

***The Joint Declaration
on the Doctrine of Justification
in Confessional Lutheran Perspective***



The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

***The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification
in Confessional Lutheran Perspective***

An Evaluation of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic
“Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification”
by the Departments of Systematic Theology
Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne and
Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis

In response to a request from
President Alvin Barry
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

With a summary and study guide prepared by
The Commission on Theology and Church Relations
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

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A Summary of the Seminary Evaluations

1. The “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (JDDJ) was prepared between 1995 and 1997 by Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians under the auspices of the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation (of which the LCMS is not a member). It forms the culmination, to date, of several Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogs in various places. The final version of this document was adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) assembly in August 1997, by a 97% majority.

Side-by-side differences

2. The basic conclusion of the JDDJ is that past and remaining differences between Lutherans and Roman Catholics do not disrupt their present “consensus” on the doctrine of justification. JDDJ identifies three types of differences that remain: differences of language, of theological elaboration, and of emphasis in the understanding of justification. But here an important question arises about JDDJ’s own claims. How can there be a genuine consensus on basic truths if the language, the elaborations, and the emphases differ?

3. What kind of “consensus” does JDDJ have in mind? It says that “the Lutheran and the Catholic explications of justification are in their difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding basic truths.” What does this mean? Further, what possible differences might *not* be open to one another? It does not serve the cause of dialog to operate on the principle that two or more theologically contradictory statements can all be true. Such thinking does not take the history of Lutheran-Roman Catholic differences seriously enough, nor does it sufficiently honor the integrity of each side. Did the two sides really intend the statements that they made in the 16th century, and since then, to amount only to “salutary warnings,” as JDDJ suggests?

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Unresolved issues:

Justification, Grace, Faith, Original Sin

4. JDDJ does not settle the major disagreement between Lutheran theology and Roman Catholic theology on justification. Lutherans teach that justification is essentially a declaration of “not guilty” and “righteous” pronounced by God on a sinner because of Christ and His work. Roman Catholics teach that justification involves an internal process in which a believer is transformed and “made” more and more righteous. The non-settlement of this issue forms the chief defect of JDDJ.

5. Correspondingly, JDDJ fails to define clearly the word *grace*. Content to use the term “justification by grace,” the document does not resolve the classic question whether such grace is God’s undeserved favor (Lutheran) or whether it is a spiritual power poured or “infused” into the soul that enables one to love God and merit salvation (Roman Catholic). Rome’s view of grace as infused stands at the base of its theology of justification as a process.

6. Although JDDJ uses the biblical phraseology “through faith” or “by faith,” at critical points it speaks of justification “in faith.” This new wording is ambiguous and allows for the Roman Catholic idea of infused grace. It does not clearly state that faith’s role in justification is exclusively to *receive* Christ’s benefits given to sinners by God in His grace. Therefore, it fails to make clear that the *cause* of justification is God’s saving work in Christ, not ourselves or anything in us.

7. JDDJ contains an expression of the Lutheran position that original sin, which remains after baptism, is really sin. It also includes the Roman Catholic view that original sin is eradicated by baptism, and that the desire to sin that remains after baptism is not really sin. JDDJ leaves this historic disagreement, like other disagreements mentioned above, unresolved.

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Too little attention to justification

8. Lutherans confess that justification is the article that integrates all faith and theology. This centrality of justification is lost in JDDJ. The Vatican insisted on changing a draft of JDDJ that said this article should be seen “as criterion” which “constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ.” The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity would go no further than to say that “the doctrine of justification is *an* indispensable criterion” [emphasis added]—which is the final wording of JDDJ.

9. Accordingly, JDDJ does not address itself directly to disputed beliefs and practices such as the “meritorious” value of good works, purgatory, indulgences, the papacy, the significance of the saints, devotion to Mary, and so forth. Lutherans cannot speak of consensus on justification as long as these related issues remain unsettled.

10. If justification as the result of Christ’s atoning work is not allowed to be central in all the other articles of faith as they apply to the believer, giving them their shape, it will no longer truly serve as the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. When the other articles of faith are not related to justification, those articles will be misunderstood or misconstrued. Ultimately, Christ will be robbed of His honor as the Savior of sinners.

“Hasn’t Rome changed on justification?”

11. The Second Vatican Council has exerted a massive influence on the Roman Catholic Church of today. While that council retracted none of the offensive doctrines put forth by the 16th-century Council of Trent (which responded to the Reformation), nonetheless the Roman Catholic Church’s witness today is much more complex than is sometimes thought.

12. For example, in describing “Assurance of Salvation,” JDDJ says: “Catholics can share the concern of the Reformers to ground faith in the objective reality of Christ’s promise. . . . No

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one may doubt God's mercy and Christ's merit. . . . Recognizing his own failures, however, the believer may yet be certain that God intends his salvation." Here is a departure from traditional Roman Catholic theology in JDDJ, although it does not connect well with the rest of the document.

13. Although change has taken place in the Roman Catholic church since Vatican II, JDDJ shows how very little headway has been made toward a genuine resolution of the differences between Lutherans and Roman Catholics on justification. This statement is not a "breakthrough."

All in all

14. All Christians can rejoice with JDDJ's affirmation that "justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. . . ." If only this sentiment had set the tone for a document that clearly spelled out this wonderful truth!

15. Despite its teaching on justification, the Roman Catholic Church has many noteworthy blessings that were also recognized by Martin Luther and C.F.W. Walther, including: Baptism; the public reading of the Scriptures in the vernacular; Absolution in private and public confession; the Sacrament of the Altar, now frequently administered under both kinds; the call or ordination to the pastoral office; prayer, the Psalms, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and many fine hymns. Beginning the discussion of justification with Scripture, as JDDJ did, is a good starting point. Further progress in ongoing dialogs can be made only through discussions normed strictly by Holy Scripture.

Study Questions

(Paragraph numbers refer to the summary).

Paragraphs 2-3

Evaluate JDDJ's basic approach in light of John 8:31-32 and 1 Jn. 2:20-21.

What does 1 Cor. 1:10 say about differences of language and theological elaboration? See Phil. 2:1-4.

Was Aaron trying to set up a different worship that was "open" to the worship of the true God when he built an altar to the Lord in front of the golden calf (Ex. 32:1-6)? What lesson should we learn here?

Paragraph 4

What is the essential nature of justification? See Rom. 3:19-28; 4:4-8, 25; 5:6-19; 8:33; Deut. 25:1; 1 Kings 8:32; Ps. 143:2; Proverbs 17:15; Isa. 5:23. See also Zech. 3:1-5, which does not use the word "justify" but captures the idea.

Justification, in which God does not count sin against a person, is essentially the same as forgiveness (Ps. 32:1-2; Rom. 4:1-13) and reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:14-21). How does this help you to understand justification better?

Paragraph 5

What is saving grace? See Rom. 3:24; 4:4; 11:6; 2 Cor. 8:9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 2:9; Titus 2:11. Compare John 3:16.

Paragraph 6

What is faith's role in justification? See Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4; Jn. 1:12; Rom. 3:28; 4:16; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:8-10.

Paragraph 7

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Describe original sin according to Ps. 51:5; John 3:6; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 8:7; Gen. 8:21.

What does Scripture say about the sin that remains in Christians? See Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:16-21; Col. 3:5-11.

Paragraphs 8–10

How do these passages express the central message of Scripture? Gen. 3:15; Is. 53; John 1:29; 3:16; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Pet. 1:18-21.

In November 1998, Pope John Paul II issued a papal encyclical announcing a Jubilee Indulgence for the year 2000 that is very similar to indulgences at Luther's time. How can this development help us evaluate JDDJ?

Paragraph 12

How can a Christian be certain of his or her own salvation? See 2 Cor. 1:19–20; 1 Pet. 1:3-5, 23; 1 John 5:4-13; Rom. 8:28-39.

A Response to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

Prepared by the Department of Systematic Theology
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The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Historical Introduction

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was prepared between 1995 and 1997 by Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians under the auspices of the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). In 1995, the first version was sent to the participating churches. The Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, prepared a Lutheran response, while the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity under Cardinal Cassidy acted for the Vatican. A revised text was ready by the summer of 1996 and further changes were suggested by the LWF Council in September. A final version was authorized for distribution by the LWF Executive Committee in February 1997.¹ This text was adopted with near unanimity (958–25) by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) at its August 1997 assembly in Philadelphia.²

The Joint Declaration is not a new, independent effort, but concludes and summarizes various national and international Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogues. The 1980 papal visit to Germany on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession provided the original stimulus. This led to the formation of the Ecumenical Working Group of Evangelical and Catholic Theologians in Germany, who by 1986, produced *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era—Do They Still Divide?*³ This evoked a negative response by the Evangelical [Protestant] theological faculty of Georgia Augusta University, Göttingen, Germany: *Outmoded Condemnations? Antitheses between the Council of Trent and the Reformation on Justification, the Sacrament, and the Min-*

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*istry-Then and Now.*⁴ A formal lifting of mutual condemnations on justification was planned for 1997 to coincide with the 450th anniversary of the Council of Trent's Decree on Justification and the fiftieth anniversary of the Lutheran World Federation in 1997. The issue proved too intractable for this timetable.⁵

Unlike the ELCA-Reformed Agreement, the Joint Declaration does not call for full communion, although the doctrine of justification is no longer considered an obstacle to bringing it about: "the mutual 'anathemas' (condemnations) drawn up in the sixteenth century on the teaching of justification no longer apply to these churches." The Declaration has a core resemblance to Lutheran accords with the Reformed. As in the Agreement and Marburg Revisited, past differences are seen as "complementary." Like *A Common Calling*, which speaks of the "diverse witnesses to the one Gospel that we confess in common," the Joint Declaration holds that with this current agreement on the "basic truths of the doctrine of justification," the characteristic "concerns" of each communion with their "remaining differences" are now mutually acceptable. Without disowning its past, each church holds that "the understanding of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics." Positions of each are tolerable within the doctrinal dimensions of the other. "Therefore the Lutheran and the Catholic explications of justification are in their differences open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding basic truths" (Declaration 5.40). Many prominent Lutheran theologians of course approve of the Joint Declaration. Harding Meyer invokes the LWF's ecumenical slogan of "Reconciled Diversity," and Carl Braaten calls it "a step in the right direction."⁶ Others are more reserved, as will be shown.

The Structure of the Joint Declaration

The Declaration consists of 44 paragraphs subdivided into

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five sections. Under “A Preamble” are found paragraphs 1–7. The first major section, “1. Biblical Message of Justification,” is subdivided into paragraphs 8–12. The entire second major section, “2. The Doctrine of Justification as Ecumenical Problem,” is contained in paragraph 13. There follows section “3. The Common Understanding of Justification” in paragraphs 14–18. This “common understanding” is then unfolded in the longest section “4. Explicating the Common Understanding of Justification” with paragraphs 19–39. Section 4, paragraphs 19–39, is further divided into seven aspects of the doctrine over which the churches were divided. Each of the seven parts is constructed so that Lutherans and Roman Catholics set forth their common agreement and then each sets out its own particular emphases. The final section, “5. The Significance and Scope of the Consensus Reached,” encompasses paragraphs 40–44 and resolves the quandry section, “2. The Doctrine of Justification as Ecumenical Problem.” On the basis of this consensus, the mutual condemnations are lifted (paragraph 41). Paragraph 44 concludes with gratitude for “this decisive step forward” and a prayer to be led “further toward that visible unity which is Christ’s will.” References to supporting documents are included in an “Appendix.”

Some Illuminating Textual History

From a Lutheran perspective, the Declaration is not entirely without merit. Paragraph 31 expresses Lutheran-Roman Catholic consensus on the Law and the Gospel: ‘We confess together that persons are justified by faith in the Gospel ‘apart from works prescribed by the Law’ (Rom. 3:28). Christ has fulfilled the Law and by his death and resurrection has overcome it as a way to salvation. . . .’ This comes closest to an explicit profession of *sola fide*, which is found in the Declaration only in paragraph 26, prepared by the Lutherans.⁷ Paragraph 32 is also unmistakably Lutheran. This is contradicted by the next paragraph (33), which is unmistakably Roman Catholic: the statement that “Christ is not a law-

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giver in the manner of Moses” allows the traditional Roman evasion that the ceremonial but not the moral law is excluded from justification. The scholastic view that the Gospel is the “New Law” is left in place. To this the Lutheran response has always been Rom. 7:7: “I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’” St. Paul meant to exclude precisely the moral law from justification. In the view of six ELCA theologians (from Luther Seminary, St. Paul), the good Lutheran statements above were likely “a last-minute insertion by some of the German Lutheran representatives who were worried about the tilt of the whole document toward individual internal transformation through grace rather than newly righted relationships through God’s Word of Law and Gospel.”⁸ They point out that since the necessary theological presuppositions are nowhere developed in the document, the good paragraphs 31–32 “connect with nothing.”⁹

Justification as Criterion?

