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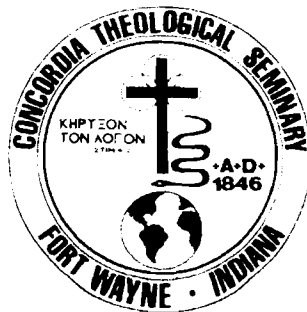
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Announcement .....	161
Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification .....	Robert D. Preus 163
A Linguistic Analysis of Glossolalia .....	Theodore Mueller 185
Reformed and Neo-Evangelical Theology in English Translations of the Bible .....	Michael R. Totten 193
The Mirror of God's Goodness .....	B.A. Gerrish 211
Hermeneutics in Thomas Aquinas .....	John Franklin Johnson 223
Homiletical Studies .....	233
Book Reviews .....	245
Books Received .....	251



# Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification

Robert D. Preus

There are, of course, no problems in the doctrine of justification, no problems at all. The doctrine presents God's revealed answer to all the major problems of sinful man. Does God exist? What is He like? Does He love me? What must I do to be saved? Can sinful man ever stand before a holy and righteous God? These and all the other nagging questions of fallen man are answered truly and clearly and decisively by the revealed doctrine of justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith.

And so in this essay I address myself not to any problems in the doctrine of justification itself, but to some of the great problems we have made for ourselves in the church, problems which have perennially in the church tended to obscure that brilliant light of justification by grace, to mitigate the doctrine, to deny it, to corrupt it, to ignore it, or to relegate it to the vast limbo of meaninglessness.

What are some of these perennial problems with which, it seems, we evangelical Christians and Lutherans must constantly contend as we seek to confess and teach the Gospel of justification? What are some of the major assaults within the church against this article on which the church stands or falls? I will address myself to five.

1. *The first assault against the article of justification by faith is to define justification as something other than a divine forensic act of acquittal.* Let us repair to our Confessions for our definition. Apology IV (305) has this comment on Romans 5:1: "In this passage 'justify' is used in a judicial way to mean 'to absolve a guilty man and pronounce him righteous,' and to do so on account of someone else's righteousness, namely, Christ's, which is communicated to us through faith" (cf. 252).<sup>1</sup>

It is true that such statements are not definitions as such. They are passing statements touching either the meaning of *dikaioo* as Scripture uses it or the nature of justification (what happens when a person is justified). But these statements, along with every article on justification in our Confessions, indicate that the Lutheran Reformers had a very clear idea of what it meant to be justified and that they held firmly that their entire doctrine was dependent upon and centered in the fact that justification was simply a divine, gracious, forensic act of acquittal and a corresponding imputation of Christ's righteousness (the

obedience of His "doing and suffering," SD, III, 15). If this understanding of the meaning of justification, including and emphasizing as it did so consistently the imputation of Christ's righteousness, the *justitia aliena* which was *extra nos* in every sense, was held, then all problems connected with the doctrine would disappear. For the correct understanding of what justification is would exclude as incompatible all aberrant notions concerning infused grace, *fides formata*, human merit, and the like; and would solicit, as the Gospel always does, the response, the only possible response, to a verdict (or promise), the response of *sola fides*.

It is instructive to note that, as time went on, the dispute between the later Lutherans and the great Roman Catholic anti-Lutheran polemicists such as Bellermino, Stapleton, Gretzer and others centered more and more upon the meaning of justification, on what happens when a person is justified.<sup>2</sup> Elert<sup>3</sup> is correct both historically and theologically when he notes that from Luther through Chemnitz and Gerhard the fundamental issue with Roman theology was concerning the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the sinner in his justification before God.

We need not here rehearse the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification with which Luther and the Reformers contended and with which we still contend as Lutherans.<sup>4</sup> I might just mention, however, that Roman Catholic theologians have always been willing to grant that justification is in a sense a forensic act of God, although only partially so. After all, God does and will at the day of judgment, render a forensic verdict concerning every person who has ever lived, whether he be righteous or not, or how righteous he is. But this is no concession at all to the Lutheran understanding, for in classic medieval and post-Reformation Catholic theology God's judgment, or reckoning, over every man is analytical. God judges a person to be righteous because he is in himself and inherently righteous, and that because of what he is and what he has done. Under no circumstances can the foreign righteousness of Christ which He wrought independently of us and is utterly *extra nos* be imputed to a believer so as to constitute his righteousness as he stands before God. The Council of Trent makes the position very clear in Canon 10 of the sixth session, "If anyone should say that a man is justified either without the righteousness of Christ whereby He has gained merit for us or that through this merit we become righteous formally, let him be anathema."<sup>5</sup> Trent affirmed that the merits of Christ's atonement were the basis (*causa meritoria*) of our becoming righteous before God and that they are actually communicated (*communicantur*)

to us, but piecemeal only and as love is infused, never by a gracious divine reckoning. But it is the second condemnation of the canon which so utterly devastates the evangelical doctrine. For here the doctrine that the merits of Christ, His righteousness, become mine, and that my righteousness before God in its very nature (*forma*) is all that He has done for me by His living and suffering, is condemned. And this was the heart of Luther's evangelical understanding of justification.

To this day the position of Rome has not changed and the doctrine of Trent prevails, in spite of all the changes which have taken place in the Roman Catholic Church. In dialogues with Roman Catholics and in the writings of some we do, indeed, note an openness to the forensic justification and the comfort it offers as it opens up the entire Scriptures and focuses attention on the saving work of Christ; but nothing substantive can be seen. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues in this country have not even dealt with the subject. And in Europe, where the subject has been broached rather seriously,<sup>6</sup> representatives on the Roman Catholic side have not been particularly representative, and the discussions have been devoted mainly to probings and explorations into the possibility of amalgamating the Roman Catholic and evangelical doctrines or of the Roman Catholic Church accepting Article IV of the Augustana in the light of a Roman Catholic understanding of it.

But the attempt to merge and synthesize the two understandings of justification is an impossible undertaking, as well as an affront to the evangelical doctrine, and every such undertaking, whether by Lutheran or Roman Catholic has failed.<sup>7</sup> For the *justitia aliena*, which is imputed to me and which alone constitutes my righteousness before God, is exclusive and absolutely rules out anything in me (love, works, qualities, virtues — yes, even faith) which would prompt God to adjudge me righteous. And God's forensic justification which takes place in His tribunal (SD III, 32) and therefore absolutely outside (*pure extrinseca*) of man (*circa et extra hominem*)<sup>8</sup> absolutely excludes the doctrine that justification is as a whole or in any part a process taking place in man whereby he becomes progressively more righteous.

