

## **Debate Over Justification by Faith: Evangelicals and Catholics**

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### **1. Biblical Understanding of Justification by Faith**

Paul says “they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24, RSV), for “a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Rom 3:28 RSV), with even faith a gift (Rom 10:17). Humans are “justified by his blood” (Rom 5:9, ESV). Calvary was the “one act of righteousness” which “leads to justification and life for all men” (Rom 5:18b, ESV). “God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Justification is found in Christ, and is received by faith. This has nothing to do with Christ’s faithfulness in the covenant which continues human membership in the covenant, as proposed by “New Perspectives on Paul” scholarship. Justification explains how one gets in (not how one stays in) the covenant. Justification is an entry level reality, having to do with how one is saved.

The word justify in Hebrew (*hitsdiq*) and Greek (*dikaioun*) “never refer to the infusion of righteousness, that is the transformation of someone from being ungodly to being virtuous.” Justification is the same throughout humans’ history, in old and new covenant periods, because it is about the one eternal gospel (Rev 14:6). Hence “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned (*elogisth*) to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:3, RSV), or “counted” to him (ESV). The word “reckoned” or “counted” is mentioned nine times in the chapter. This is a forensic term. It is about the great exchange that takes place in justification, humans become members of the covenant on the basis of Christ substitutionary death for all humans.

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The benefits of Christ's death are available from the beginning of sin, for "the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 13:8b); "scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In thee shall all nations be blessed.'" (Gal 3:8 RSV). For God chose us in Christ from before the foundation of the world (Ephes 1:4). "The Lord Our Righteousness" (Jer 23:6) is already a focus in the old covenant. That's why David said, "God counts (*logizetai*) righteousness apart from works" (Rom 4:6). Here is a forensic statement, God declaring someone to be righteous.

At a deeper level, Christ was "delivered up for our transgressions and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25, ESV). There is a post-Calvary dimension to God's saving work that is often overlooked. Christ (Rom 8:34) and the Holy Spirit (Rom 8: 26, 27) both intercede in heaven for believers. The Book of Hebrews is like a fifth Gospel, and focuses on Christ post-ascension ministry which is just as important as His ministry on earth (the subject of the four Gospels). If Christians had focused on all that Christ and the Holy Spirit are doing for us in heaven's sanctuary, believers would not have been tempted to look to Mary and saints in intercessory work for which they have no qualifications. For there is only "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all men" (1 Tim 2:5, 6a). Christ alone is qualified to intercede on the basis of His death (Heb 8:3; 9:15, 25-28; 10:12).

Just as Adam's sin is imputed to all humans, so Christ's death deals with sin and His righteousness is imputed to all who will receive justification. Christ's righteousness imputed makes unnecessary any infusion through sacraments or works to merit righteousness. Reckoned righteousness finds the recipient always dependent on the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ. By contrast, infusion of righteousness focuses on inherent righteousness and works that follow to merit more righteousness. Personal performance and the performance of other humans (Mary and saints) takes the place of sole dependence on Christ crucified, resurrected, and interceding before the Father at heaven's throne. For only Christ Jesus has become "our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30).

## 2. History

During the first 350 years of the Christian era the doctrine of justification was not an issue like the Christological and Trinitarian debates. Nevertheless seeds were sown in those formative years that bore fruit in the medieval period. For example, just as impassibility (*apatheia*) of God was a philosophical view that questioned God's compassion, so ἀντεξουσία (self-power) was a philosophical term introducing human autonomy to the doctrine of justification (cf. Latin *liberum arbitrium*). Also the Greek word *meromai* (to receive one's share) was translated by the Latin word *meritum* (to be worthy of something) which brought the concept of "merit" into medieval theology, effecting the biblical doctrine of justification. So alien philosophical ideas distorted the biblical meaning of justification, contributing to the Roman concept of justification.

### Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

God's call to Augustine to be clothed by Jesus Christ converted him, and influenced his understanding of justification by faith. From Romans 3:20 he knew that justification doesn't come through the law.<sup>1</sup> Rather justification is God's gift through the Holy Spirit. So one is "justified freely by His grace" so grace may "heal" the will to enable one to keep the law.<sup>2</sup> Throughout his writings Augustine glories in God's grace, and justification is by grace, but is isn't a "declared justification" but an "internal justification" for in the context of justification Augustine says God "works in His saints."<sup>3</sup> Augustine asks "For what else does the phrase 'being justified' signify than 'being made righteous'—by Him, of course, who justifies the ungodly man, that he may become a godly one instead?<sup>4</sup> Augustine explains what "justifieth the ungodly" means—"the ungodly maketh pious."<sup>5</sup> "For when the ungodly is justified, from ungodly he is made."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *On The Spirit and The Letter*, NPNF First Series 5:88 (14, 15).

<sup>2</sup> *On The Spirit and The Letter*, 89 (15).

<sup>3</sup> *On The Spirit and The Letter*, 113 (65).

<sup>4</sup> *On The Spirit and The Letter*, 102 (45).

<sup>5</sup> *On The Gospel of St. John* NPNF First Series 7:21 (3. 9).

<sup>6</sup> *On the Psalms*, NPNF First Series 8: 22 (Psa 7. 5).