Even more telling is the history behind the amendment of paragraph 18, regarding justification as “criterion”—we rely here on Eberhard Jüngel’s critique, “Um Gottes willen-Klarheit!” [For God’s sake-clarity!].¹⁰ After intense discussions, the German LWF contingent proposed that the article of justification be recognized “as criterion” which “constantly serves to orientate all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ.” This change was officially accepted into the June 1996 version of the Joint Declaration, but then was vetoed by the Roman Sacred Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith. As Jüngel puts it: “Cardinal Ratzinger corrected Cardinal Cassidy to the effect that the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity may concede only that ‘. . . the doctrine of justification is an indispensable criterion.’” By the addition of the indefinite article “an,” justification was demoted from its position of unique, overarching criterion to one among others. Roman Catholics added that they “see them-

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selves as bound by several criteria.” This intervention by Ratzinger’s Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith may signal that the Vatican is actually planning to grant its long-delayed official approval to the final text, though some Lutherans remain unconvinced.

Finnish Additions

Finnish theologians may have been even more influential than the Germans. This is evident from a comparison of the 1995 version of the Joint Declaration, the Jan. 30, 1996, submission by the Council for International Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and the final version of the Declaration. Despite some muddles, which can be discussed below, the theologically forceful language of the Finnish response found its way into the final text, including the addition of a whole new paragraph (8) on the rich Old Testament background of section “2. Biblical Message of Justification.” Another improvement was the inclusion of explicit Trinitarian-Christological language at various points, especially in a completely re-worked paragraph 15, which previously lacked substance.

Failures of the Declaration: A Confessional Lutheran Perspective

1. Justification: Forensic or Transformational?

The foremost defect of the document is that it does not come clean on the most glaring conflict between Augsburg and Trent. For Lutherans, justification is essentially forensic, that is, God declares the sinner righteous on account of and in Christ. Roman Catholics define justification as an internal transformation of the believer, a “process,” which Lutherans place in the area of sanctification, about which too there are different understandings. Roman Catholics have understood grace as if it were almost a substance, *gratia infusa*, which is poured into the soul initially by

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Baptism.¹¹ Lutherans, with Paul, see justifying grace as the *favor Dei*, God's gracious attitude whereby He accepts sinners. The title of paragraph 4.2, "Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous," to be sure, could be understood in a Lutheran way. The famous paragraph 72 of Apology IV makes it clear that faith "being made righteous" in justification means only receiving "the forgiveness of sins."¹² Clearly this is not what is meant in the Joint Declaration. However, the Formula of Concord expressly rejects the view that justifying righteousness "consists of two pieces or parts, namely, the gracious forgiveness of sins and, as a second element, renewal or sanctification" (SD, III, 48). We are not alone in our concerns. So also the six ELCA theologians:

The fundamental problem with JDDJ is that it seems to subsume the Lutheran understanding of justification under a Roman Catholic understanding of justification as a process whereby the soul is progressively transformed through "grace." . . . The document presents an understanding of justification in terms of the soul's progressive internal transformation by infused grace, and never refers in a vital or critical way to the Lutheran insistence on justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) in God's Word of promise, no doubt because such insistence would undermine the entire structure of the doctrine of justification proposed by JDDJ (emphases in original).

This objection does come a bit late! For years the ELCA compromised itself in various ecumenical dialogues. Lutheran acceptance of the Roman Catholic position on justification should come as no surprise. H. George Anderson, now Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, co-chaired the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue on Justification by Faith, which concluded: "156 (5). . . . By justification we are both declared and made righteous . . . 158 . . . [God's saving work] can be expressed in the imagery of God as judge who pronounces sinners innocent and righteous, . . . and also in a transformist view, which emphasizes the change wrought in sinners by infused grace."¹³ On this point the Lutherans com-

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pletely surrendered, but Rome was not required to reform her traditional definition, which was officially restated in the 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church: “Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man” (498). The characteristic Roman Catholic fusion of “forensic” and “transformist” views of justification has been wrongly attributed to Luther by such prominent scholars as Alister McGrath and Tuomo Mannermaa, as will be shown below.¹⁴

2. Sola Gratia: No Real Advance

The present Declaration is willing to grant *sola gratia* simply because the Lutheran and Roman parties had different understandings of “grace.” If saving grace is God’s undeserved favor, as in Rom. 4:4 and 11:6, then, in the article of justification, grace and works (Law) are clearly mutually exclusive. Justification is either by grace or by works, but not both. But if grace now means infused grace, a spiritual power poured into the soul by which we love God and merit salvation, then such infused grace and works in justification are related as “both/and.” Neither the Joint Declaration nor the background dialog have come to terms with these contradictory meanings of “grace.”¹⁵ This would have unraveled the illusory “consensus” on justification. Another ELCA critic of the Declaration, Louis A. Smith, writes:

Second, and in witness to the confusion produced by the niceness, the document keeps pointing us to a doctrine of justification by grace, as if the mere agreement on that terminology was some kind of breakthrough. It isn’t! The 16th century had any number of colloquies between Roman Catholics and Lutherans who knew perfectly well that the disagreeing parties used the same language. What they disagreed about was the meaning of the terms. Grace was for Lutherans *favor Dei*, the personal good will of God. For Roman Catholics, grace referred to a quasi-substantial something, *habitus* or *qualitas* that was infused (poured) into the human soul. Indeed, in the 16th century, even the language of justification by faith could have been agreed on, if

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Lutherans would only have accepted that faith referred to the beginning of and a necessary element within a process, which then gave its name to the process as a whole.¹⁶

Perhaps the only genuine departure from the Tridentine scheme is section 4.6, Assurance of Salvation (“36. Catholics can share the concern of the Reformers to ground faith in the objective reality of Christ’s promise. . . .No one may doubt God’s mercy and Christ’s merit. . . .Recognizing his own failures, however, the believer may yet be certain that God intends his salvation.” The six ELCA theologians see here “a possible ecumenical breakthrough,” although, in their opinion, it is “undeveloped.” Unfortunately, they say, this section “appears to have no connection to the rest of the document.” The Finnish document commended the stronger language of an earlier version: “Thus it is true to say: faith as assurance of salvation [is] a profound consensus on this question.” This formulation required Roman approval and so it is not surprising that the final version toned down the language. Smith is genuinely pessimistic about the overall value of this section and the other “good” one, “Law and Gospel.” He notes: “Unless it should turn out that sections 4.5 and 4.6 are to be taken as the hermeneutical keys to the entire document, . . . [then] the rest of the document is much fluff, an appropriate target for a white-out sale.”¹⁷

3. Justification: The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls, or One Truth Among Others?

Much more is at stake in this discussion for Lutherans than for Roman Catholics, who see justification as one topic among others and give it another definition.¹⁸ For Lutherans justification is the integrative center of all faith and theology.¹⁹ Without justification, Lutherans lose the distinctive characteristic of their theology and the reason for their existence. It is the core of all Christian truth and gives form and shape to all other biblical arti-

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cles. All articles are at stake in justification, and justification is at stake in all articles. It is the very engine that drives not only the Augustana (XX,8) but the entire Concordia (Apology IV, 2; XII, 3, 10; Smalcald Articles II/I; Large Catechism, Creed, 33, 54, 55; Formula of Concord, S.D., III, 6; V, 1). The six ELCA theologians are quite right in saying: "Lutherans have always insisted that justification by faith alone is the chief article and the criterion, the 'plumb line' by which all doctrine and practice is to be judged."²⁰

Paragraph 18 of the Joint Declaration tries to accommodate the Lutheran position by saying that the article of justification "is more than just one part of Christian doctrine" and that it "stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith." However, as we have seen, the attempt to have the article of justification defined as overall "criterion" was blocked by the Vatican and the "criterion" reduced to one among others.

Some who may find the protracted discussion on justification too abstract, easily recognize differences in beliefs and practices that the Declaration leaves untouched. These "neuralgic points" are concealed under broad dogmatic terminology in paragraph 43 of the Declaration. The U.S. dialogue, however, was more forthright: "Some of the consequences of the differing outlooks seem irreconcilable, especially in reference to particular applications of justification by faith as a criterion of all church proclamation and practice" (paragraph 121). To wit: "Catholics and Lutherans, for example, traditionally differ on purgatory, the papacy and the cult of saints" (153). The solution of "this impasse" (121) is, of course, for the Lutherans to surrender the Reformation position: "Lutherans, however, do not exclude the possibility that such teachings can be understood and used in ways consistent with justification by faith; if such teachings are preached and practiced in accord with this doctrine, they need not, from this Lutheran perspective, divide the churches even though Lutherans do not accept them" (153)!²¹ The Augsburg

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Confession (XXII–XXVIII) and the Smalcald Articles (Part II) applied the criterion of justification to practice in the same way they applied it to doctrine. Lutherans of Reformation times held that practices which contravened justification did in fact divide the church. Practice mattered as applied doctrine. The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Gift of Salvation paper spells out “diverse understandings of merit, reward, purgatory, and indulgences, Marian devotion and the assistance of the saints in the life of salvation, and the possibility of salvation for those who have not been evangelized.” For Lutherans it is nonsense to speak of consensus on justification if these issues remain unsettled. Differences in practices point to fundamental doctrinal discrepancies.

4. Original Sin?

Behind the Lutheran-Roman Catholic differences on justification are equally fundamental differences on how original sin is understood. Differences on one doctrine mirror differences in others. Lutherans hold that original sin is really sin and that it remains after Baptism. Roman Catholic doctrine holds that original sin is eradicated by Baptism and that concupiscence is not really sin. Avery Dulles raises the issue in his cautionary piece: “Can unjustified sinners, with the help of grace, freely dispose themselves to receive the grace of justification, as affirmed in Trent’s canon 4 on justification? Or are sinners so radically corrupted that they cannot, even with the help of actual grace, prepare themselves for justification?”²² The issue came to a head in Trent’s Decree Concerning Original Sin (Fifth Session), which calmly anathematized St. Paul: “This concupiscence, which at times the Apostle calls sin [Rom. 6–8; Col. 3] the holy Synod declares that the Catholic Church has never understood to be called sin, as truly and properly sin in those born again, but because it is from sin and inclines to sin. But if anyone is of the contrary opinion, let him be anathema.”²³ Hubert Jedin, the great modern Roman Catholic authority on Trent, acknowledges

that problem: “The Council was now brought up against the very basis of the Lutheran teaching on justification, and one of the most difficult points of controversy, because Luther’s view seemingly found support in St. Paul and St. Augustine. . . .The teaching of canon 5 on concupiscence laid the foundation of the subsequent decree on justification.”²⁴

An earlier version of the Joint Declaration contained this bald statement: “Properly speaking, [concupiscence] therefore is not sin.” This was criticized in some detail, particularly by the Finnish response, which suggested “that the last sentence (‘Properly speaking, it therefore is not sin’) be eliminated.” The final version complies technically, but safeguards the Tridentine substance by having paragraph 30 say that baptismal grace takes away all that is sin “in the proper sense” and that is “worthy of damnation” (Rom. 8:1). There does, however, remain in the person an inclination (concupiscence) that comes from sin and presses toward sin. Since, according to Catholic conviction, human sin always involves a personal element and since this element is lacking in this inclination, Catholics do not see this inclination as sin in an authentic sense.