2. *The second assault against the article of justification by faith is to separate God's act of justifying the sinner through faith from its basis in Christ's atonement.* The doctrine of justification is threatened when it is not based upon and taught in connection with the universal redemption and legal propitiation wrought by Christ (Apol. IV, 40, 46, 53, 230-1, 244, 269, 291, 299, 308, 382,

387; XXI, 28; XII, 87, 108; XXIV, 19, 23, 38, 58; AC XXI, 2.). Again let me cite the Confessions (SD III, 14-15):

Therefore the righteousness which by grace is reckoned to faith or to the believers is the obedience, the passion, and the resurrection of Christ when he satisfied the law for us and paid for our sin . . . His obedience consists not only in his suffering and dying, but also in his spontaneous subjection to the law in our stead and his keeping the law in so perfect a fashion that, reckoning it to us as righteousness, God forgives us our sins, accounts us holy and righteous, and saves us forever on account of this entire obedience which, by doing and suffering, in life and death, Christ rendered for us to his heavenly father.

In this statement we note the close connection between the righteousness of faith, our justification, and the vicarious atonement of Christ. They entail each other. There can be no imputation of Christ's righteousness with which I can stand before God, if Christ did not by His atonement acquire such a righteousness. The purpose of Christ's vicarious work of obedience is that it might be imputed to me and all sinners. Therefore, to deny the vicarious atonement or to separate it from my personal justification threatens or vitiates the doctrine of justification by faith entirely.

This was done already in the Middle Ages when Abelard denied the vicarious atonement, but also by the nominalists who taught that justification was indeed a forensic act of God, but made it dependent upon His will rather than the atonement and righteousness of Christ. But the same tendency to separate God's justification of the individual sinner from its basis in Christ's atoning work really pervades all Roman Catholic theology, with a few exceptions, to this very day. Luther rails incisively against this Christless soteriology:

There are some within the new high schools who say that forgiveness of sins and justification of grace depend entirely upon the divine imputation, that is, on God's reckoning; and that it is enough that God imputes or does not impute sins to a person, for in that manner he is either justified or not justified of his sins, as Psalm 32 and Romans speak, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." If this were true, then the entire New Testament would be nothing and useless. Then Christ worked foolishly and unnecessarily when He suffered for sin. Then God Himself in all this carried out a mock battle and a tricky game [*Kauckelspiel*]. For He was able to forgive and not reckon sins without the

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suffering of Christ. And therefore a faith other than faith in Christ could bring righteousness and salvation, namely, a faith which would rely on such gracious mercy of God which makes one free of sin. Against this miserable and shocking opinion and error the holy apostles have had the custom always to refer to faith in Jesus Christ and to speak of Christ so often, that it is a wonder that there is anyone to whom such a cause is not known. Thus these learned men in the high schools know no longer what Christ is or why He is necessary, or what the Gospel and the New Testament means. They make Christ only a new Moses, a teacher, who gives them new laws and commandments by which man is to become pious and live.<sup>9</sup>

Listen to Luther again as he hammers home his crucial point:

I have often said before that faith in God is not enough; but there must also be a cost. And what is the cost? For the Jews and Turks believe too, but without means or cost. The Gospel shows us what the cost is. For the Holy Spirit teaches there that we do not have the Father without means and we cannot go to the Father without means. Here Christ teaches us that we are not lost, but have eternal life, that is, that God loved us so much that He was willing to pay the cost of thrusting His own dear Son into our misery, hell and death and having Him drink that up. That is the way we are saved.<sup>10</sup>

Such statements of Luther's could be greatly multiplied. What Christ the Redeemer did then is mine now. Everything He did as Savior and Substitute for me and the whole human race I claim as my own.

Bear in mind that Luther is not reproaching merely the gross denial of the atonement by a few remote scholastic theologians, but his own contemporaries who held to the vicarious atonement in all its Anselmic purity, but did not relate it to personal justification. And we need not look just to Unitarianism or Rome to find this tendency today; it is right within the bosom of Lutheranism wherever pastors think they are preaching the Gospel when they expound the great themes of regeneration, faith, peace with God, yes, even forgiveness of sins, and neglect to mention the work of Christ, His once-and-for-all active and passive obedience, and to proclaim that that and that alone is not only the basis, but the very essence of our righteousness before God and our eternal salvation.

And so it is, strictly speaking, not talk about forgiveness, or talk about faith, or even talk about justification by faith which is the

Gospel, but the work and righteousness of Christ (Apol. IV, 43) which we apprehend by faith, as our Confessions assert again and again (SD III, 13, 25, 30, 38, 41, 42, 43; Apol. XXVIII, 3, 19, 30, 34; X, 7; XII, 42, 61, 65, 115; XIII, 19-20; IV, 45, 43, 50, 48, 56, 55, 304, 264, 267, 272, 291, 292, 217, 270, 299, 338, 386).

In the seventeenth century the Lutheran doctrine of justification which represented the greatest breakthrough of the Gospel since apostolic times was condemned by the Roman Catholic theology for three reasons: (1) because it ruled out every human being's righteousness and good works as a factor in justification, (2) because it gave no place to sanctification or renewal in justification, and (3) because it taught that God works all holiness and righteousness in us through Christ.<sup>11</sup> True, it was granted by Thomas Stapleton that "Christ's actual righteousness (His atoning work) merits righteousness for us, that is, not only the remission of sins, but also the communication of grace by which, when it is given us, we are truly justified."<sup>12</sup> But that we are justified *formaliter* through the imputation of Christ's righteousness is categorically rejected. "Christ justifies us intrinsically by dwelling in us, not extrinsically through an imputed righteousness." Stapleton's final sally against the Lutheran doctrine reveals only his utter ignorance of what the issue is. "If Christ's righteousness is our righteousness formally, it then follows not merely that all our virtues and excellencies are in fact virtues of Christ's righteousness and that we are justified through all these, but it also follows that we cannot be reckoned righteous by any other virtue and no other virtue is able to have any bearing on our imputed righteousness." Exactly so. This is precisely what the Lutherans taught.

In the nineteenth century the greatest Jesuit controversialist of the era, Perrone, argued in exactly the same fashion.<sup>13</sup> Commenting on Romans 4:5, he says, "God accepts our faith gratuitously, and this faith as an actual disposition of ours he imputes for righteousness in view of the merit of Christ. However, He does not impute the formal righteousness of Christ to us, so that by this we are counted just."<sup>14</sup> Again the same blind refusal to see anything but a remote connection between Christ's atoning work and man's present justification before God, the same pathetic refusal to see that Christ's obedience constitutes our righteousness before God and our salvation.

