386).

All these expressions refer to the consciousness of faith, as it is normally confessed by the adult Christian. The baptized infant is not yet able to express his faith in this manner, but to do so becomes a necessity for the more mature Christian in view of the consciousness of his sins. For this reason Melanchthon emphasized the fact that in this controversy with the Romanists "consolation" (2) was at stake. The awareness and confession of faith becomes necessary because "in justification our business is with God; his wrath must be stilled and the conscience find peace before him" (224). Sin "terrifies consciences" (979); it terrifies "minds" (115). These "terrors of sin and death" (291, 314) can be overcome only by faith, which is a "work of the Holy Spirit that frees us from death, comforting and quickening terrified minds" (115). For faith sets "against God's wrath... Christ the mediator and propitiator" (46). "This is the greatest consolation in all afflictions" (60), and "in penitence and the terrors of conscience it consoles and encourages our hearts" (45), and "it brings forth peace, joy, and eternal life in the heart" (100). As Melanchthon puts it: "There must needs be a proclamation in the church from which the faithful may receive the sure hope of salvation" (119), since "it rests on the Word and commandment of God" (346). "So pious men should not let themselves be diverted from this declaration, that we receive the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake only by faith; here they have a certain and firm consolation against the terrors of sin, against eternal death, and against all the gates of hell" (85).

Melanchthon makes an important distinction with regard to worship, which can be applied also to prayer as part of our confession of faith. "It is easy to determine the difference between this faith and the righteousness of the law. Faith is that worship which receives God's offered blessings; the righteousness of the law is the worship which offers God our own merits. It is by faith that God wants to be worshipped, namely, that we receive from him what he promises and offers" (49, 310). Faith is, therefore, "an act of worship" because it is "obedience toward God," since faith desires "to receive the offered promise" (228, 308). Prayer also is worship, since "prayer relies upon the mercy of God when we believe that we are heard because of Christ the high priest" (333, 59).

#### 2. CHRISTIAN LOVE

The opponents had contended that love and good works were more important than faith, since they merited forgiveness of sins. <sup>31</sup> Melanchthon knows that love and good works are very important, so that they even merit reward, but they do not merit the forgiveness of sins. "We teach that rewards have been offered and promised to the works of the faithful. We teach that good works are meritorious — not for the forgiveness of sins, grace, or justification (for we obtain these only by faith) but for other physical and spiritual rewards in this life and in that which is to come, as Paul says (I Cor. 3:8), 'Each shall receive his wages according to his labor.' Therefore there will be different rewards for different labors" (194). And he adds that "works merit other bodily and spiritual rewards because they please God through faith" (355). This is the same as to say that God rewards His own work, since faith is a gift of God (356).

The giving or retaining of rewards is God's exercise of Christians: "Yet God exercises his saints in different ways and often puts off the rewards for the righteousness of works. Thus they learn not to trust in their own righteousness, but seek the will of God rather than the rewards, as is evident in Job, in Christ, and in other saints. Many Psalms teach us this as they console us against the good fortune of the wicked" (198). He understands that "such praise undoubtedly moves the faithful to good works" (199), especially since "we also grant that alms merit many divine blessings, lighten our punishments, and merit a defense for us in the perils of sin and death, as we said earlier about penitence in general" (278).

When speaking of penitence, Melanchthon admits that "the punishments that chasten us are lightened by our prayers and good works, indeed by our complete penitence" (268). For the faithful "the degree of the reward is evidently commensurate with the degree of the work" (367), but this "is not an incentive to work for their own advantage, since they should work for the glory of God" (364). For "the crown is owed to the justified because of the promise" (363), and "justification is strictly a gift of God" (362).

Melanchthon understands that "reward properly belongs to the law," but the "keeping of the law would not please God unless we had been accepted because of faith. Since men are accepted because of faith, this incipient keeping of the law pleases God and has its reward, both here and hereafter" (368). The point is that "justification is not the approval of a particular act but of the total person" (222). Only after the person himself is accepted by God in mercy can his works please God too. This truth being understood, Melanchthon can make the following affirmations: "Christ frequently connects the promise of forgiveness of sins with good works" in order to warn hypocrites and to console the faithful (275). "In penitence we must consider faith and fruits together" (278). In this sense, "it is the whole newness of life which saves" (278).