Although this inclination is “objectively in contradiction to God,” it “does not merit the punishment of eternal death and does not separate the justified person from God.” Here excuses for sin are substituted for forgiveness and justification!²⁵

5. Justification: Christological Core and Center

Defining justification is a delicate task. Even some Reformation-era Lutherans slipped into a Roman-like (scholastic) understanding of it.²⁶ Justification is also the most central of all articles of faith, because it gives form and shape to all the other articles as they apply to the believer. Without relating a particular article to justification, that doctrine is not properly understood. So when justification is misunderstood, the entire body of doctrine is off balance. Justification describes the believer’s relationship to

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God as he is accepted for Christ's sake. So it is not only a matter of how a particular article is biblically demonstrable (*sola scriptura* [AC XX, 11 {Eph 2:8–9}]), but also how it relates to justification as the core article by which the church stands or falls. Justification is a distinct article but it belongs to and is never separate from christology (*solus Christus*). Christology and justification are two sides of one doctrine—what God accomplishes in Christ (atonement), He applies to believers (justification).²⁷ Rome sees justification as what God accomplishes in the believer (transformist view). The Lutheran christological view stands diametrically opposed to the Roman anthropological one. Lutherans quarreled not with Rome's christology qua christology (that is, the Second Article of the Nicene Creed), but with Rome's doctrine of justification, which rendered this christology ineffective for the believer. So it was not simply that such things as Masses for the dead or purgatory lacked biblical support, which of course they did, but more importantly, these were rejected because they detracted from Christ's work and deprived Him of His glory.²⁸

Rome's view of grace as an infused substance, *gratia infusa*, stands at the base of its theology of justification as a process. Lutherans hold that justification is first of all a universal, world-embracing act and judgment of God in Christ, which is received by faith alone: "The first and chief article is this, that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, 'was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification' (Rom. 4:25)" (Smalcald Articles, II/I/1). "Indeed, the entire Gospel that we preach depends on the proper understanding of this article. Upon it all our salvation and blessedness are based, and it is so rich and broad that we can never learn it fully" (Large Catechism, Creed, Second Article, 33). The Formula of Concord (SD, III, 25) lists four "essential and necessary elements" of justification: 1. the grace of God; 2. the merit of Christ; 3. the Gospel; and 4. faith.²⁹ The first three constitute what has been called "general" or "universal" justification, which then becomes "personal" or "individual" justification

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when appropriated by faith (what the Apology calls *fides specialis* [personal faith]). (The terms “objective” and “subjective,” though sometimes used by Lutherans in this context, fit the Calvinist view more closely, which rejects universal grace and regards the “subjective” aspect of justification as the “experience” of it in one’s soul or conscience.)

Personal justification takes place by faith. God’s justification of the world in Christ (universal justification) is prior to anyone’s faith and constitutes its object and substance. All this is, at best, peripheral to the Declaration. Justification exemplifies the Lutheran understanding of all doctrine: grace means that God acts prior to faith. A parallel is the example of the Lutheran understanding of the Lord’s Supper where Christ’s bodily presence in the bread and wine is prior to our reception of it and is not dependent on our faith. God justifies the world while it is still ungodly.³⁰ Justification is a reality in Christ, and is therefore prior to anyone’s reception of it by faith. It possesses an objective reality in God alone. Abraham believed in the God who justified the ungodly, Rom. 4:3–5. God was justifying the ungodly before Abraham believed. The Declaration cites 1 Cor. 1:30, “Christ is our righteousness,” but does not unfold its christological content.

The Declaration speaks of justification in terms of what it does, its effects (the transformist view), and does not touch upon it as a divine accomplishment in Christ, as other commentators also note. Where Roman Catholics see justification as something happening in man (anthropological view), Lutherans see justification as accomplished in Christ (christological view). Atonement and objective justification are coterminous, but the latter is dependent and a result of the former. Justification is not an arbitrary decision of God that is accomplished by sovereign decree, but flows from God’s regard for the work of Christ.³¹ God justifies and He understands His act of justifying (justification) as His own saving accomplishment in Christ. So also Outmoded Con-

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demnations? of the Göttingen faculty: “Corresponding to God’s being God, justification occurs through Christ alone (*solo Christo*), by grace alone (*sola gratia*), and in faith alone (*sola fide*).”³² This justification in Christ is as universally expansive as is the divine condemnation of the world in Adam. In both the universal condemnation and justification, He is acting according to justice or righteousness. God’s justification of the world in Christ must exceed His universal condemnation of the world in Adam. Without this belief, Christ’s work becomes inferior to Adam’s, a horrific doctrine by all standards (Rom. 5:15). God’s universal acceptance of all of mankind in Christ is essential to the Lutheran doctrine that justification takes place in the blood of Christ, who on this account can be called our justification. Rom. 5:9: “Since, therefore, we are now justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.” Universal justification does not imply the universalism of an *apokatastasis*, which makes personal participation in justification inconsequential. We quote from Hans Küng, “All men are justified in Jesus Christ and only the faithful are justified in Jesus Christ.”³³

By contrast, justification for Rome is basically a grace-driven process in man. And it is this view that dominates the Joint Declaration. It is true that the strong Finnish representations succeeded in reshaping a previously bland, “anthropologically” orientated paragraph into an express confession of Trinitarian-Christological substance: “15. . . .The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ Himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. . . .” Had this been the document’s real starting point, rather than a decorative afterthought, the result might have been different. “Justification thus means that Christ Himself is our righteousness” is in need of development, but, as mentioned, this does not happen. Given the “transformist” commitments of the document, even noble Trinitarian-Christological

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language can do little more than remind us of the painful contrast between the confessional “ought” and the ecumenical “is.”

6. Justification: Beyond “Law and Gospel” and Faith

Our response has taken advantage of critiques including the one offered by six Luther Seminary (ELCA) professors. They rightly point to the incompatibility between the Declaration’s understanding of justification as an inner process of transformation and the Lutheran view of justification through faith alone (*sola fide*). But their stress on faith as “relational,” especially without a clear affirmation of the incarnation and atonement, is itself misleading. Their polemic against “some contemporary Finnish Luther scholars” who “align justification with theosis through the idea that faith ‘receives’ Christ, and so divine life itself is ‘imparted’ to the person in justification” is valid, if it targets the mingling of justification and sanctification in that approach. On the other hand, we could hardly disagree that God through Christ dwells in believers, especially through the Sacrament. Faith to be sure is “relational” but not as though in justification this faith were more than pure receptivity—the empty hand filled by the Person and Work of the God-Man.

It is a common Protestant error that faith justifies somehow also because of its own inherent value. Seeing faith as a substantive cause of the believer’s justification is hardly different from the characteristic Roman fusion of justification with sanctification. Without Christ, faith is nothing. Listen to Luther in his Galatians Commentary.

But where they speak of love, we speak of faith. And while they say that faith is the mere outline, but love is its living colors and completion, we say in opposition that faith takes hold of Christ and that He is the form that adorns and informs faith as color does the wall. Therefore, Christian faith is not an idle quality or an empty husk in the heart. . . . But if it is true faith, it is a sure

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trust and firm acceptance in the heart. It takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object but, so to speak, the One who is present in the faith itself [*in ipsa fide Christus adest*]. . . . Therefore, faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ. . . . Therefore, the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us righteous and grants us eternal life.³⁴

Whereas the six ELCA theologians do not relate faith and justification to the atonement, Küng and several other Roman Catholic theologians recognize justification as an effect of Christ's universal atonement. For instance Meinertz, "The objective fact of justification is accomplished in the redemptive death of Christ, in connection, of course, with the resurrection. And so Rom. 5:9 can insist that we are justified in His blood, and by way of complement, in Rom. 4:25, that Christ was raised up for our justification."³⁵ Küng himself puts it like this:

On the one hand, the justification accomplished on the cross must not be separated from the process which reaches down to the individual man; this would in one way or another lead to *apokatastasis*. On the other hand, personal justification must not be separated from the general act of justification on the cross; this would in one way or another lead to predestinationism. Rather both must be seen as the two sides of a single truth: All men are justified in Jesus Christ and only the faithful are justified in Jesus Christ.³⁶

Küng previously offered: "In reading texts which speak of justification in connection with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is striking to note that all of them referred emphatically to faith as well (for example, Rom. 4.5, 20-25)."³⁷ The Joint Declaration fails not simply in this or that detail of justification, but in terms of the "big picture."

7. Flawed Ecumenical Methodology

Tuomo Mannermaa traces the Leuenberg Concord to a fallacious distinction between a common “ground” or basis and differing modes of “expression.” This approach is similar but not identical to G. Ebeling’s scheme of distinguishing *fides justificans* from *fides dogmatica*.³⁸ Mannermaa sees a similar faulty pattern at work in the Ecumenical Working Group’s 1986 *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era—Do They Still Divide?*, which is “not the only text in which the distinction of ground and expression, center and periphery, concern and formulation [*Anliegen* und *Ausgestaltung*] serves as hermeneutical key to the solution of the ecumenical problem.”³⁹

The Joint Declaration follows a similar pattern in distinguishing between the basic “concerns” or “intentions” and the actual doctrinal positions and formulations of Trent and the Book of Concord. First, terms like grace, faith, and justification are identified, but precise meanings give way to equivocations. Then the Declaration takes these ambiguities as proof of a “consensus on basic truths concerning the doctrine of justification,” of which the differing theologies of the two churches are merely complementary and not contradictory expressions.⁴⁰

Setting aside the past condemnations on such grounds amounts simply to wishing them away. Understandably, the Declaration cannot say that the past condemnations were simply wrong. Paragraph 42 puts it like this: “Nothing is thereby taken away from the seriousness of the condemnations related to the doctrine of justification. Some were not simply pointless. They remain for us ‘salutary warnings’ to which we must attend in our teaching and practice.”

If “some” of the condemnations were “not simply pointless,” were many or most of them “simply pointless” then? An earlier version of the Declaration had put it like this: “Nothing is thereby taken away from the seriousness of the condemnations related to the doctrine of justification. They did not simply or altogether

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miss the point. Where the basic consensus is not adhered to they still apply today. In this respect the mutual doctrinal condemnations remain ‘important as salutary warnings.’”

The Church of Finland’s response asked pointedly: “What does the formulation ‘where the basic consensus is not adhered to’ mean in concrete terms?” The final form of this point evidently follows the maxim: the less said the better.

Having referred to unresolved issues such as purgatory, indulgences, merit, satisfaction, sacrifice of the Mass, invocation of saints, and monastic vows, Avery Dulles asks what it would mean to say that such matters are no longer church-divisive: “Does it imply that Lutherans may today teach and hold the doctrine of Trent and that Catholics are free to teach and hold the positions of the Book of Concord on the disputed points? If such freedom does not exist, the issues appear to stand in the way of full communion.”⁴¹ He adds this eloquent plea:

In the present atmosphere, Christians find it all too easy to declare that the doctrinal disagreements of the past have lost their church-divisive character. Pervasive though the present climate of agnosticism and relativism may be, Lutherans and Catholics must resist it. One of the most precious things we have in common may be our conviction that pure doctrine is crucially important and that ecclesial unity should not be purchased at the expense of truth. I sincerely hope that we can continue to learn from one another, appropriate one another’s insights, and correct one another’s oversights.⁴²

Though some have pointed out that the “mutual condemnations” in the Council of Trent and the Book of Concord are different, these differences must not be exaggerated. Gottfried Martens in his *Die Rechtfertigung des Sünders-Rettungshandeln Gottes oder historisches Interpretament* criticizes the various justification dialogues precisely for reducing everything to historically variable expressions and interpretations. In fact, the booklet *Ecumenism:*

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The Vision of the ELCA. A Guide for Synods and Congregations, captures the prevailing approach perfectly: “As Lutherans seek to enter into fellowship without insisting on doctrinal or ecclesiastical uniformity, they place an ecumenical emphasis on common formulation and expression of theological consensus on the Gospel.”⁴³ When Dulles observes that “Trent made no mention whatever of Luther or Lutherans,” he is technically correct.⁴⁴ The fact is, however, as Jedin puts it, “The Tridentine decree on justification is the Church’s authoritative answer to the teaching of Luther and the Augsburg Confession on grace and justification. The reformed doctrines of Zwingli and Calvin were only lightly touched upon in the course of the debate.”⁴⁵

It is also true that the Lutherans specifically refused to include “entire churches” in their condemnations of error (Preface to the Book of Concord). When the ELCA theologians opine, however, “nor are Roman Catholics excluded by Lutherans from Lutheran fellowship, including Holy Communion, even to this day,” they are indulging in an unhistorical, woolly ecumenism. The Formula of Concord, understands the Smalcald Articles as having properly explained the Augsburg Confession, and given ample grounds “for having no communion with the papists, and for neither expecting nor planning to come to an understanding with the pope about these matters.”⁴⁶

Despite Roman misrepresentations of justification, C. F. W. Walther cited Luther that the church has been preserved under the papacy because Roman Catholics have what Luther calls “Christ’s ordinances and gifts”: Baptism, the reading of Gospel in the vernacular, absolution in private and public confession, the Sacrament of the Altar though it was administered at Easter and under one kind, the call or ordination to the pastoral office, and lastly prayer, the Psalms, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and many fine hymns.⁴⁷ We are encouraged that in our country, Roman Catholics are offered and many receive the Lord’s Supper every Sunday and in many dioceses under both kinds.