At the same time in Germany, a converted Jew, Philippi, was teaching in Germany, upholding the centrality of the atonement for the doctrine of justification which had meant so much to Luther. With power and pathos he gave the final answer to the

piddling and shallow theological productions of his day by Roman Catholics and liberal Protestants:

He who takes away from me the atoning blood of the Son of God, paid as a ransom to the wrath of God, who takes away the satisfaction of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, vicariously given to the penal justice of God, who thereby takes away justification or forgiveness of sins only by faith in the merits of this my Surety and Mediator, who takes away the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, takes away Christianity altogether, so far as I am concerned. I might then just as well have adhered to the religion of my ancestors, the seed of Abraham after the flesh.<sup>15</sup>

The denial or diminution of the vicarious atonement is *eo ipso* a denial of the evangelical doctrine of justification.

3. *The doctrine of justification by faith is threatened or vitiated when any deviation whatsoever from the evangelical, confessional (and biblical) structure, conceptualization, Vorbild (pattern), or hypotyposis<sup>16</sup> of the doctrine is insinuated, defended, or taught.* What is this evangelical, apostolic “pattern of sound words” as it applies to the doctrine of justification? Let us once again repair to our Confessions for an answer (SD III, 4, 25):

The righteousness of faith is forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and the fact that we are adopted as God’s children solely on account of the obedience of Christ, which, through faith alone, is reckoned by pure grace to all true believers as righteousness, and that they are absolved from all their unrighteousness because of this obedience.

The only essential and necessary elements of justification are the *grace of God, the merit of Christ, and faith which accepts these in the promise of the Gospel*, whereby the righteousness of Christ is reckoned to us and by which we obtain the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, adoption, and the inheritance of eternal life.

(See also SD III, 9; Apol. IV, 214, 217; XII, 72, 76). On the basis of these two pre-eminent statements, which draw upon Apology IV and summarize it, we can quite easily offer a Lutheran model for the doctrine of justification by faith.

God counts the sinner righteous (i.e., forgives him and imputes Christ’s righteousness to him), by (a) grace (not works), (b) for Christ’s sake, (c) through faith (in the Gospel). Any deviation from this model buries Christ, burdens consciences, and takes away from the comfort of the Gospel, as Melancthon says throughout Apology IV — any deviation at all from any aspect of



the pattern. For the article of justification according to the above model is the chief article of Christian doctrine (Apol. IV, 2; SA II, II, 1-3), which is an organic whole, like a human body, so that a distortion or unsoundness of any part affects the whole body.<sup>17</sup>

Likening this simple model to a skeleton, let me add some flesh and blood to the body by explaining terms and mentioning implications and connections within the model and as it relates to all of Christian doctrine and practice. Justification is clearly a forensic act, but so also are the less obviously soteriological terms so often used interchangeably with justification or as part of its definition, such as forgiveness, reconciliation, propitiation, — yes, even redemption.<sup>18</sup> This is clear in our Confessions from the passages cited above and many others. The forensic theme is the dominant soteriological theme which undergirds all others; this was one of the reasons Melancthon and Luther viewed justification as the “chief article.”

Grace, according to our model, is the free and active motivating power of God which has mercy and saves man, always without works, for man is totally sinful (AC II; FC I, II) and unable to contribute anything to his salvation. Grace is always in Christ; the two are inseparable. Does God out of grace send Christ to take my sin and be my Savior? Or does Christ by His perfect obedience and His propitiatory sacrifice make God gracious toward me? Both. In the evangelical Lutheran model of justification it is both. Elert says perceptively, “God lets Christ bear the curse because He loves me, and He loves me by letting Him feel and bear the wrath provoked by me.”<sup>19</sup>

In our model we note that the forensic nature of justification and the *sola gratia* are linked together. There can be only one explanation for God behaving in a fashion contrary to an earthly judge who condemns the guilty and acquits the innocent, whose verdict is always analytical — only one reason for God absolving the sinner and imputing to him the righteousness of Christ. The reason is His grace.

But our discussion of the model has now brought us into the middle of a consideration of the work of Christ and the *propter Christum* (for every aspect of the model entails every other aspect). And as we speak of Christ and His work “for us,” we find ourselves in the midst of a consideration of faith which alone can apprehend His work.

Faith’s role in justification and its relation to its object are affirmed throughout the Apology. We receive forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake through faith (XXVII, 13). What is more certain

than this, that men obtain (*consequuntur*) the forgiveness of sins by faith (*fide*) for Christ's sake (*propter Christum*) (XXVII, 19; cf. 30; XXVIII, 7)? The Gospel promises the gracious remission of sins, and this promised mercy in Christ is apprehended through faith (XXVII, 34, 54).

On the basis of these assertions we can make several comments. The *propter Christum* is exclusive in that it is the *only* basis for God's verdict of justification; and human works are explicitly ruled out of consideration by the *propter Christum*. "We must hold to the doctrine that we obtain the forgiveness of sins by faith (*fide*) on account of Christ (*propter Christum*), not because of our works, either preceding or following (*non propter nostra opera praecedentia aut consequentia*) (XII, 116). But the work of Christ referred to in the phrase *propter Christum* is also the object of faith. Of course, the object of faith can be conceptualized differently as the mercy of God, the Gospel, or forgiveness, and we may observe this phenomenon throughout the Confessions. But all these exist only by virtue of Christ's redemptive work and His righteousness.

Finally, we must comment briefly about faith in our model. First, and most importantly, it must be considered in the article of justification as pure receptivity. Melanchthon made this point crystal clear in the statements cited above when he consistently used verbs for receptivity (*consequor, apprehendo, accipio*) in describing the place of faith in what our later Lutheran theologians called God's *modus justificationis*.<sup>20</sup> But does not Melanchthon also call justifying faith trust (Apol. IV, 48, German text; 337)? Yes, but trust very definitely in that it receives the promises or its appropriate object. And faith as receptivity has the element of trust in it (Apol. IV, 48, 227). Years later, in defending the confessional understanding of justifying faith Quenstedt calls it a *fiducialis apprehensio*.<sup>21</sup>

The Lutheran doctrine of justifying faith was rejected by Trent (Session VI, Canon 12). Chemnitz replied that the Lutherans in no way denied a *fides generalis* which believes all the articles of faith; such belief is presupposed by the believer in Christ; but in no sense does it enter into the article of justification. And the Formula of Concord scores of times makes the object of faith a teaching in its constant use of the introductory formula, "We believe, teach, and confess." But such an explanation in no sense satisfied the Roman theologians. Bellarmine calls Melanchthon's understanding of justifying faith (personal trust in God's mercy) "the seed of every heresy of our time."<sup>22</sup> This is a significant statement and, unless it represents merely another case of

Bellarminian bombast, quite perceptive in a sense. Like the scholastics, Bellarmine held that faith justified in a meritorious sense, as “faith formed by love”; and if the Lutheran understanding of faith’s merely instrumental and receptive role in justification is correct, the entire Roman Catholic dogmatic structure (whether pertaining to justification, penance, sacraments, or whatever) breaks down.