Although Melanchthon clearly knows that "it is impossible to separate faith from love for God," he makes it equally clear that "faith precedes while love follows" (141, 111). "Faith alone accepts the forgiveness of sins, justifies, and regenerates. Then love and other good fruits follow" (292). Indeed, "love must necessarily follow" (114), since Paul speaks of "faith working through love" (111). Melanchthon thus shows good works to be "good fruits" which follow faith by intrinsic necessity. But good works are also commanded, especially in view of the necessity to "exercise our faith." "Good works should be done because God has commanded them and in order to exercise our faith, to give testimony, and to render thanks. For these reasons good works must necessarily be done" (189). This "exercise of faith" is necessary in view of the "flesh that is partly unregenerate and hinders what the Holy Spirit motivates, fouling it with its impurity" (189).

Like Luther, Melanchthon is very clear about the simul. On the one hand, he knows that "faith brings the Holy Spirit and produces a new life in our hearts" so that "it must also produce spiritual impulses in our hearts" (125). These spiritual "impulses agree with God's law" (175). (When Melanchthon here speaks of

the law he wants to be understood as speaking "of the Decalogue, the law that deals with the thoughts of the heart," (124.) It is true that "the law always accuses" (38), so that the regenerate must confess with Jerome that "we are righteous . . . when we confess that we are sinners" (173), and with Melanchthon that the "confession that our works are worthless is the very voice of faith" (337). This concept is similar to Luther's accusatio sui<sup>32</sup> which leads to a continual penitence and does not permit an opinio legis (265, 266), so that we can only reach the "Christian and spiritual perfection if penitence and faith amid penitence grow together" (353). But it is also true for Melanchthon that certain passages of Scripture "assert that we should begin to keep the law ever more and more." He learned from Luther the third use of the law, explained in very simple terms in the two Catechisms, published two years before. Melanchthon's explanation of the work of the Holy Spirit in us sounds like Luther's explanation of the first and the second table, especially of the First Commandment: "After we have been justified and regenerated by faith, therefore, we begin to fear and love God, to pray and expect help from him, to thank and praise him, and to submit to him in our afflictions. Then we also begin to love our neighbor because our hearts have spiritual and holy impulses" (125).

On the other hand, Melanchthon knows that we "receive the Holy Spirit, that this new life might have . . . hatred of lust" (349). The Holy Spirit "mortifies our lust [mortificat concupiscentiam]" (45). This concupiscence or lust is what remains of the original sin even after regeneration has taken place, since "our unspiritual nature continually brings forth evil desires, though the Spirit in us resists them" (146). Melanchthon knows that "sin still sticks to your flesh" (179), that the flesh "hinders what the Holy Spirit motivates, fouling it with its impurity" (189). "The flesh distrusts God and trusts in temporal things; in trouble it looks to men for help; it even defies God's will and runs away from afflictions that it ought to bear because of God's command; and it doubts God's mercy. The Holy Spirit in our hearts battles against such feelings in order to suppress and destroy them and to give us new spiritual impulses" (170).

In view of this *simul* Melanchthon argues that "faith arises in penitence and ought to grow continually in penitence" (353). Faith "has its existence in penitence. It ought to grow and become firmer amid good works as well as temptations and dangers, so that we become ever stronger in the conviction that God cares for us, and hears us for Christ's sake. No one learns this without many

severe struggles. How often our aroused conscience tempts us to despair when it shows our old and new sins or the uncleanness of our nature! This handwriting is not erased without a great conflict in which experience testifies how difficult a thing faith is" (350).

Melanchthon speaks of two elements in the keeping of the law, "namely, the inward spiritual impulses and the outward good works" (136). The outward good works which we do when "we begin to love our neighbor because our hearts have spiritual and holy impulses" (125) can be only "acts and signs of faith" (155), but never the fulfilling of the law, since "love has infinite external duties to men" (226). These "infinite external duties to men" should keep us humble, since "even a weak and feeble keeping of the law is rare, even among saints" (290). And "in the Lord's Prayer the saints pray for the forgiveness of sins; therefore saints have sins, too" (328).

Finally, Melanchthon lays down a general rule concerning the "law and works" (185): "The law cannot be kept without Christ, and . . . if civil works are done without Christ they do not please God. In commending works, therefore, we must add that faith is necessary, and that they are commended because of faith as its fruit or testimony" (184).