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Conclusion

We can do no better than to conclude with the judgment of our late president, colleague, and friend Robert Preus, whose timely book, *Justification and Rome*, has just been published by Concordia Publishing House:

The settlement is an amalgam of the old Lutheran and Roman Catholic definitions, or rather, a pasting together of the two disparate sets of definitions-sort of like a treaty. Neither side gives up its set of definitions and meanings. The treaty provides that the Lutheran and the Roman Catholic will no longer battle over words, meanings, and definitions, but each will keep his own.⁴⁸

David P. Scaer, Chairman
Richard Muller, Secretary
Kurt E. Marquart
William C. Weinrich, Adjunct
Lawrence R. Rast Jr., Adjunct

Notes

1. Following the directive of the LWF Executive Committee, General Secretary Ishmael Noko asked the 124 member churches to answer the following question regarding the approval of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JD) by May 1, 1998: "Does your church accept the conclusions reached in 40 and 41 of the JD and thus join in affirming that, because of the agreement of the fundamental meaning and truth of our justification in Christ, to which the JD testifies, the condemnations regarding justification in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching on justification of the Roman Catholic Church presented in the JD?" *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: A Commentary by the Institute of Ecumenical Research* (Hong Kong: Clear-Cut, 1997) was distributed in May 1997. This docu-

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ment is hereafter referred to as *A Commentary*.

2. The General Synod of the Church of Norway accepted the Declaration on Nov. 14, 1997 and urged its pastors to acquaint their people with the decision. In Finland, the church delayed final approval until May 1998.

3. Edited by Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

4. Translated and first published by Oliver K. Olson with Franz Posset in *Lutheran Quarterly* 5 (Spring, Autumn, and Winter 1991), and later in book form (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Luther Academy, 1992).

5. Wilbert Rusch remarks that the attempt to articulate sufficient agreement on justification to warrant declaring “inapplicable” the 16th century condemnations was undertaken “at an original suggestion from the ELCA” (“The Ecumenical Task of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: Some Personal Observations,” *Lutheran Forum* 30 [September 1996]: 22). Rusch does not provide details.

6. Harding Meyer, “Nicht mehr unueberwindlich,” *Lutherische Monatshefte* 36 (September 1997): 27; Carl Braaten, “Confessional Integrity in Ecumenical Dialogue,” *Lutheran Forum* 30 (September 1996): 25.

7. Note must be taken also of two documents: *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* (First Things 43 [May 1994]: 15–22), and *The Gift of Salvation* (First Things 78 [Jan. 1998]: 20–23), in which Lutherans had no hand. *The Gift of Salvation* is a document agreed to on October 6–7, 1997, by a group of Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, including Harold O.J. Brown, James Packer, Avery Dulles, and Richard Neuhaus. It expressly affirms “agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone [*sola fide*].” This document is not the object of our critique, but it has fine points. For example, “In justification, God, on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer rebel-

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lious enemies, but forgiven friends, and by virtue of His declaration it is so.” It also speaks of “justification [as] central to the scriptural account of justification.” Both documents laid down a common agreement on certain issues, but were also forthright in setting down disagreements. Among these are “the meaning of baptismal regeneration, the Eucharist, and sacramental grace; the historic uses of the language of justification as it relates to imputed and transformative righteousness; the normative status of justification in relation to all Christian doctrine; the assertion that while justification is by faith alone, the faith that receives salvation is never alone; diverse understandings of merit, reward, purgatory, and indulgences; Marian devotion and the assistance of the saints in the life of salvation; and the possibility of salvation for those who have not been evangelized.” This could also be taken into our critique of a Declaration. The earlier document, *Evangelicals & Catholics Together* also affirmed a basic agreement in faith. Such concerns are also applicable to the Declaration.

8. “A Call for Discussion” was the product of six professors and not the entire faculty of Luther Seminary, St. Paul. The faculty, however, passed a resolution May 22, 1997, which said the Declaration touched on the central Lutheran doctrine and questioned the legality of the proposed action. A vote on the Declaration “would run the risk of signaling that the ELCA is not serious about its own confessional heritage or its relationship to the Roman Catholic Church.”

9. The Strasbourg Institute *A Commentary* notes that, “No Catholic condemnations relate to the law-gospel distinction as such” (41).

10. Eberhard Jüngel, “Um Gottes willen—Klarheit! Kritische Bemerkungen zur Verharmlosung der kriteriologischen Funktion des Rechtfertigungsartikels aus Anlass einer—kumenischen ‘Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre,’” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 94 (1997): 394–406.

11. See footnote 15.

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12. See also the explanation in FC, SD, III, 19 and 20.

13. "U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, Justification By Faith," *Origins: NC Documentary Service*, 13 (October 6, 1983): 298.

14. Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification, from 1500 to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 1993), 10–32, 44–53, 125–130.

15. "A Call for Discussion" notes that Trent sees "justification as a process of growth in holiness empowered through the gift of grace given in the sacraments. Grace is understood as an infused causal power that transforms the soul." Aristotle's four causes are taken into the Tridentine definition. Predisposing or helping grace [first cause] turns the sinner from sin to "the church's 'instrumental cause' of justification, which is baptism [second cause]. In baptism, the cleansing of original sin and the remission of actual sin (up to the time of baptism) are received, together with the infusion of grace which renews the soul and enables the observance of the commandments. This is supplemented by the rite of penance for post-baptismal sin [third cause] and by the necessary but always uncertain grace of perseverance in holiness of life until the end [fourth or final cause], when, for those who persevere, God grants eternal life both as a further gift and as reward promised for good works."

16. Louis A. Smith, "Some Second Thoughts on the Joint Declaration," *Lutheran Forum* 31 (Fall 1997): 8.

17. Smith, "Second Thoughts," 8.

18. See "Grace and Justification" in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ([Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1994], 481–490), which weaves together justification, grace, merit, and Christian holiness in a way consistent with the Council of Trent.

19. "In this controversy, the chief article [locus] of Christian doctrine is at stake, which, when it is properly understood, illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ and brings to pious con-

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sciences the abundant consolation which they need” (Apology IV,2).

20. “A Call for Discussion,” citing a Memo of March 5, 1997, to the ELCA Synod Bishops of Regions 1 and 3.

21. The Jesuit theologian Avery Dulles is quite precise in recognizing these differences. See “On Lifting the Condemnations,” *Dialog* 35 (Summer 1996): 220.

22. Dulles, “On Lifting,” 220.

23. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, translated by H. J. Schroeder (St Louis and London: B. Herder, 1941), 23.

24. Herbert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1961), 2: 145, 162.

25. The Strasbourg *A Commentary* (38–41) forthrightly acknowledges that both sides define sin differently. What is more telling is their claim that modern exegetes do not agree with Luther’s interpretation that the sinful “I” of Rom. 7:14–24 is St. Paul as believer rather than St. Paul before his conversion. This, of course, supports the Roman view.

26. FC, III and IV, “Justification” and “Good Works.” One may also see Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 3 volumes (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1917–1924), 2:633–635. FC, Ep III/8 explicitly condemns “that renewal [*renovationem*] and love belong to our righteousness before God.”

27. One may see the Smalcald Articles.

28. Apology XXIV, 90. The Mass cannot be a sacrifice for sin because it would be on par with Christ’s death.

29. One may compare Apology IV, 53.

30. Pieper, *Dogmatik*, 2:631.

31. Theories of a limited atonement operate with precisely this kind of deficiency in seeing atonement and justification as arbitrary acts of a sovereign God, that is, Calvin and the Reformed.

32. *Outmoded Condemnations*, 17 (emphasis added).

33. *Justification* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 223. Küng

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continues (224): Also, “In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God’s gracious saving judgment on sinful mankind is promulgated. . . . Here God pronounces the gracious and life-giving judgment which causes the one just man to be sin and in exchange makes all sinners free in Him.”

34. *Luther’s Works*, 26:129-130. The response of the six ELCA theologians about “faith as trust in God’s eschatological Word of promise” is too bare. Where is the full-blooded Lutheran stress on the life, death, and resurrection of the God-Man as alone-saving object of faith? The missing dimension here is that very vicarious (substitutionary) satisfaction of God’s justice in Christ, which is criticized in various ways in *The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1968) by Gerhard Forde, one of the six St. Paul theologians. Rather than reject outright the Finns’ plea for solid Trinitarian-Christological foundations, they ought to have acknowledged the intent, even while correcting the faulty implementation. Faith is “relational,” but without express reference to God’s concrete, historical act of righteousness in the cross and resurrection of His Son, the language is open to Barthian or Bultmannian interpretations. Eeva Martikainen’s significant study of Luther’s understanding of doctrine notes the proclivity of modern Luther scholarship for putting pale philosophical fancies, for example, “relational ontology,” in the place of Luther’s strong incarnational-doctrinal realism (*Doctrina: Studien zu Luthers Begriff der Lehre*. Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 26 0357–3087 [Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Gesellschaft, 1992], 15).

35. Küng, *Justification*, 226.

36. Küng, *Justification*, 223.

37. Küng, *Justification*, 223.

38. Tuomo Mannermaa, *Von Preussen nach Leuenberg. Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Theologie des Luthertums. Neue Folge* (Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1981), 1:48, 56–63.

39. Tuomo Mannermaa, “Einig in Sachen Rechtfertigung?

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Eine lutherische und eine katholische Stellungnahme zu J-rg Baur," *Theologische Rundschau* 55 (1990): 327.

40. The Strasbourg *A Commentary* (48) concedes as much: "The Catholic and Lutheran doctrines of justification do speak partially different languages, sometimes using different concepts, sometimes drawing different distinctions. Nevertheless, that which is common and fundamental is expressed in the JD in a common language." Somehow the second sentence contradicts the first.

41. Dulles, "On Lifting," 220.

42. Dulles, "On Lifting," 220.

43. *Ecumenism—The Vision of the ELCA: A Guide for Synods and Congregations* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), 22–23. A good antidote would be Martikainen, *Doctrina*.

44. Dulles, "On Lifting," 307. One could easily illustrate this in great detail, as is demonstrated in *Outmoded Condemnations?*

45. Jedin, *Trent*, 2:307.

46. FC, SD, Rule and Norm, 7.

47. *The True Visible Church*, translated by J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 24–25.

48. (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997), 103–104.

***A Response to the Joint Declaration on
the Doctrine of Justification***

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Introduction

This is an evaluation on the basis of Scriptural and Confessional principles of the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification 1997” (Final Proposal), published jointly by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. This evaluation is written at the request of the President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In his letter, the President requested: 1) an indication of whether or not “this document is an adequate confession of the doctrine of justification,” 2) that the document’s strengths and deficiencies be indicated, and 3) a reaction to the notion that this document represents a “significant breakthrough in a doctrine that has long divided Rome from Wittenberg.”

This evaluation will be structured according to the President’s requests, listed above. First, however, a summary of the purpose and conclusions of the “Joint Declaration” is necessary.

**A summary of the purpose and conclusions
of the “Joint Declaration.”**

The present document will attempt to remain as faithful to the President of Synod’s request as possible, confining itself to the “Joint Declaration,” and not entering into the long and interesting history of Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogues which lies behind it. In fact, the “Joint Declaration” itself wishes to be received, not as a “new, independent presentation alongside the dialogue reports and documents to date, let alone a replacement

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of them” (6).¹ It is, rather, a summary of “the results of the dialogues on justification,” enabling the various Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church to “make binding decisions” concerning these results (4). A listing of all the resources, including references to all the previous dialogue documents, together with pertinent quotes from these documents, is attached to the “Joint Declaration” for handy reference.