At least a century was spent by the greatest Lutheran theologians of the age, attempting to defend and clarify the Lutheran position, so crucial to the understanding of justification and communicating the Christian message. Their adversaries were the Romanists who denied that justifying faith was trust and receptivity, but taught that justifying faith was an act of man which could be considered a good work (formed by love); its object was the entire Christian dogma (*fides dogmatica*, Bellarmine). The Arminians too opposed the Lutheran doctrine by making faith (which they granted was trust) a work (*actus*) of man. Like the Romanists they had a synergistic notion of how man came to faith. And, of course, there were the Socinians, who held to an acceptilation theory of the atonement and viewed faith (not in Christ’s righteousness but in God’s mercy apart from Christ’s atonement) as a meritorious work of man. These deviations from the evangelical model of justification are in force today, although in somewhat less gross form. And we have all encountered them.

The Lutherans of the post-Reformation period and up to the present time have countered these aberrations in three ways. First, following Article II of the Formula of Concord, they show that man’s receiving the grace of God in faith is itself a gift of grace, and that the absolution that forgives works the very faith to receive the forgiveness (Apol. XII, 39, *passim*).<sup>23</sup> Secondly, they point out continually that faith’s role in justification is purely instrumental, that faith is an *organon leptikon*, like the empty hand of a beggar receiving a gift,<sup>24</sup> that it alone (*sola fide*) is the appropriate vehicle to receive reconciliation, forgiveness, Christ and His merits (SD III, 30-38; Apol. IV, 163; AC XX, 28). Thirdly, they show that justification is *per fidem*, not *propter fidem*, by pointing out that faith justifies by virtue of its object, as Melancthon used to say (Apol. IV, 56, 338, 227; SD III, 13), and that this is really only a different way of saying, “We are accounted righteous before God for Christ’s sake through faith” (Apol. IV, 214).<sup>25</sup>

And so we see that Lutherans with a good deal of consistency

have conscientiously adhered to the biblical and confessional form of sound words in respect to justification — God justifies the sinner by grace for Christ's sake through faith. But we can observe through the study of history and our own times that the assaults against this pattern, along with their disastrous consequences, never cease.

4. *The fourth assault against the doctrine of justification is to deny its reality, or, what is the same thing, to define it merely formally.* Let me again introduce the discussion of this point with citations from the Apology (IV, 72, 78, 117):

And "to be justified" means to make unrighteous men righteous (*ex iniustus iustos effici*) or to regenerate them, as well as to be pronounced or accounted righteous. For Scripture speaks both ways. Therefore we want to show first that faith alone makes (*efficiat*) a righteous man out of an unrighteous one, that is, that it receives the forgiveness of sins.

Therefore we are justified by faith alone (*sola fide*), justification being understood as making (*effici*) an unrighteous man righteous or regenerating him.

What we have shown thus far, on the basis of the Scriptures and arguments derived from the Scriptures, was to make clear that by faith alone we receive the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, and by faith alone are justified, that is, out of unrighteous we are made (*efficiamur*) righteous men and are regenerated.

Now what are we to make of these passages which seem to be defining justification in non-forensic terms? The answer is not that Melancthon is sloppy at this point, for on just this issue he would be meticulously careful. Nor in this discussion in 1531 can it be conjectured that he is acting politically and softpedaling an issue lest he antagonize the Romanists. The fundamental issue in the controversy was whether justification was a forensic act, and Melancthon has made his position crystal clear (IV, 252, 305, *passim*) throughout the Apology. No, Melancthon is deliberately using realistic terminology as he defines justification, terminology which could well have been used by his opponents; but he does so not to goad them, but to make clear that man is really made righteous — he becomes righteous when God justifies and imputes Christ's righteousness to him. The term *efficio* consistently used by Melancthon in the above contexts unquestionably has a forensic connotation. Melancthon is saying, prior to the Osiandrian error, prior to Trent and its caricature of the Lutheran doctrine of justification as a kind of pious fiction, that the sinner's justification before God is no fiction, but a real

gracious reckoning by God whereby man actually becomes righteous,<sup>26</sup> but by imputation. This is wholly in accord with Melanchthon's "realist ontology" (making no reference to scholastic or to post-Idealistic realism), which means that reality underlies theological assertions about God (*wahrhaftiglich ist Gott*, AC I, 2), sin (*vere peccatum*, AC II, 2), Christ (*vere Deus, vere homo, vere resurrexit*, AC III, 2,4.), and Christ's body and blood in the communion (*vere adsint*, AC X, 1). One cannot over-emphasize the importance of this ontology to Luther and Melanchthon; without it all Christianity has no substance, but is a great fiction.

At this elemental point Lutheran theologians since the eighteenth century have attacked the evangelical doctrine of justification. The great Liberal theologian, Albrecht Ritschl, did so in the nineteenth century when he distinguished between religious judgments of value (*Werturteil*) and judgments of being (*Seinurteil*) and when he denied the vicarious atonement,<sup>27</sup> for obviously if there is no real satisfaction made for sins and no real righteousness to be imputed, there can be no justification at all in the realistic Lutheran sense. In our day we see the same rejection of the reality of justification by Rudolf Bultmann as outlined in his notorious programmatic essay<sup>28</sup> espousing the radical demythologization of the New Testament theology. Again we can only conclude that, if the vicarious atonement is a myth, then any real transferral or imputation of the results of the atonement in a divine forensic act of justification is impossible. Paul Tillich too affirms an ontology of his own<sup>29</sup> in which *ex hypothesi* the reality of a divine verdict of acquittal is both impossible and unnecessary.