#### 3. THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

Melanchthon distinguishes between faith and hope: "the object of hope is properly a future event, while faith deals with both future and present things" (312). Faith deals with "future and present things" because "this faith produces a sure hope" (346). It "makes the difference between those who are saved and those who are not. Faith makes the difference between the worthy and the unworthy because eternal life is promised to the justified and it is faith that justifies" (347). A man's rebirth through faith is already "the beginning of eternal life" (352).

Eternal life is granted as a gift to faith. Melanchthon explains how we have to understand the affirmation that eternal life is also granted to works. He says, first, that "we have shown above that justification is strictly a gift of God; it is a thing promised. To this gift the promise of eternal life has been added" (362). He then applies the rule by which "all passages on works can be interpreted," namely, "Whenever law and works are mentioned, we must know that Christ, the mediator, should not be excluded. He is the end of the law. Therefore, when eternal life is granted to works, it is granted to the justified. None can do good works except the justified, who are led by the Spirit of Christ; nor can

good works please God without the mediator Christ and faith" (372).

Melanchthon admits that "there will be distinctions in the glory of the saints" (355), since "works merit other bodily and spiritual rewards because they please God through faith" (355). He emphasizes, however, that, in spite of these distinctions, all is purely the gift of God: "Paul calls eternal life a 'gift' (Rom. 6:23) because the righteousness bestowed on us for Christ's sake at the same time makes us sons of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17), as John says (John 3:36), 'He who believes in the Son has eternal life.' Augustine says, as do many later writers, 'God crowns his gifts in us'" (356). Only in eternal life will our sanctification be perfect, since "beholding the glory of the Lord, we are changed into his likeness" (351).

#### Conclusion

Article Four of the Apology is almost a summary of Christian dogmatics. Since the article on justification by faith is of such central importance, it relates to almost all other articles of the Christ faith. Melanchthon was certainly at his best when he worked on this theological treatise. He was an exact and a hard worker. Bente recalls an incident, recorded by Mathesius and others, which happened at Spalatin's house at Altenburg, while Luther and Melanchthon were returning from Coburg after the Diet. Melanchthon went to work on the Apology there even on a Sunday and during meal time. Then Luther went to Melanchthon and "plucked the pen from his hand," saying, "God can be honored not only by work, but also by rest and recreation; for that reason He has given the Third Commandment and commanded the Sabbath."<sup>33</sup>

Melanchthon's theological position, as we find it in the Apology, is still valid and correct. It is not without reason that the Apology became an official confession of the Lutheran Church to which we still subscribe. It is amazing that Melanchthon was able to speak a theological language so similar to Luther's that at times it is difficult to determine whether it was the one or the other who enunciated a concept first. One might, however, venture to say that, while Luther provided the essence, Melanchthon provided the form for the theology that became standard for the Reformation. Melanchthon's logic is extremely clear, and once one has laid hold of his train of thought, it is easy to follow his argument and even to expect his conclude this study: "We conclude that we are justified before God, reconciled to him, and

reborn by a faith that penitently grasps the promise of grace, truly enlivens the fearful mind, and is convinced that God is reconciled and propitious to us because of Christ. Through this faith, Peter says (I Pet. 1:5), we are 'guarded for a salvation ready to be revealed.' Christians need to understand this faith, for it brings the fullest comfort in all afflictions and shows us the work of Christ" (386, 387).