The purpose, or “intention” of the “Joint Declaration” is to show that “the subscribing Lutheran churches² and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ” (5). It does not cover all that either of the churches confesses regarding the doctrine of justification, much less the many other, serious theological differences related to it,³ but merely a “consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification” (5). It also purports to show that the remaining differences regarding the doctrine of justification “are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations” (5). The removal of the condemnations is a necessary step along the way towards declaring the remaining differences regarding the doctrine of justification as no longer church-dividing (1).

The “Joint Declaration” identifies three types of remaining differences: 1) differences of language; 2) differences of theological elaboration; and 3) differences in emphasis in the understanding of justification. These remaining differences are termed “acceptable.” Thus, the Lutheran and Catholic explications of justification “are in their difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding basic truths” (40).⁴

Is the “Joint Declaration” an adequate confession of the doctrine of justification?

This question can be answered very simply: No. The reasons for this can be found in the next section, which will deal, not only with the strengths of the “Joint Declaration” but also with its obvi-

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ous and, in our opinion, alarming deficiencies.

Strengths and deficiencies of the “Joint Declaration”

Strengths

The “Joint Declaration” is not a strong document. Yet, although it does not dwell on it, the document does point out the necessity, when dealing with contemporary Roman Catholics, of taking into account the significant, even profound changes brought about by (or reflected in) the documents of the Second Vatican Council. As Lutherans, we often still tend to deal with contemporary Catholics on the basis of the pre-Vatican II Catholicism. Although in that Council they retracted none of the offensive doctrines promulgated by the Council of Trent, they began in the spirit of Vatican II to give more value to Scripture (while at the same time continuing to emphasize unwritten tradition), restoring to an important place in their churches the liturgical homily.⁵ At any rate, the document is helpful in reminding us that the witness of the Roman Catholic church today is very much more complex than many Lutherans think, if they continue to base their assessment of it solely on the basis of pre-Vatican II sources.

In fact, there is in the “Joint Declaration” much affirmed by both dialogue partners in which we can rejoice. They show that Lutherans and Roman Catholics are Christians who have much more in common than what divides them. We rejoice in the affirmation: “In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ” (15).

Section 1 (paragraphs 8–12), which deals with the biblical message of justification, is pretty good. Although, in typical fashion, many of the thornier issues of biblical interpretation, and

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although it is focused far too narrowly on the Bible passages dealing with justification,⁶ and in this case it fails to point out the strongly legal, forensic character of justification, it is at least good that the discussion begins with Scripture. In the end, the only way we will be able to make significant inroads in our dialog with Catholics is rigidly to confine our discussions to the Scriptures. This is, therefore, a good starting point.

Finally, there is much good to be said merely for the fact that the Lutherans and Roman Catholics are engaging in dialog. We should be in these discussions too. Especially in view of the apparent dissolution of many forms of historic Christianity, and in view of the fact that the Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination (by far!), we should be engaging in dialog with them.

Deficiencies

The “Joint Declaration” is a weak document. This evaluation’s discussion of its deficiencies will be structured, not as a line-by-line response, but in several general categories.

Methodological concerns

In general, the document embraces a false methodology, one that is patently self-contradictory. For example, it claims that a “common listening, together with the theological conversations of recent years, has led to a shared understanding of justification. This encompasses a consensus in the basic truths, the differing explications in particular statements are compatible with it” (14, see also 7). Later the “Joint Declaration” identifies three types of remaining differences: 1) differences of language; 2) differences of theological elaboration; and 3) differences of emphasis in the understanding of justification (40). This raises several questions. How can there be a genuine consensus in basic truths, while the explications, the language, the elaborations and the emphases of these truths differ? How is it meaningful to speak of consensus in

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this way? And how can it be truly a consensus when there remain such fundamental differences?

But, the “Joint Declaration” goes even further. It asserts that these differences are “acceptable” (40). One wonders what differences would be unacceptable under such a way of thinking. In a marvel of ambiguity, the document says: “the Lutheran and Catholic explications of justification are in their difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding basic truths” (40). What does it mean that differences are “open to one another?” Are all differences open to one another? Are the differences between Christians and Muslims open to one another? Further, why do not the differences referred to in the “Joint Declaration” destroy the consensus? This is not even addressed.

There is a new and dangerous dialogical methodology at work here. It seems to be possible to affirm both that a theological statement is true and that what contradicts it is true as well. According to these laws of dialog (or is it lawlessness?), there appear to be no differences that matter, none that can be said to destroy “consensus.”

Imprecise theological language

The “Joint Declaration” is filled with imprecise, even at times meaningless, language. Unfortunately, this is also true of its theological language. There are many examples of this. But the example that is most important, and far-reaching, has to do with the document’s use of faith, especially the preposition used to designate faith’s role in the justification of a sinner.

Faith, of course, especially the *sola fide*, was the primary point of disagreement between Lutherans and Catholics in the 16th century. The primary way Lutherans expressed the role of faith was by means of the preposition, “through,” through faith.⁷ They spoke this way in order to indicate that faith was an instrument,⁸ a means through which sinners receive the justification of God, that is, faith, as opposed to works.

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Now, this document uses the phrase “in faith.” Occasionally, “by faith” is used, especially when alluding to a quote from the Confessions.⁹ But, the primary way of referring to justifying faith in the “Joint Declaration” is “in faith.” Nowhere, not once, does the phrase “through faith” appear in this document. This is questionable, not only because it is new, but primarily because it is ambiguous. What does it mean? How is it appropriate to achieve consensus on the basis of language that is ambiguous?

More importantly, however, this language is dangerous. By failing to state clearly the instrumental nature of justifying faith, we fail to identify clearly the cause of our justification as found entirely in God’s saving action in Christ. The cause of our faith is outside of us, not “in faith,” not in us. When we speak this way, we rob Christ of all the glory in the justification of sinners and we deprive sinners of the maximum comfort which can only be gotten when Christ is the sole cause of salvation. The document’s treatment of the assurance of salvation is also, at best, ambiguous. It is a good example of how the primary purpose of the “Joint Declaration” is to maximize agreement and minimize the disagreements. It says that “we confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God (34).¹⁰ This is much softer than saying that the promises of God are fully reliable. This is evident when, in the next sentence, it says the faithful “can build on the effective promise of God’s grace in Word and Sacrament and so be sure of this grace” (34). Can it be both that the Promise alone is reliable and that we can build on it and so be sure?

The section on the good works of the justified is also ambiguous. On the one hand, it says that good works “contribute to growth in grace, so that the righteousness that comes from God is preserved and communion with Christ is deepened” (38). On the other hand, it affirms that “righteousness as acceptance by God and sharing in the righteousness of Christ is always complete” (39). Is it both complete and deepened by our good

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works? This goes beyond ambiguity. It also self-contradictory.

Untrue to history

It is especially troubling to note that the “Joint Declaration” does not take the history of the theological differences with the Roman Catholics seriously enough. It does not sufficiently honor the integrity of either side. How can it be true that “nothing is thereby taken away from the seriousness of the condemnations [of the 16-th century] related to the doctrine of justification” when they are relegated to the status of “salutary warnings’ to which we must attend in our teaching and practice” (42)? What is this “new light” (41) which has suddenly been cast upon matters which were considered by our fathers to have been of the utmost urgency and which, from the Lutheran side, concerned the “chief article of the Christian faith”?¹¹

The “Joint Declaration” declares that “The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent” (41). This is certainly true. However, the teaching presented in this declaration is not the teaching of the 16th century.¹² It is misleading, and less than honest, to suggest that it is.

In our proper search for understanding and unity based upon theological dialog, we have to be more honest with the historical theological differences and treat our various theological heritages with great integrity and respect.

Is this a breakthrough?

President Barry’s final question is: Is this Declaration a significant breakthrough in a doctrine that has long divided Rome from Wittenberg? Again, the answer is easy: No.

First of all, as even the document itself shows, there remain very significant theological differences, in language, theological elaboration and emphasis, regarding the doctrine of justification. It is not a “breakthrough.” In fact, the document shows that very

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little headway at all has been made.

Secondly, it cannot constitute a significant breakthrough, since such a breakthrough will only be achieved through honest dialogue, each side not only seeking what unites, but also honoring what still divides. A breakthrough predicated upon a faulty methodology, upon imprecise theological language and upon an ahistorical treatment of our foundational documents is no breakthrough at all. Those who in this round of the discussions represented the Lutheran side failed. We should not only view this document with alarm for the potential damage to faith it could cause, but we should seek every opportunity to enter the dialogue with the Roman Catholics. Otherwise, who will fairly and with integrity represent the Lutheran Confessions and deal honestly with the condemnations?

Adopted by the Department of Systematic Theology Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO at its regular 9/17/97 meeting.

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NOTES

1. All references to the "Joint Declaration" are by paragraph numbers, as indicated in the document itself.

2. The ELCA is, of course, now officially one of these subscribing Lutheran churches, having voted overwhelmingly in favor of the "Joint Declaration" at its August, 1997 church-wide convention.

3. Such as the relationship between the Word of God and church doctrine, ecclesiology, authority in the church, ministry,

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the sacraments, all of which are mentioned in paragraph 40 of the “Joint Declaration.” What is not mentioned at all is the role of Mary and the saints in salvation. In almost humorous irony, the very week that the ELCA overwhelmingly approved the “Joint Declaration,” *Newsweek* carried a front-cover, multi-page article on the powerful movement within the church to prevail upon Pope John Paul to make an infallible declaration making Mary co-redemptrix with Christ, co-mediatrix with Christ, and intercessor for the church. While many Roman Catholic theologians disagree strongly with this movement, if the Pope takes this action, it would bind the consciences of the Catholic faithful and belief would be required for salvation. It is safe to say that such a move would show how little has really changed in Catholic doctrine, how much directly related to the Gospel still remains dividing Lutherans from Catholics and how superficial the “Joint Declaration” is in its treatment of the issues related to the doctrine of justification

4. These statements appear to be without any meaning whatsoever. The fuzzy language found throughout the “Joint Declaration” will be taken up later in this Evaluation, under the heading, “deficiencies.”

5. This shift towards Scripture also, unfortunately, had untoward and lamentable results, as many Catholic biblical scholars took leadership in fostering and promoting the harmful effects of historical criticism.

6. It deals only with passages in which the word *dikaiao* in its various forms is used. This is far too narrow, since, in Lutheran understanding, the doctrine of justification is far broader than merely this legal, forensic term, as importune as that may be. An honest and full discussion of the doctrine of justification, although this is admittedly impossible in a summary document such as the “Joint Declaration,” must include all the biblical language embraced by the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* and cannot be so intolerably restricted as the “Joint Declaration” does,

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for all the terms (redemption, reconciliation, giving life, light, birth, and many others) substantiate the central themes of the doctrine of justification: That God is favorable to sinners solely by grace, solely on account of Christ, solely through faith, without works of the law. Thus, this document gives the false impression that Lutherans are only concerned about *dikaioo*. This is not true. We are concerned about all the beautiful biblical ways to say the chief article.

7. In Latin, *per fidem*. Of course, Lutherans also often used the phrase “by faith” with virtually the same meaning. When they said it this way, however, it was also made clear that faith in this case points toward its Object, Jesus Christ. In other words, faith justifies because of its Object, not because of itself, or of anything in us.

8. Often called an *organon leiptikon*, that is, a receiving organ, in order to emphasize the passivity of the believer in his justification.

9. In fact, tellingly, one of the sections (4.3) is titled, “Justification by Faith and through Grace.” This seems to suggest faith as the cause of our justification and grace as the means. One hesitates to quibble about language, but this is, after all, a theological document and one should expect a higher degree of precision than one finds here.

10. Emphasis added.

11. Perhaps the true attitude of the “Joint Declaration” toward the historic condemnations is revealed by the gratuitous statement: “Some were not simply pointless” (42). Does this mean that some (or many) of the condemnations were pointless?

12. Only with great difficulty does one avoid the conclusion that the “Joint Declaration” is being disingenuous with the reader. This kind of statement, so obviously misleading, does justice neither to the historic documents of the 16th century, nor to genuine attempts at understanding today.

Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

1997

Preamble

1. The doctrine of justification was of central importance for the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century. It was held to be the "first and chief article"(1) and at the same time the "ruler and judge over all other Christian doctrines."(2) The doctrine of justification was particularly asserted and defended in its Reformation shape and special valuation over against the Roman Catholic Church and theology of that time, which in turn asserted and defended a doctrine of justification of a different character. From the Reformation perspective, justification was the crux of all the disputes. Doctrinal condemnations were put forward both in the Lutheran Confessions(3) and by the Roman Catholic Church's Council of Trent. These condemnations are still valid today and thus have a church-dividing effect.