Is any such fundamental assault being waged against the doctrine of justification in Lutheran circles today? I think so. This is, in effect, what Robert Jenson is doing in his recent popular book, *Lutheranism*, written in collaboration with Erik W. Gritsch.<sup>30</sup> To Jenson justification is not a "content item" of the Gospel, along with other content items (p. 43). Dogma, which (I take it) teaches what justification is, is "not a particular proposed content of the church's proclamation, along with other contents. It is rather a metalinguistic stipulation of what *kind* of talking — about whatever contents — can properly be the proclamation and word of the church." Thus, one "does gospel." Jenson rejects the "whole Western ontological tradition," which, as far as I can see, boils down to a repudiation of the view that reality is made up of "substances" with "attributes" (p. 65). "This ontology is inconsistent with the gospel as understood by the Reformers," Jenson

confidently asserts. In the place of this outmoded ontology, Jenson substitutes what I would call his own ontology of "communication." He says that a person has his identity by communication (p. 66); thus justification is not a real, divine forensic act ("Lutherans created the doctrine of justification 'in the heavenly court,' " p. 67) whereby I become forgiven and really righteous before God, but a (divine) "communication" which makes me what I am and becomes the "locus" for "God's reality" for me. What reality means in this context is anyone's guess, but probably it has nothing to do with God's existence, but refers to His gracious presence, or to my existential awareness of that presence which is "real" only in communication. So much for Jenson's position.

Now, if asked, I suppose Jenson would reply that in some sense our justification by God is real, real in communication and dependent upon the absolutely "unconditional promise" (which he never defines — at least, not in Western ontological terms so that the rest of us can understand him). But does my justification rest upon reality, the reality of the *propter Christum*, which is *extra et ante fidem* or any "communication"? And is the verdict of justification itself real, declared *coram tribunali divino*, and not merely real in "communication"? Jenson's reply to these questions, although never explicitly given, is clearly "no."

Now I would be the last to accuse Prof. Jenson of building his entire theology of justification upon some quasi-idealistic philosophy, or upon an ontology of relationship or process which makes cognitive theological assertions unnecessary. But he is certainly applying his orthodox and tradition terminology (e.g., "unconditional promise," faith as "hearing," etc.) to an entirely different *Vorbild*, or pattern, than that of the Lutheran Confessions, something like putting new wine into old bottles. After all, the old *Vorbild*, or doctrinal model, affirmed that the subject of theology, the living God and His actions, was ontologically antecedent to any conceptualization of Him, or pattern of theology. In fact, any pattern of theology must conform to what God is like in Himself and to what He has done according to His own revelation of Himself. According to this classic Christian model, God is real, the creator and sustainer of all that exists; He is really Triune (an immanent, not just an economic Trinity); the first Adam really fell and his sin was really imputed to the whole human race; the Son of God really became incarnate; He really suffered and died and rose again; the atonement is real; heaven is real; hell is real; forgiveness and justification are real, not just metaphors for something else. Unless all this is included in our theological *Vorbild*, there is nothing left of our Christianity and

our Gospel, except words, empty words, impotent words, words without referents and without meaning, like tinsel on a discarded Christmas tree, or bridgework on a corpse.

Again let me say I am not accusing Prof. Jenson of attempting a brilliant and sinister *coup de grace* whereby he has deftly and unobtrusively laid to rest outmoded thought-forms and ontologies and offered a whole new *Vorbild* for theologizing, and thus negated the Lutheran doctrine of justification by negating its reality. I am not quite sure I understand him well enough to say that. Perhaps no one does. Perhaps no one can. I am simply suspicious of theologians — not of philosophers or scientists, who have their own stock in trade — but of theologians, whose only source of theology is allegedly the divinely revealed Scriptures, who make light of ontology, especially when it happens to be the ontology of Western (and Eastern) Christianity and of the Lutheran Confessions.

5. *The fifth assault against the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith is to make faith a condition for justification.* The Formula emphatically excludes such a view (SD III, 43; cf. SD III, 13; Apol. IV, 5y, 338):

Faith justifies solely for this reason and on this account, that as a means and instrument it embraces God's grace and the merit of Christ in the promise of the Gospel.

I could have discussed the aberration of conditioning justification on faith under thesis 3, but I think it deserves special attention because it has been such an insidious and persistent force in the church since the Reformation, also among Lutherans. Crassly, of course, historic Roman and Arminian theology made faith as a work and virtue of man a condition for fellowship with God and for salvation. But in a more subtle form the tendency to condition justification on faith is found in every form of synergism and pietism and religious emotionalism, in ideologies which stress inwardness and subjectivity, in Christian Existentialism and Crisis Theology (Emil Brunner), all protestations of adherence to the *sola gratia* notwithstanding. We find the tendency wherever there is a preoccupation with faith as such or an inordinate interest in the phenomenology of faith, rather than in the object of faith, Christ and His atoning work, and in the Gospel. For my faith is not the Gospel or the content of the Gospel, but rather embraces and applies the Gospel. Faith is never directed toward itself. Soren Kierkegaard made faith a condition for justification, not by teaching such an aberration — he was too good a theologian for that — but by an emphasis, by

stressing always the *fides heroica*, the *fides activa* in the Christian life, in answer to the question "How can I become a Christian?" rather than stressing the *fides passiva* which does nothing, but is pure receptivity.

This tendency to make justification dependent upon faith has a long and sorry history in the Lutheran church, which in its Confessions hints at no such thing. The tendency has its origin in synergism (Calixtus, Musaeus) and pietism (Baier, Hollaz). To be sure the monergism of divine grace was consistently affirmed by these theologians along with the conditionality of faith, but the result was confusion and their theology became synergistic all the same. The position taken by Baier is particularly offensive.<sup>31</sup> He asserts, "Now also faith in Christ is rightly considered to be a cause of salvation." How is this to be understood? Baier explains that he is not speaking of faith as an *actus* or quality in man, but only as directed toward Christ. Nor is he implying that faith is any kind of efficient or formal cause. "But its causality," he says, "consists in this, that it presents to God the merit of Christ as something which has been apprehended by man, and in this way faith moves God to grant out of grace salvation to that man. And so faith is rightly referred to as a moving cause, because it moves God, not by its own merit, but by the dignity of the merit of Christ. Thus in distinction from the merit of Christ, faith can be called a *causa impulsiva minus principalis* of salvation." Baier thinks he has safeguarded himself by his reference to the object of faith. And, of course, we must realize that his use of the term cause (*causa*) is not freighted with our present day understanding, but meant only "factor," or "role." But, nevertheless, his misleading, ill-conceived notion of faith as a moving cause of salvation cannot fail to detract from the objective *causa meritoria* of justification, namely, the obedience of Christ, which, along with the grace of God, later called the *causa impulsiva externa* of justification,<sup>32</sup> was the only basis or cause mentioned by Melancthon in the Apology. Baier's view cannot fail, therefore, to lead to synergism and all kinds of subjectivistic aberrations, which we see later in Hollaz and the pietists.<sup>33</sup> Can you imagine Luther speaking in such a cold way? Listen to him as he speaks of faith's role in a person's salvation:

Faith holds out the hand and the sack and just lets the good be done to it. For as God is the giver who bestows such things in His love, we are the receivers who receive the gift through faith which does nothing. For it is not our doing and cannot be merited by our work. It has already been granted and given. You need only open your mouth, or rather, your heart, and keep still and let yourself be filled.<sup>34</sup>



Baier's view of faith as a moving cause of justification is really quite inconceivable and self-contradictory. To revert to the well worn Lutheran analogy, how could the empty hand of the beggar, viewed as that which receives a priceless gift, move the benefactor to bestow the gift?

But what about the biblical language which often says that if one believes, God will save, or justify, him (e.g. Rom. 10:9; 4:24). It is, of course, an undeniable fact that Scripture speaks in such a way, as our pietistic and synergistic friends never cease to remind us. How do we reply to this? We must affirm emphatically that, when the Scriptures or our Confessions speak in such a fashion, they are speaking of faith as an ordinate condition, which is really no condition at all in the usual sense. Commenting on Romans 3:22, Sebastian Schmidt concedes that faith may be called a condition, but only in the sense of a *mode* according to which God Himself saves and justifies us, namely, through faith.<sup>35</sup> Gerhard offers us more aid as we combat the synergists and pietists on this sensitive issue: "The term 'if' is either etiological or syllogistic; that is, it designates either cause or consequence. In the preaching of the Law, 'if you do this, you shall live,' the term 'if' is etiological, inasmuch as obedience is the cause on account of which eternal life is given to those who obey the Law. But in the Gospel promises, 'if you believe, you will be saved,' the term 'if' is syllogistic, inasmuch as it relates to the mode whereby God applies the divine promises, and this is through faith alone."<sup>36</sup>

It is difficult to understand how one can make faith a condition of justification (in the causal sense), without teaching that justification is *propter fidem* or at least *post fidem*, rather than *per fidem*. But where do the Scriptures or our Confessions ever say that faith creates, causes, occasions, precedes or conditions God's gracious justification? Faith does not create as it receives; it receives what is already a reality. It is, in fact, the word of forgiveness, already acquired and objectively offered and imparted, that creates faith. Melancthon (Apol. XII, 42) says, "Faith is conceived and confirmed through absolution, through the hearing of the Gospel."

The danger and the tragedy of making faith a condition for justification is that one begins to look for assurance of salvation and grace, not in the objective atonement and righteousness of Christ, but in the quality or strength of one's faith, as if justifying faith is something other than pure trust and receptivity. C.F.W. Walther has a most enlightening and helpful chapter on the danger of making faith a condition for justification.<sup>37</sup> Walther

points out that to make justification depend upon faith ultimately robs a poor sinner of comfort, for then his faith becomes, not a result of the Gospel's powerful working, but a part of the Gospel itself. Walther shows how foolish it is to go this route by means of many telling examples. Let me use one of my own. Let us say that you and I are engaging in a Kennedy evangelism program and we are admitted to the home of an old unchurched man who, as far as we know, is unconverted. I witness to him, telling him of the boundless grace of God toward all sinners, grace which sent His own Son into the flesh to be our Savior and Substitute, grace which sent Him to the cross to pay for the sins of us all, grace to forgive us totally and save us forever. The man responds with utter joy. "What a wonderful message," he says, "what a wonderful, comforting message for a poor old sinner." But you interject, "Wait a minute, sir, you have to believe this message! Everything my friend here has said is of no value to you unless you believe it." How do you react to this little scenario? Do you think your interjection helped the old man? Is not what you did rather foolish and dangerous? It is like taking in a beautiful sunset on my front porch and being told that somehow my appreciation of it conditioned it, like the *esse est percipi* of the subjective Idealists. But we Lutherans, following Apology IV, the most magnificent treatise ever written on the subject of justification by faith, are realists, and our faith rests on the realities of the Gospel of justification.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. SD III, 9: "Concerning the righteousness of faith before God we believe, teach, and confess unanimously, in accord with the summary formulation of our Christian faith and confession described above, that a poor sinner is *justified before God (that is, he is absolved and declared utterly free from all his sins, and from the verdict of well deserved damnation, and is adopted as a child of God and an heir of eternal life) without any merit or worthiness on our part, and without any preceding, present, or subsequent works, by sheer grace, solely through the merit of the total obedience, the bitter passion, the death, and the resurrection of Christ, our Lord, whose obedience is reckoned to us as righteousness*" (cf. 4, 17).
2. The most extensive review of the debate is in John Gerhard, *Loci Theologici* (Tuebingen, 1766), VII, 257ff., where he polemicizes against Andradius, Bellarmine, and others who taught that justification was both the imputed righteousness and the inherent righteousness of the Christian's renewal. See also Chemnitz, *op. cit.*, 168ff.
3. *The Structure of Lutheranism*, tr. Walter A. Hanson (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), p. 109.
4. Ad. Tanqueray, *Brevior Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae* (Paris: Typis Societas Sancti Joannis Evang. Desclie, 1946), p. 498, *passim*. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, tr. Patrick Lynch (St. Louis: Herder, 1954).