#### **FOOTNOTES**

- 1. C.F.W. Walther, "That the Evangelical Lutheran Church Alone Has Been Entrusted with the Pure Doctrine of Justification," Synodal-Bericht, 1859, p. 18, as cited in Carl S. Meyer, "Scripture, Confession, Justification," Concordia Theological Monthly, XLII (April 1971), p. 201.
- 2. Bente, "Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books," Concordia Triglotta (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), p. 42. H. Lietzmann, ed., Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 4th edition, 1959), p. xxiii. Unless otherwise stated, the citations of Apology IV will be taken from the Tappert edition of the Book of Concord. Only the usual paragraph number will be added in parentheses. The Concordia Triglotta uses two series of paragraph numbers: 1-121 are called Article IV (II), and 122-400 (1-279) are called Article III. To find the appropriate paragraph in the second section one has to deduct 121 from the number cited in this essay.
- 3. A.C. Piepkorn, "Melanchthon the Confessor," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXI (Sept. 1960), p. 541.
- 4. Bente, 42.
- 5. Michael Rogness, Philip Melanchthon, Reformer Without Honor (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), p. 65.
- 6. Rogness, pp. 7, 65.
- 7. Apology II: 35-45, especially 43.
- 8. Rogness, p. 114.
- 9. C.L. Manschreck, *Melanchthon, The Quiet Reformer* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1958), p. 210.
- 10. Rogness, pp. 105, 113, 160.
- 11. Peter Fraenkel und Martin Greschat, Zwanzig Jahre Melanchthonstudium, Sechs Literaturberichte (1945-1965) (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1967), p. 119: "Melanchthons von Luther gutgeheissene Entwicklung ist in erster Linie am Interesse für Ethik und Wissenschaft, d.h. am Gebrauch der Vernunft im Dienste Gottes, orientiert".
- 12. Rogness, p. 106.
- 13. Bengt Hägglund, History of Theology (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), p. 251: "... he altered to some extent the basic ideas which we find in Luther"; "... something of the richness of Luther's point of view had been lost."
- 14. Otto W. Heick, "The Just Shall Live by Faith," Concordia Theological Monthly, XLIII (Oct. 1972), p. 579: "This imputation doctrine came under attack as a Melanchthonian perversion of Luther's own view of justification. The attack was spearheaded by Karl Holl..." Heick defends Uuras Saarnivaara's position and points to Luther's declaration in the "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin writings (1545)" (Luther's Works, 34, p. 337), where Luther criticizes Augustine's The Spirit and the Letter and says that there "he did not explain all things concerning imputation clearly." This statement proves that Luther and Melanchthon agree on imputation.

15. Heick, p. 581.

- 16. Fraenkel, p. 119: "Manschreck meint, wie Engelland, man durfe nicht von Synergismus reden: Fur Melanchthon bleibt Gott allein Urheber des Heils." John M. Drickamer, "Did Melanchthon Become a Synergist?" Springfielder, XL (Sept. 76), p. 100: "He did become a synergist."
- 17. Wilhelm Maurer, Der junge Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation, Band 2: Der Theologe. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1969), p. 239: "Christum erkennen heisst also das Heil erbitten..." "Melanchthon, der Anselms Frage: Cur Deus homo? aufgreift, beantwortet sie nur soweit, als sie auf die Heilstaten Christi Bezug nimmt..."
- 18. Ph. Melanchthon, Loci Communes (1521), as cited in Lietzmann, p. 181.
- 19. Jörg Rothermundt, "The Meaning of Justification," Justification Today (Supplement to Lutheran World, 1965), p. 37.
- 20. Bernardo Bartmann, Teologia Dogmatica (Sao Paulo: Edicoes Paulinas, 1964), II, pp. 298ff.
- 21. Bartmann, p. 299.
- 22. Bartmann, p. 299.
- 23. The Latin reads: "Cur non exponunt hic gratiam misericordiam Dei erga nos?" The Concordia Triglotta, p. 223, translates: "Why do they not here set forth the grace, the mercy of God toward us?" Tappert says: "God's grace and mercy," following Henry E. Jacobs, The Book of Concord, I, p. 158: "Why do they not here set forth God's love and mercy toward us?"
- 24. Rothermundt, p. 38.
- 25. Martin Luther, WA, 18, p. 697. FC-SD, II: 89. Robert D. Preus, "The Significance of Luther's Term *Pure Passive* as Quoted in Article II of the Formula of Concord," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXIX (1958), pp. 561-570.
- 26. F. Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), II, p. 444.
- 27. W. Elert, The Structure of Lutheranism (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), p. 79.
- 28. See also Apology IV: 69, 72, 89, 114, 179, 212, 293, 296.
- 29. The other use of "forensic" (252), cited by F. Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), II, p. 403, and H. Schmidt, Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), p. 427, is not speaking of justification by faith, but to James' (2:24) use of the term "justify."
- 30. Piepkorn, 544.
- 31. Jacobs, II, pp. 209ff. The Confutatio Pontificia, VI:5 states: "On this account their frequent ascription of justification to faith is not admitted, since it pertains to grace and love." Article XX, 1: "... concerning good works, that they do not merit the remission of sins, which as it has been rejected and disapproved before, is also rejected and disapproved now."
- 32. Elert, p. 85.
- 33. Bente, p.42.