2. For the Lutheran tradition, the doctrine of justification has retained its special status. Consequently it has also from the beginning occupied an important place in the official Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue.

3. Special attention should be drawn to the following reports: "The Gospel and the Church" (1972) (4) and "Church and Justification" (1994) (5) by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission, "Justification by Faith" (1983) (6) of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue in the USA, and *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era—Do They Still Divide?* (1986) (7) by the Ecumenical Working Group of Protestant and Catholic theologians in Germany. Some of these dialogue reports have been officially received by the churches. An important example of such reception is the binding response of the United Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Germany to the *Condemnations* study, made in 1994 at the highest possible level of ecclesiastical recognition together with the other churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany. (8)

4. In their discussion of the doctrine of justification, all the dialogue reports as well as the responses show a high degree of agreement in their approaches and conclusions. The time has therefore come to take stock and to summarize the results of the dialogues on justification so that our churches may be informed about the overall results of this

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dialogue with the necessary accuracy and brevity, and thereby be enabled to make binding decisions.

5. The present Joint Declaration has this intention: namely, to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church(9) are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ. It does not cover all that either church teaches about justification; it does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.

6. Our Declaration is not a new, independent presentation alongside the dialogue reports and documents to date, let alone a replacement of them. Rather, as the appendix of sources shows, it makes repeated reference to them and their arguments.

7. Like the dialogues themselves, this Joint Declaration rests on the conviction that in overcoming the earlier controversial questions and doctrinal condemnations, the churches neither take the condemnations lightly nor do they disavow their own past. On the contrary, this Declaration is shaped by the conviction that in their respective histories our churches have come to new insights. Developments have taken place which not only make possible, but also require the churches to examine the divisive questions and condemnations and see them in a new light.

1. Biblical Message of Justification

8. Our common way of listening to the Word of God in Scripture has led to such new insights. Together we hear the Gospel that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). This good news is set forth in Holy Scripture in various ways. In the Old Testament we listen to God's Word about human sinfulness (Psalm 51:1-5; Daniel 9:5f.; Ecclesiastes/Qoheleth 8:9f.; Ezra 9:6f.) and human disobedience (Genesis 3:1-19; Nehemiah 9:16f., 26) as well as of God's "righteousness" (Isaiah 46:13; 51:5-8; 56:1 [cf. 53:11]; Jeremiah 9:24) and "judgment" (Ecclesiastes/Qoheleth 12:14; Psalm 9:5f.; 76:7-9).

9. In the New Testament diverse treatments of "righteousness" and "justification" are found in the writings of Matthew (5:10; 6:33; 21:32), John (16:8-11), Hebrews (5:1-3; 10:37-38), and James (2:14-26).(10) In Paul's letters also, the gift of salvation is described in various ways,

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among others: "for freedom Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1–13; cf. Rom. 6:7), "reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:18–21; cf. Rom. 5:11), "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1), "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17), "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11, 23), or "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1:31; 2 Corinthians 1:1). Chief among these is the "justification" of sinful human beings by God's grace through faith (Rom. 3:23–25), which came into particular prominence in the Reformation period.

10. Paul sets forth the Gospel as the power of God for salvation of the person who has fallen under the power of sin, as the message that proclaims that "the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith" (Rom. 1:16–17) and that grants "justification" (Rom. 3:21–31). He proclaims Christ as "our righteousness" (1 Corinthians 1:30), applying to the risen Lord what Jeremiah proclaimed about God himself (23:6). In Christ's death and resurrection all dimensions of his saving work have their roots for he is "our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). All human beings are in need of God's righteousness, "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 2:23; cf. Rom. 1:18–3:22; 11:32; Galatians 3:22). In Galatians (3:6) and Rom. (4:3–9), Paul understands Abraham's faith (Genesis 15:6) as faith in the God who justifies the sinner and calls upon the testimony of the Old Testament to undergird his gospel that this righteousness will be reckoned to all who, like Abraham, trust in God's promise. "For the righteous will live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4; cf. Galatians 3:11; Rom. 1:17). In Paul's letters, God's righteousness is also power for those who have faith (Rom. 1:17; 2 Corinthians 5:21). In Christ he makes it their righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). Justification becomes ours through Christ Jesus "whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith" (Rom. 3:25; see 3:21–28). "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

11. Justification is the forgiveness of sins (cf. Rom. 3:23–25; Acts 13:39; Luke 18:14), liberation from the dominating power of sin and death (Rom. 5:12–21) and from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:10–14). It is acceptance into communion with God: already now, but then fully in God's coming kingdom (Rom. 5:1–2). It unites with Christ and with his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:5). It occurs in the reception of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and incorporation into the one body

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(Rom. 8:1–2, 9–11; 1 Corinthians 12:12–13). All this is from God alone, for Christ's sake, by grace, through faith in "the Gospel of God's Son" (Rom. 1:1–3).

12. The justified live by faith that comes from the Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17) and is active through love (Galatians 5:6), the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). But since the justified are assailed from within and without by powers and desires (Rom. 8:35–39; Galatians 5:16–21) and fall into sin (1 John 1:8, 10), they must constantly hear God's promises anew, confess their sins (1 John 1:9), participate in Christ's body and blood, and be exhorted to live righteously in accord with the will of God. That is why the Apostle says to the justified: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12–13). But the good news remains: "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1), and in whom Christ lives (Galatians 2:20). Christ's "act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all" (Rom. 5:18).

The Doctrine of Justification as Ecumenical Problem

13. Opposing interpretations and applications of the biblical message of justification were in the sixteenth century a principal cause of the division of the Western church and led as well to doctrinal condemnations. A common understanding of justification is therefore fundamental and indispensable to overcoming that division. By appropriating insights of recent biblical studies and drawing on modern investigations of the history of theology and dogma, the post-Vatican II ecumenical dialogue has led to a notable convergence concerning justification, with the result that this Joint Declaration is able to formulate a consensus on basic truths concerning the doctrine of justification. In light of this consensus, the corresponding doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to today's partner.

3. The Common Understanding of Justification

14. The Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church have together listened to the good news proclaimed in Holy Scripture. This common listening, together with the theological conversations of recent years, has led to a shared understanding of justification. This encompasses a consensus in the basic truths; the differing explications in particular statements are compatible with it.

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15. In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.(11)

16. All people are called by God to salvation in Christ. Through Christ alone are we justified, when we receive this salvation in faith. Faith is itself God's gift through the Holy Spirit who works through Word and Sacrament in the community of believers and who, at the same time, leads believers into that renewal of life which God will bring to completion in eternal life.

17. We also share the conviction that the message of justification directs us in a special way towards the heart of the New Testament witness to God's saving action in Christ: it tells us that as sinners our new life is solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift and we receive in faith, and never can merit in any way.

18. Therefore the doctrine of justification, which takes up this message and explicates it, is more than just one part of Christian doctrine. It stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith, which are to be seen as internally related to each other. It is an indispensable criterion, which constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ. When Lutherans emphasize the unique significance of this criterion, they do not deny the interrelation and significance of all truths of faith. When Catholics see themselves as bound by several criteria, they do not deny the special function of the message of justification. Lutherans and Catholics share the goal of confessing Christ, who is to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5-6) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts [cf. Sources, section 3].

4. Explicating the Common Understanding of Justification

4.1 Human Powerlessness and Sin in Relation to Justification

19. We confess together that all persons depend completely on the

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saving grace of God for their salvation. The freedom they possess in relation to persons and the things of this world is no freedom in relation to salvation, for as sinners they stand under God's judgment and are incapable of turning by themselves to God to seek deliverance, of meriting their justification before God, or of attaining salvation by their own abilities. Justification takes place solely by God's grace. Because Catholics and Lutherans confess this together, it is true to say:

20. When Catholics say that persons "cooperate" in preparing for and accepting justification by consenting to God's justifying action, they see such personal consent as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities.

21. According to Lutheran teaching, human beings are incapable of cooperating in their salvation, because as sinners they actively oppose God and his saving action. Lutherans do not deny that a person can reject the working of grace. When they emphasize that a person can only receive (mere passive) justification, they mean thereby to exclude any possibility of contributing to one's own justification, but do not deny that believers are fully involved personally in their faith, which is effected by God's Word.

4.2 Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous

22. We confess together that God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from sin's enslaving power and imparts the gift of new life in Christ. When persons come by faith to share in Christ, God no longer imputes to them their sin and through the Holy Spirit effects in them an active love. These two aspects of God's gracious action are not to be separated, for persons are by faith united with Christ, who in his person is our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30): both the forgiveness of sin and the saving presence of God himself. Because Catholics and Lutherans confess this together, it is true to say that:

23. When Lutherans emphasize that the righteousness of Christ is our righteousness, their intention is above all to insist that the sinner is granted righteousness before God in Christ through the declaration of forgiveness and that only in union with Christ is one's life renewed. When they stress that God's grace is forgiving love ("the favor of God" (12)), they do not thereby deny the renewal of the Christian's life. They intend rather to express that justification remains free from human cooperation and is not dependent on the life-renewing effects

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of grace in human beings.

24. When Catholics emphasize the renewal of the interior person through the reception of grace imparted as a gift to the believer, (13) they wish to insist that God's forgiving grace always brings with it a gift of new life, which in the Holy Spirit becomes effective in active love. They do not thereby deny that God's gift of grace in justification remains independent of human cooperation [cf. Sources, section 4.2].

4.3 Justification by Faith and through Grace

25. We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life. They place their trust in God's gracious promise by justifying faith, which includes hope in God and love for him. Such a faith is active in love and thus the Christian cannot and should not remain without works. But whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it.

26. According to Lutheran understanding, God justifies sinners in faith alone (*sola fide*). In faith they place their trust wholly in their Creator and Redeemer and thus live in communion with him. God himself effects faith as he brings forth such trust by his creative Word. Because God's act is a new creation, it affects all dimensions of the person and leads to a life in hope and love. In the doctrine of "justification by faith alone," a distinction but not a separation is made between justification itself and the renewal of one's way of life that necessarily follows from justification and without which faith does not exist. Thereby the basis is indicated from which the renewal of life proceeds, for it comes forth from the love of God imparted to the person in justification. Justification and renewal are joined in Christ, who is present in faith.

27. The Catholic understanding also sees faith as fundamental in justification. For without faith, no justification can take place. Persons are justified through Baptism as hearers of the Word and believers in it. The justification of sinners is forgiveness of sins and being made righteous by justifying grace, which makes us children of God. In justification the righteous receive from Christ faith, hope, and love and are thereby taken into communion with him. (14) This new personal relation to God is grounded totally on God's graciousness and remains constantly dependent on the salvific and creative working of this gracious God, who remains true to himself, so that one can rely upon him. Thus

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justifying grace never becomes a human possession to which one could appeal over against God. While Catholic teaching emphasizes the renewal of life by justifying grace, this renewal in faith, hope, and love is always dependent on God's unfathomable grace and contributes nothing to justification about which one could boast before God (Rom. 3:27). [See Sources, section 4.3.]

4.4 The Justified as Sinner

28. We confess together that in Baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies, and truly renews the person. But the justified must all through life constantly look to God's unconditional justifying grace. They also are continuously exposed to the power of sin still pressing its attacks (cf. Rom. 6:12–14) and are not exempt from a lifelong struggle against the contradiction to God within the selfish desires of the old Adam (cf. Galatians 5:16; Rom. 7:7–10). The justified also must ask God daily for forgiveness as in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:12; 1 John 1:9), are ever again called to conversion and penance, and are ever again granted forgiveness.