5. See Martin Chemnitz, *Examen Concilii Tridentini* (Berlin, 1861), p. 146.
6. George Forell and James F. McCue, editors, *Confessing the Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981). Joseph Burgess, ed., *The Role of the Augsburg Confession: Catholic and Lutheran Views* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).
7. Hans Kung, *Justification, the Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*, tr. by Thomas Collins, Edmond E. Tolk, and David Granskou (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964). See particularly Karl Barth's letter to the author, pp. xix-xxii. See also Robert Scharlemann, *Thomas Aquinas and John Gerhard* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).
8. When the Lutheran Fathers insistently spoke of justification taking place *in foro Dei* or *coram tribunali judicis supremi* (cf. John Quenstedt, *Systema* [Leipzig, 1702], P.III, C.8, S.1, Th.16 [II, 754]; *ibid.* S.2, Q.6, Ekth.6 [II, 789]; *passim.*), they did so not to establish a locus for justification in heaven and not on earth, but to retain the forensic image against the idea of an *actus medicinalis* or *physicus* which can only be a gradual process in man whereby he becomes more and more just. Cf. Luther WA 56, 158.
9. WA 10<sup>1</sup>, 469
10. WA 10<sup>3</sup>, 161-2.
11. Thomas Stapleton, *Opera* (Paris, 1620), II, 215ff.
12. *Ibid.* 221.
13. *Praelectiones Theologicae*, 27 ed. (Regensberg: 1856), II, 235.
14. Later he says, commenting on Rom. 5:19, "Per unius obedientiam justi constituentur multi *meritorie*, C. *formaliter*, N."
15. Quoted in Albrecht Ritschl, *The Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (Clifton, N.J.: Reference Book Publishers, 1966), I, 551.
16. *Begriff und Form; forma et quasi typus* (SD Rule and Norm, 1). *Summa und Vorbild der Lehre; compendiarium hypotyposei seu forma sanae doctrinae* (SD Rule and Norm, 9), *Form der Lehre; compendiarium hypotyposei sanae doctrinae. Begriff, Vorbild, form and hypotyposeis* (2 Tim. 1:13) might best be rendered by "pattern" or "model." The reference is not to the exact wording of the doctrine, which is always drawn from the words of Scripture, but to the proper conceptualization of it, based on Scripture.
17. How this happens is demonstrated throughout Apology IV and SA II. See Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), I, 138-9, for a discussion of Luther's and others' view of Christian doctrine as *una copulativa*. See also Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I, 91.
18. See Sebastian Schmidt, *Commentarius in epistolam D. Pauli ad Romanos* (Hamburg, 1704), pp. 254ff., for an excellent commentary on Rom. 3:23-26 which illustrates this point well.
19. It is interesting that as much as our Confessions speak of the universal grace and love of God — and the later dogmaticians emphasize this theme even more because of the Calvinistic menace — they stress with equal emphasis Christ as "propitiator," as the one who placates God's wrath against us and makes God gracious and disposed to justify us. This is clearly the basic model for Christ's work in the Apology (see above, p. 4). This was also a common theme of Luther (WA 10<sup>3</sup>, 136-7): "To believe in the resurrection of Christ is nothing else than to believe that we have a Propitiator before God, and that Christ makes God into a kind and merciful Father. From birth and from his own reason man has nothing but sin and corruption by which he deserves God's wrath. For God is an everlasting righteousness and bright-

ness who by His nature hates sin. Therefore men and God are always enemies and cannot be friends and agree. For this reason Christ became man and took our sin on Himself and the Father's wrath, and drowned them both in Himself that He might reconcile us to the Father . . . Whatever we receive from God must be got and secured through this Christ who has made Him a gracious Father for us. Christ is our support and our protection under which we hide like little chicks under the wings of the hen. Only through Him may we pray to God and be heard. Only through Him do we receive favor and grace from the Father. For He has made satisfaction for our sins and turned an angry judge into a kind and merciful God."

20. See Sebastian Schmidt, *ibid.*, p. 190ff. Cf. Chemnitz, *op. cit.*, p. 146ff.
21. *Systema*, P.III, C.9, S.1, Th.6, Nota 2 (II, 836).
22. Robert Bellarmine, *De controversiis adversus hujus temporis haereticos* (Paris, 1583), cap.IV de justificatione (III, 722).
23. Jacob Heerbrand, *Disputatio de gratia* (Tuebingen, 1572), p. 15. "Faith is not a human persuasion, which some falsely ascribe to us, a persuasion which would in any case fail. No, it is a work of God and gift of the Holy Spirit in us. We are not justified by faith insofar as it is a quality in us, as once again the enemies of God's grace, the neo-Pelagians, falsely accuse us of teaching that the ungodly are justified when they have a certain idea (or rather dream) that they are righteous. No, we are justified by faith insofar as it apprehends Christ who was made righteousness for us by God, sanctification and redemption, and insofar as faith applies Christ's merit to itself." Cf. also Jacob Andreae, *Disputatio de evangelio* (Tuebingen, 1572), p. 3.
24. Quenstedt, *Systema*, P.III, C.8, S.2, Q.6 *Bebaiosis* I (II, 791): "To accept, to apprehend, or rather to receive something, these on the part of the one who receives are purely instrumental actions." Quenstedt goes on to list, all the biblical terms for faith which denote receptivity, and he traces Paul's consistent use of the instrumental genitive or dative when speaking of justification by faith. George Calanus (*Fasciculus dissertationum theologiarum pio libro concordiae* [Abo, 1660] p. clv) has a very extended, typical discussion of this kind, but really such is standard for all Lutheran teachers from the time of the Formula of Concord. See also Olav Odhelius, *Disputationum homologeticarum in Augustanam Confessionem primasexta* (Uppsala, 1653), p. 227: "Now since there is no other medium in man through which righteousness and salvation are apprehended except faith, there is every reason in the world to say that we are justified by faith alone."
25. Odhelius, *ibid.*, p. 226: "This faith does not justify absolutely as a quality in us, nor by its own power as our action, nor by any capacity it has to choose; but only organically and relatively insofar as it has to do with its object, God in Christ, and as it embraces the grace of God and the atonement of Christ." Cf. Quenstedt, *Systema*, P.III, C.8, S.2, Q.6, Ek.9 (II, 789) and Obj. dialysis I (II, 793). Probably the most adamant debate between Roman Catholics and Arminians, on the one hand, and Lutherans, on the other, centered in just this issue, whether faith justified by virtue of its object only or whether there is some aspect to his faith which prompts God to look favorably upon the believer. The debate centered upon the right understanding of Rom. 4:5 ("His faith is counted for righteousness.") as the crucial passage in determining how faith justifies (Quenstedt, *ibid.* P.III, C.8, S.1, Th.13, Nota 2 [II, 749]). The Arminian Episcopius maintained that faith in us as such is counted by God for righteousness, not the object of faith, according to Paul. Bellarmine held that the apostle in this context had *fides formata* in mind.