29. Lutherans understand this condition of the Christian as a being "at the same time righteous and sinner." Believers are totally righteous, in that God forgives their sins through Word and Sacrament and grants the righteousness of Christ which they appropriate in faith. In Christ, they are made just before God. Looking at themselves through the law, however, they recognize that they remain also totally sinners. Sin still lives in them (1 John 1:8; Rom. 7:17, 20), for they repeatedly turn to false gods and do not love God with that undivided love which God requires as their Creator (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:36–40 pr.). This contradiction to God is as such truly sin. Nevertheless, the enslaving power of sin is broken on the basis of the merit of Christ. It no longer is a sin that "rules" the Christian for it is itself "ruled" by Christ with whom the justified are bound in faith. In this life, then, Christians can in part lead a just life. Despite sin, the Christian is no longer separated from God, because in the daily return to Baptism, the person who has been born anew by Baptism and the Holy Spirit has this sin forgiven. Thus this sin no longer brings damnation and eternal death.⁽¹⁵⁾ Thus, when Lutherans say that justified persons are also sinners and that their opposition to God is truly sin, they do not deny that, despite this sin, they are not separated from God and that this sin is a "ruled" sin. In these affirmations, they are in agreement with Roman Catholics,

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despite the difference in understanding sin in the justified.

30. Catholics hold that the grace of Jesus Christ imparted in Baptism takes away all that is sin "in the proper sense" and that is "worthy of damnation" (Rom. 8:1).⁽¹⁶⁾ There does, however, remain in the person an inclination (concupiscence) which comes from sin and presses toward sin. Since, according to Catholic conviction, human sin always involves a personal element and since this element is lacking in this inclination, Catholics do not see this inclination as sin in an authentic sense. They do not thereby deny that this inclination does not correspond to God's original design for humanity and that it is objectively in contradiction to God and remains one's enemy in lifelong struggle. Grateful for deliverance by Christ, they underscore that this inclination in contradiction to God does not merit the punishment of eternal death⁽¹⁷⁾ and does not separate the justified person from God. But when individuals voluntarily separate themselves from God, it is not enough to return to observing the commandments, for they must receive pardon and peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation through the word of forgiveness imparted to them in virtue of God's reconciling work in Christ. [See Sources, section 4.4.]

4.5 Law and Gospel

31. We confess together that persons are justified by faith in the Gospel "apart from works prescribed by the Law" (Rom. 3:28). Christ has fulfilled the Law and by his death and resurrection has overcome it as a way to salvation. We also confess that God's commandments retain their validity for the justified and that Christ has by his teaching and example expressed God's will which is a standard for the conduct of the justified also.

32. Lutherans state that the distinction and right ordering of Law and Gospel is essential for the understanding of justification. In its theological use, the Law is demand and accusation. Throughout their lives, all persons, Christians also, in that they are sinners, stand under this accusation, which uncovers their sin so that, in faith in the Gospel, they will turn unreservedly to the mercy of God in Christ, which alone justifies them.

33. Because the Law as a way to salvation has been fulfilled and overcome through the Gospel, Catholics can say that Christ is not a law-giver in the manner of Moses. When Catholics emphasize that the righteous are bound to observe God's commandments, they do not thereby

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deny that through Jesus Christ God has mercifully promised to his children the grace of eternal life.(18) [See Sources, section 4.5.]

4.6 Assurance of Salvation

34. We confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God. In spite of their own weakness and the manifold threats to their faith, on the strength of Christ's death and resurrection they can build on the effective promise of God's grace in Word and Sacrament and so be sure of this grace.

35. This was emphasized in a particular way by the Reformers: in the midst of temptation, believers should not look to themselves but look solely to Christ and trust only him. In trust in God's promise they are assured of their salvation, but are never secure looking at themselves.

36. Catholics can share the concern of the Reformers to ground faith in the objective reality of Christ's promise, to look away from one's own experience, and to trust in Christ's forgiving Word alone (cf. Matthew 16:19; 18:18). With the Second Vatican Council, Catholics state: to have faith is to entrust oneself totally to God,(19) who liberates us from the darkness of sin and death and awakens us to eternal life.(20) In this sense, one cannot believe in God and at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy. No one may doubt God's mercy and Christ's merit. Every person, however, may be concerned about his salvation when he looks upon his own weaknesses and shortcomings. Recognizing his own failures, however, the believer may yet be certain that God intends his salvation. [See Sources, section 4.6.]

4.7 The Good Works of the Justified

37. We confess together that good works—a Christian life lived in faith, hope, and love—follow justification and are its fruits. When the justified live in Christ and act in the grace they receive, they bring forth, in biblical terms, good fruit. Since Christians struggle against sin their entire lives, this consequence of justification is also for them an obligation they must fulfill. Thus both Jesus and the apostolic Scriptures admonish Christians to bring forth the works of love.

38. According to Catholic understanding, good works, made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace, so that the righteousness that comes from God is preserved and communion with Christ is deepened. When Catholics affirm the "meri-

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torious" character of good works, they wish to say that, according to the biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works. Their intention is to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions, not to contest the character of those works as gifts, or far less to deny that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace.

39. The concept of a preservation of grace and a growth in grace and faith is also held by Lutherans. They do emphasize that righteousness as acceptance by God and sharing in the righteousness of Christ is always complete. At the same time, they state that there can be growth in its effects in Christian living. When they view the good works of Christians as the fruits and signs of justification and not as one's own "merits," they nevertheless also understand eternal life in accord with the New Testament as unmerited "reward" in the sense of the fulfillment of God's promise to the believer. [See Sources, section 4.7.]

5. The Significance and Scope of the Consensus Reached

40. The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics. In light of this consensus the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis in the understanding of justification described in paragraphs 18 to 39 are acceptable. Therefore the Lutheran and the Catholic explications of justification are in their difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding basic truths.

41. Thus the doctrinal condemnations of the 16th century, in so far as they relate to the doctrine of justification, appear in a new light: The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration.

42. Nothing is thereby taken away from the seriousness of the condemnations related to the doctrine of justification. Some were not simply pointless. They remain for us "salutary warnings" to which we must attend in our teaching and practice. (21)

43. Our consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification must come to influence the life and teachings of our churches. Here it must prove itself. In this respect, there are still questions of varying importance which need further clarification. These include, among other topics, the relationship between the Word of God and church

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doctrine, as well as ecclesiology, authority in the church, ministry, the sacraments, and the relation between justification and social ethics. We are convinced that the consensus we have reached offers a solid basis for this clarification. The Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church will continue to strive together to deepen this common understanding of justification and to make it bear fruit in the life and teaching of the churches.

44. We give thanks to the Lord for this decisive step forward on the way to overcoming the division of the church. We ask the Holy Spirit to lead us further toward that visible unity which is Christ's will.

Appendix

Sources Regarding the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification Between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church

In parts 3 and 4 of the "Joint Declaration," reference is made to formulations from different Lutheran-Catholic dialogues. They are the following documents:

"All Under One Christ," statement on the Augsburg Confession by the Roman Catholic-Lutheran Joint Commission, 1980, in: "Growth in Agreement," edited by Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer, New York/Ramsey, Geneva, 1984, 241–247.

Comments of the Joint Committee of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany and the LWF German National Committee regarding the document, *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era—Do They Still Divide?*, in "Lehrverurteilungen im Gespräch" ["Condemnation Tenets in Dialogue"], Göttingen, 1993 (hereafter: VELKD).

Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum . . .*, 32nd to 36th edition (hereafter: DS).

Denzinger-Hünemann, *Enchiridion Symbolorum . . .*, since the 37th edition (hereafter: DH).

Evaluation of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity of the Study, *Lehrverurteilungen—kirchentrennend? [Condemnation Tenets—Church Dividing?]*, Vatican, 1992, unpublished document (hereafter: PCPCU).

"Justification by Faith," *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*,

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Minneapolis, 1985 (hereafter: USA).

The Condemnations of the Reformation Era—Do they Still Divide?, edited by Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, Minneapolis, 1990 (hereafter: LV:E).

To [part] 3: The Common Understanding of Justification (paragraphs 14 and 18) [LV:E 68f.; VELKD 95]:

" . . . a faith centered and forensically conceived picture of justification is of major importance for Paul and, in a sense, for the Bible as a whole, although it is by no means the only biblical or Pauline way of representing God's saving work" [USA, no. 146].

"Catholics as well as Lutherans can acknowledge the need to test the practices, structures, and theologies of the church by the extent to which they help or hinder 'the proclamation of God's free and merciful promises in Christ Jesus, which can be rightly received only through faith' (para. 28)" [USA, no. 153].

Regarding the "fundamental affirmation" [USA, no. 157; cf. 4] it is said:

"This affirmation, like the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone, serves as a criterion for judging all church practices, structures, and traditions precisely because its counterpart is 'Christ alone' (solus Christus). He alone is to be ultimately trusted as the one mediator through whom God in the Holy Spirit pours out his saving gifts. All of us in this dialogue affirm that all Christian teachings, practices, and offices should so function as to foster 'the obedience of faith' (Rom. 1:5) in God's saving action in Christ Jesus alone through the Holy Spirit, for the salvation of the faithful and the praise and honor of the heavenly Father" [USA, no. 160].

"For that reason, the doctrine of justification—and, above all, its biblical foundation—will always retain a special function in the Church. That function is continually to remind Christians that we sinners live solely from the forgiving love of God, which we merely allow to be bestowed on us, but which we in no way—in however modified a form—'earn' or are able to tie down to any preconditions or postconditions. The doctrine of justification, therefore, becomes the touchstone for testing at all times whether a particular interpretation of our relationship to God can claim the name of 'Christian.' At the same time, it becomes the touchstone for the Church, for testing at all times whether

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its proclamation and its praxis correspond to what has been given to it by its Lord" [LV:E 69].

"An agreement on the fact that the doctrine of justification is significant not only as one doctrinal component within the whole of our church's teaching, but also as the touchstone for testing the whole doctrine and practice of our churches, is—from a Lutheran point of view—fundamental progress in the ecumenical dialogue between our churches. It cannot be welcomed enough" [VELKD 95; cf. 157].

"For Lutherans and Catholics, the doctrine of justification has a different status in the hierarchy of truth; but, both sides agree that the doctrine of justification has its specific function in the fact that it is 'the touchstone for testing at all times whether a particular interpretation of our relationship to God can claim the name of "Christian." At the same time, it becomes the touchstone for the Church, for testing at all times whether its proclamation and its praxis correspond to what has been given to it by its Lord' [LV:E 69]. The criteriological significance of the doctrine of justification for sacramentology, ecclesiology, and ethical teachings still deserves to be studied further" [PCPCU 96].

To [part] 4.1: Sin and Human Powerlessness in Relation to Justification (paragraphs 19–21) [LV:E 42ff.; 46; VELKD 77–81; 83f.]:

"Those in whom sin reigns can do nothing to merit justification, which is the free gift of God's grace. Even the beginnings of justification, for example, repentance, prayer for grace, and desire for forgiveness, must be God's work in us" [USA, no. 156.3].

"Both are concerned to make it clear that . . . human beings cannot . . . cast a sideways glance at their own endeavors . . . But, a response is not a 'work.' The response of faith is itself brought about through the uncoercible Word of promise, which comes to human beings from outside themselves. There can be 'cooperation' only in the sense that in faith the heart is involved, when the Word touches it and creates faith" [LV:E 46f].

"Where, however, Lutheran teaching construes the relation of God to his human creatures in justification with such emphasis on the divine 'monergism' or the sole efficacy of Christ in such a way, that the person's willing acceptance of God's grace—which is itself a gift of God—has no essential role in justification, then the Tridentine canons 4, 5, 6 and 9 still constitute a notable doctrinal difference on justification" [PCPCU 22].

"The strict emphasis on the passivity of human beings concerning

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their justification never meant, on the Lutheran side, to contest the full personal participation in believing; rather it meant to exclude any cooperation in the event of justification itself. Justification is the work of Christ alone, the work of grace alone" [VELKD 84, 3–8].

To [part] 4.2: Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous (paragraphs 22–24) [USA, nos. 98–101; LV:E 47ff.; VELKD 84ff.; cf. also the quotations to 4.4]:

"By justification we are both declared and made righteous. Justification, therefore, is not a legal fiction. God, in justifying, effects what he promises; he forgives sin and makes us truly righteous" [USA, no. 156,5].

"Protestant theology does not overlook what Catholic doctrine stresses: the creative and renewing character of God's love; nor does it maintain . . . God's impotence toward a sin which is 'merely' forgiven in justification but which is not truly abolished in its power to divide the sinner from God" [LV:E 49].

"The Lutheran doctrine has never understood the 'crediting of Christ's justification' as without effect on the life of the faithful, because Christ's Word achieves what it promises. Accordingly the Lutheran doctrine understands grace as God's favor, but nevertheless as effective power . . . 'for where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation'" [VELKD 86, 15–23].

"Catholic doctrine does not overlook what Protestant theology stresses: the personal character of grace, and its link with the Word; nor does it maintain . . . grace as an objective 'possession' (even if a conferred possession) on the part of the human being—something over which he can dispose" [LV:E 49].

To [part] 4.3: Justification by Faith and through Grace (paragraphs 25–27) [USA, nos. 105ff.; LV:E 49–53; VELKD 87–90]:

"If we translate from one language to another, then Protestant talk about justification through faith corresponds to Catholic talk about justification through grace; and on the other hand, Protestant doctrine understands substantially under the one word, 'faith,' what Catholic doctrine (following 1 Cor. 13:13) sums up in the triad of 'faith, hope, and love'" [LV:E 52].

"We emphasize that faith in the sense of the first commandment always means love to God and hope in him and is expressed in the love to the neighbour" [VELKD 89, 8–11].

"Catholics . . . teach as do Lutherans, that nothing prior to the free

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gift of faith merits justification and that all of God's saving gifts come through Christ alone" [USA, no. 105].

"The Reformers . . . understood faith as the forgiveness and fellowship with Christ effected by the Word of promise itself. This is the ground for the new being, through which the flesh is dead to sin and the new man or woman in Christ has life (*sola fide per Christum*). But even if this faith necessarily makes the human being new, the Christian builds his confidence, not on his own new life, but solely on God's gracious promise. Acceptance in Christ is sufficient, if 'faith' is understood as 'trust in the promise' (*fides promissionis*)" [LV:E 50].

Cf. The Council of Trent, Session 6, Chap. 7: "Consequently, in the process of justification, together with the forgiveness of sins a person receives, through Jesus Christ into whom he is grafted, all these infused at the same time: faith, hope and charity" [Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, vol. 2, London/Washington, D.C., 1990, 673].

"According to Protestant interpretation, the faith that clings unconditionally to God's promise in Word and Sacrament is sufficient for righteousness before God, so that the renewal of the human being, without which there can be no faith, does not in itself make any contribution to justification" [LV:E 52].

"As Lutherans, we maintain the distinction between justification and sanctification, of faith and works, which, however, implies no separation" [VELKD 89, 6–8].

"Catholic doctrine knows itself to be at one with the Protestant concern in emphasizing that the renewal of the human being does not 'contribute' to justification, and is certainly not a contribution to which he could make any appeal before God. Nevertheless, it feels compelled to stress the renewal of the human being through justifying grace, for the sake of acknowledging God's newly creating power; although this renewal in faith, hope, and love is certainly nothing but a response to God's unfathomable grace" [LV:E 52f].

"Insofar as the Catholic doctrine stresses that 'the personal character of grace, and its link with the Word', this renewal . . . is certainly nothing but a response effected by God's Word itself and that 'the renewal of the human being does not contribute to justification, and is certainly not a contribution to which a person could make any appeal before God' our objection no longer applies" [VELKD 89, 12–21].

To [part] 4.4: The Justified as Sinners (paragraphs 28–31) [USA, nos. 102ff.; LV:E 44ff.; VELKD 81ff.]:

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"For however just and holy, they fall from time to time into the sins that are those of daily existence. What is more, the Spirit's action does not exempt believers from the lifelong struggle against sinful tendencies. Concupiscence and other effects of original and personal sin, according to Catholic doctrine, remain in the justified, who, therefore, must pray daily to God for forgiveness" [USA, no. 102].

"The doctrines laid down at Trent and by the Reformers are at one in maintaining that original sin, and also the concupiscence that remains, are in contradiction to God . . . object of the lifelong struggle against sin . . . After Baptism, concupiscence in the person justified no longer cuts that person off from God; in Tridentine language, it is 'no longer sin in the real sense'; in Lutheran phraseology, it is *peccatum regnatum*, 'controlled sin'" [LV:E 46].

"The question is how to speak of sin with regard to the justified without limiting the reality of salvation. While Lutherans express this tension with the term, 'controlled sin,' (*peccatum regnatum*), which expresses the teaching of the Christian as 'being justified and sinner at the same time' (*simul iustus et peccator*), Roman Catholics think the reality of salvation can only be maintained by denying the sinful character of concupiscence. With regard to this question, a considerable rapprochement is reached, if LV:E calls the concupiscence that remains in the justified a 'contradiction to God' and thus qualifies it as sin" [VELKD 82, 29-39].

To [part] 4.5: Law and Gospel (paragraphs 32–34):

According to Pauline teaching, it refers to the Jewish Law as means of salvation. This was fulfilled and overcome in Christ. This statement and the consequences from it have thus to be understood.

With reference to Canons 19f. of the Council of Trent the VELKD (89, 28–36) says as follows: "The ten commandments, of course, apply to Christians as stated in many places of the confessions. If Canon 20 stresses that a 'person . . . is bound to keep the commandments of God,' this does not apply to us; if, however, Canon 20 affirms that faith has salvific power only on condition of keeping the commandments, this applies to us. Concerning the reference of the Canon regarding the commandments of the church, there is no difference between us, if these commandments are only expressions of the commandments of God; otherwise it would apply to us."

The last paragraph is related factually to [part] 4.3, but emphasizes the 'convicting function' of the Law, which is important to Lutheran

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thinking.

To [part] 4.6: Assurance of Salvation (paragraphs 3S–37) [LV:E 53–56; VELKD 90ff.]:

"The question is: How can, and how may, human beings live before God in spite of their weakness, and with that weakness?" [LV:E 53].

"The foundation and the point of departure (of the Reformers) . . . are: the reliability and sufficiency of God's promise, and the power of Christ's death and resurrection; human weakness, and the threat to faith and salvation, which that involves" [LV:E 56].

The Council of Trent also emphasizes that "it is necessary to believe that sins are not forgiven, nor have they ever been forgiven, save freely by the divine mercy on account of Christ;" and that we must not doubt "the mercy of God, the merit of Christ, and the power and efficacy of the sacraments; so it is possible for anyone, while he regards himself and his own weakness and lack of dispositions, to be anxious and fearful about his own state of grace" [Council of Trent, Session 6, Chapter 9, 674].

"Luther and his followers go a step farther: They urge that the uncertainty should not merely be endured. We should avert our eyes from it and take seriously, practically, and personally the objective efficacy of the absolution pronounced in the sacrament of penance, which comes 'from outside.' . . . Since Jesus said, 'Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' (Matt. 16: 19), the believer . . . would declare Christ to be a liar . . . , if he did not rely with a rock-like assurance on the forgiveness of God uttered in the absolution . . . that this reliance can itself be subjectively uncertain—that the assurance of forgiveness is not a security of forgiveness (*securitas*), but, this must not be turned into yet another problem, so to speak: the believer should turn his eyes away from it, and should look only to Christ's Word of forgiveness" [LV:E 54f.].

"Today Catholics can appreciate the Reformer's efforts to ground faith in the objective reality of Christ's promise, 'whatsoever you loose on earth . . . ' and to focus believers on the specific word of absolution from sins. . . . Luther's original concern to teach people to look away from their experience, and to rely on Christ alone and his word of forgiveness [is not to be condemned]" [PCPCU 24].

A mutual condemnation regarding the understanding of the assurance of salvation "can even less provide grounds for mutual objection today—particularly, if we start from the foundation of a biblically

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renewed concept of faith. For a person can certainly lose or renounce faith, and self-commitment to God and his Word of promise. But, if he believes in this sense, he cannot at the same time believe that God is unreliable in his Word of promise. In this sense it is true today also that—in Luther's words—faith is the assurance of salvation" [LV:E 56].

With reference to the concept of faith of Vatican II, see Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 5: "'The obedience of faith' . . . must be given to God, who reveals an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering 'the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,' and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him."

"The Lutheran distinction between the certitude (*certitudo*) of faith, which looks alone to Christ and earthly security (*securitas*), which is based on the human being, has not been dealt with clearly enough in the LV [The Condemnations of the Reformation Era—Do they Still Divide?]. . . . Faith never reflects on itself, but depends completely on God, whose grace is bestowed through Word and Sacrament, thus from outside (*extra nos*)" [VELKD 92, 2–9].

To [part] 4.7: The Good Works of the Justified (paragraphs 38–40) [LV:E 66ff., VELKD 90ff.]:

"But the Council excludes the possibility of earning grace—that is, justification—[can. 2; DS 1552] and bases the earning or merit of eternal life on the gift of grace itself, through membership in Christ [can. 32; DS 1582]. Good works are 'merits' as a gift. Although the Reformers attack 'Godless trust' in one's own works, the Council explicitly excludes any notion of a claim or any false security [cap. 16; DS 1548f]. It is evident . . . that the Council wishes to establish a link with Augustine, who introduced the concept of merit, in order to express the responsibility of human beings, in spite of the 'bestowed' character of good works" [LV:E 66].

If we understand the language of "cause" in Canon 24 in more personal terms, as it is done in Chapter 16 of the Decree on Justification, where the idea of communion with Christ is emphasized, then we can describe the Catholic doctrine on merit as it is done in the first sentence of the second paragraph of 4.7: growth in grace, perseverance in righteousness received by God and a deeper communion with Christ.

"Many antitheses could be overcome, if the misleading word, 'merit,' were simply to be viewed and thought about in connection with the true sense of the biblical term, 'wage,' or reward" [LV:E 67].

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"The Lutheran confessions stress that the justified person is responsible not to lose the grace received but to live in it . . . Thus, the confessions can speak of a preservation of grace and a growth in it. If 'righteousness' in Canon 24 is understood in the sense that it effects human beings, then it does not apply to us. But, if 'righteousness' in Canon 24 refers to the Christian's acceptance by God, it applies to us; because this righteousness is always perfect; compared with it the works of Christians are only 'fruits' and 'signs'" [VELKD 94, 2–14].

"Concerning Canon 26, we refer to the Apology where eternal life is described as reward: '. . . We grant that eternal life is a reward, because it is something that is owed—not because of our merits but because of the promise'" [VELKD 94, 20–24].

Department for Ecumenical Affairs Home Page Footnotes:

1. The Smalcald Articles, II,1; Book of Concord, 292.
2. "Rector et iudex super omnia genera doctrinarum," Weimar Edition of Luther's Works (WA), 39, I, 205.
3. It should be noted that some Lutheran churches include only the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism among their binding confessions. These texts contain no condemnations about justification in relation to the Roman Catholic Church.
4. Report of the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, published in Growth in Agreement (New York: Geneva, 1984), pages 168–189.
5. Published by the Lutheran World Federation (Geneva, 1994).
6. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII (Minneapolis, 1985).
7. Minneapolis, 1990.
8. "Gemeinsame Stellungnahme der Arnoldshainer Konferenz, der Vereinigten Kirche und des Deutschen Nationalkomitees des Lutherischen Weltbundes zum Dokument 'Lehrverurteilungen—kirchentrennend?'," *Okumenische Rundschau* 44 (1995): 99-102; including the position papers which underlie this resolution, cf. *Lehrverurteilungen im Gespräch, Die ersten offiziellen Stellungnahmen aus den evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).
9. The word, "church," is used in this Declaration to reflect the self-understandings of the participating churches, without intending to resolve all the ecclesiological issues related to this term.
10. Cf. "Malta Report," paragraphs 26–30; "Justification by Faith,"

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paragraphs 122–147. At the request of the U.S. dialogue on justification, the non–Pauline New Testament texts were addressed in *Righteousness in the New Testament*, by John Reumann, with responses by Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Jerome D. Quinn (Philadelphia; New York: 1982), pages 124–180. The results of this study were summarized in the dialogue report "Justification by Faith" in paragraphs 139–143.

11. "All Under One Christ," paragraph 14, in *Growth in Agreement*, pages 241–247.

12. Cf. *Luther's Works, American Edition* 32:227; *Weimar Edition* 8:106.

13. Cf. Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 1528.

14. Cf. Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 1530.

15. Cf. *Apology II:38–45*; *Book of Concord*, 105f.

16. Cf. Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 1515.

17. Cf. Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 1515.

18. Cf. Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 1545.

19. Cf. *Dei Verbum* 5.

20. Cf. *Dei Verbum* 4.

21. *Condemnations of the Reformation Era*, 27.