And the great Catholic exegete, Estius, held that the faith Paul referred to was *fides ut opus spectata*. Quenstedt's response is entirely faithful to the Lutheran model of justification by faith and clarifies the issue as it was, and is, debated. He says, "In this passage faith does not denote merely an instrument which apprehends something, nor does it merely denote metonymically the thing that is imputed, namely, the righteousness of Christ; but here faith must be viewed sympectically and according to its intimate connection with its object as a complex term signifying the righteousness of Christ insofar as it is embraced and received by true faith. In this verse faith is not to be taken as pointing to its activity, but as pointing to its relationship with its object, that is, it is not to be understood as some work of ours, for here expressly and also in other passages faith is opposed to good works. Neither can faith be understood here in some qualitative sense as a quality or virtue, as if in the judgment of God it is thought to be in and through itself so great that God pronounced sinful man to be righteous on account of it. No, faith must be taken here in a *relative* sense insofar as it looks to Christ, who is our righteousness before God and apprehends His merits, or as it is faith in His blood (Rom. 3:25). Nor is this faith righteousness itself as Bellarmine dreams, but it is imputed *for righteousness*, that is to say, faith, or one's trusting *apodoche*, is accepting and receiving Christ and His righteousness as one's own. This faith presupposes an explicit knowledge of its object who justifies us and an assent on our part which is not just general but personal. It is this faith which is imputed to us for righteousness. Or, to say the same thing, God who pronounces forgiveness from the tribunal of His grace reckons the righteousness of Christ apprehended by true faith to the one who believes as his very own righteousness, just as though the believer himself had established his own righteousness as availing before God. And so the imputation of the righteousness of Christ and the imputation of faith for righteousness are one and the same. For faith is envisaged as justifying not by its own dignity, but by the dignity of its object, not by reason of itself, its own virtue or action or because it is our believing, but by reason of its object, that is, Christ whom it apprehends. In this sense faith is imputed by God's reckoning to us for righteousness, that is, reckoned as our own righteousness and obedience as though we had done it ourselves."

26. That Melanchthon, and Luther who used much bolder terms (*justitia infusa* [WA II, 145ff.]), employed such concrete, realistic terms did not seem to impress the Roman theologians at all. They still in Trent and after Chemnitz' *Examen Concilii Tridentini* represented the Lutheran idea of justification as merely putative and therefore unreal. The final answer to this caricature which should have clarified the Lutheran position completely and concluded the matter, but did not, is given by Quenstedt. It is worth citing a few of his statements. Concerning the reality of the imputation of Christ's righteousness he says (*Systema*, P.III, C.8, P.2, Q.5, Observ. 12 [II, 777]), "The righteousness of Christ is not our formal righteousness nor a righteousness that inheres in us subjectively, but is our real (*realis*) and sufficient righteousness by imputation. We do not through this righteousness become righteous by a righteousness inhering in us, but through the imputation of this righteousness we are formally justified in such a way that without it there is not substance to our righteousness before God. From this fact that the righteousness of God is extrinsic to us we conclude that it does not dwell in us formally and intrinsically. And yet it does not follow therefore that righteousness cannot be reckoned to us extrinsically and objectively. For certainly our sins were extrinsic to Christ,

and yet they could be imputed for punishment and guilt to Him and be reckoned to Him." (Cf. *ibid.* Observ. 10, 10). Quenstedt insists that the righteousness imputed to us is real and that we are really righteous by it being imputed to us (*Systema*, P.III, C.8, S.2, Obj. dial. 1 [II, 783]): "We must distinguish between a mere putative righteousness which denies the reality of the righteousness and the imputed righteousness which can be reckoned to others. The righteousness of Christ which has been reckoned to us is in itself neither putative nor fictitious, but absolutely real, corresponding exactly to God's mind and will expressed in the Law, nor as a reckoning is it a mere act of imputing something, but it is an absolutely real judgment of God which is rendered from the throne of grace through the Gospel in respect to the sinner who believes in Christ." Quenstedt is so bent on maintaining the reality of our justification, that, like Melancthon, he includes this matter in his very definition of justification (*Systema*, P.III, C.8, S.1, Th.3, Nota [II, 738]): "The word 'justify' in the Scriptures never signifies to infuse a quality of righteousness into someone, but denotes nothing else than to account a person righteous judically, or to make one righteous (*justum facere*) by an act totally extrinsic to man, an act extrinsically designating its own subject." Even in his definition of justification as a forensic act he speaks of God *making* the sinner righteous. Why? To nail down the reality of the divine action and the effect upon man, that he *is* righteous.

27. *The Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (Clifton, N.J.: Reference Book Publishers, 1966), I,9; III, 474.
28. "New Testament Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, tr. Reginald H. Fuller (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), pp. 1-44.
29. *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).
30. Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson, *Lutheranism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 42-44, 64-67, 101-109.
31. John William Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, ed. C.F.W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1879), I, 41.
32. Quenstedt, *Systema*, P.III, C.8, S.1, Ekthesis 7 (II, 741).
33. What Baier does here is really a far cry from Quenstedt's procedure, which was also unwise, in making faith a *causa media*, or organic cause, of justification, and attempted to clarify faith's instrumental role in an individual's justification as an *organon leptikon* (*ibid.*, Th. 10, Nota 1 and 2 [II, 742-3]). And Quenstedt (Th. 11) safeguards himself from such consequences being drawn from his calling faith a cause of justification by saying, "The causality of faith in the act of justification is nothing other than organic in that it justifies simply by apprehending the merits of Christ. The reason for its causality, its justifying role, has to do with faith not it itself and insofar as it is an apprehension of something and thus our act which has some kind of dignity, small or great, either in itself and by its own nature, or because it is highly pleasing and acceptable to God. No, the reason for the causality of faith consists only in the justifying object which is apprehended." The error of Baier can be traced back beyond Quenstedt to Gerhard, who in his long and excellent study on justification by faith has a section entitled "On the effect of faith which is justification" (*de effectu fidei qui est justificatio*). The actual discussion is inoffensive and never insinuates that faith is a moving cause of justification. But the seed was sown. There are troubles in the causal method brought into Lutheran dogmatics by Gerhard. C.F.W. Walther (*The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, tr.

W.H.T. Dau [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929], p. 274) calls it a "dangerous method." In this case it certainly caused a lot of trouble and paved the way for synergism. And synergism, regardless of one's good intentions, is still synergism.

34. WA<sup>2</sup> XI, 1104.

35. *Op. cit.*, p. 326. Earlier he says (p. 254), "The apostle has pointed out the true mode of justification in Rom. 3:21-2, not through the Law or our own righteousness, but through the righteousness of God appropriated by faith. This universal mode of justification is for all men, provided that (*modo*) they believe."

36. *Loci Theologici*, VII, 117.

37. *Op. cit.*, chapter 25.