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Augustine tells us that he didn't know Hebrew,<sup>7</sup> and he disliked the difficulty of learning Greek.<sup>8</sup> He was therefore limited to the Latin word *justifico*. The etymology of the Latin *justifico* means to “make righteous” rather than to “declare righteous.”<sup>9</sup> As David Wright states, “There is general agreement that he took it to mean ‘to make righteous’ and held to this throughout his writing career.”<sup>10</sup>

### Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

Martin Luther called the medieval church the “Aristotelian church” for it depended on Aristotle more than on Scripture.<sup>11</sup> Sacramental theology (systematized during 1050-1240) linked justification with the sacraments.<sup>12</sup> This alleges that continuous justification is mediated through the church and its sacraments. In the late 12<sup>th</sup> century the idea of merit for works of continuous justification entered Roman theology.<sup>13</sup> There were five main schools of thought on justification in the late medieval period, and hence among Catholic thinkers (including early Dominican, early and later Franciscan, and medieval Augustinian), with considerable diversity which need not detain us.<sup>14</sup> What is important is the unanimous view of medieval theology that justification is both an act and a process in which the status and nature of humans are altered.<sup>15</sup>

*The Summa Theologica*<sup>16</sup> is the theological system of Thomas Aquinas. “This brilliant synthesis of Christian thought has had a

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<sup>7</sup> *The Confessions of Augustine*, 164 (11.3. 5).

<sup>8</sup> *The Confessions of Augustine*, 51, 52 (1. 14. 23).

<sup>9</sup> H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, Joseph A. Burgess, *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1985), 18.

<sup>10</sup> David F. Wright, “Justification in Augustine,” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challengers*. ed. Bruce I. McCormack, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 56.

<sup>11</sup> Luther rightly speaks of Aquinas's view of the Eucharist as dependent on Aristotle, not on Scripture, and calls the medieval church the “Aristotelian church.” in the “Babylonian Captivity,” *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1973, 1<sup>st</sup> 1960), 144.

<sup>12</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of Justification; from 1500 to the Present Day* (London: Cambridge, 1992), 1: 91.

<sup>13</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 1: 100-102; see also 109-119.

<sup>14</sup> See McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 1: 155-187.

<sup>15</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 1:182.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981, 1<sup>st</sup> ET edn., 1911), vol. 1.

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decisive and permanent impact on religion since the thirteenth century and has become substantially the official teaching of the Catholic Church.”<sup>17</sup> A. G. Sertillanges, O.P. says “The Church believes today, as she believed from the first, that Thomism is an ark of salvation, capable of keeping minds afloat in the deluge of doctrine.”<sup>18</sup> However, the system is a veritable source of church traditions, comments from philosophers; and uses the Latin Vulgate, which is not always an accurate translation. Besides this, the system is written in typical medieval scholastic reasoning which is difficult to comprehend for many readers. Although the Catholic church believes the Bible is not easily understood, requiring the magisterium to interpret it, the church apparently and paradoxically believes this much harder writing<sup>19</sup> is “an ark of salvation” for readers.

Aquinas claims that God’s being is immutable (doesn’t change, Q. 9)<sup>20</sup> and He predestines persons to salvation and reprobation (Q. 23), and the Holy Spirit dwells in humans and gifts them with “sanctifying grace” (Q. 43).<sup>21</sup> However, sacraments of the Old Law “were ordained to the sanctification of man” (Q. 102)<sup>22</sup> (yet “they neither contained nor caused grace”),<sup>23</sup> and sacraments of the New Law are for “the sanctification of man,”<sup>24</sup> for they “contain grace” and are “an instrumental cause of grace.”<sup>25</sup> Aquinas claims that, “The sacraments are signs in protestation of the faith

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<sup>17</sup> Cover comment on each of the five volumes of the *Summa Theologica*

<sup>18</sup> Cover comments on the five volumes.

<sup>19</sup> One example. “Origin” and “relation” are two levels of reasoning about God: God is a Trinity in which the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son (Q 36); and with respect to relationship, the Holy Spirit is the bond between the Father and Son, because “He is love.” Whereas “the Father and the Son love one another” the Holy Spirit, even though the third person in the Trinity, “loves essentially as love proceeding; but not as one whence love proceeds.” *Summa Theologica*, 1:190 (Q, 37. 1.1). Put a different way, in an *essential sense* (through their essence) the Father and Son love each other (not through the Holy Spirit); but at the same time in a *notional sense* “the Father and the Son love each other by the Holy Ghost.” *Summa Theologica* 1:191 (Q. 37. 1.2). Acts “which designate the order” of origin in the Trinity are called “notional” (1:208 (Q. 41.2.1).

<sup>20</sup> Q = question, as Aquinas arranged his topics as questions.

<sup>21</sup> Last source, *Summa Theologica*, 1:221 (Q. 43. 1. 3).

<sup>22</sup> *Summa Theologica* 2:1068 (Q. 102. 1-11. 5).

<sup>23</sup> *Summa Theologica* 4:2349 (Q. 61. 3. 4).

<sup>24</sup> *Summa Theologica* 4:2342 (Q. 60. 3. 5); cf. 4: 2346 (61. 3. 1), 4: 2348 (61. 3. 1).

<sup>25</sup> *Summa Theologica* 4:2351 (Q. 62. 3. 3).

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whereby man is justified.”<sup>26</sup> Aquinas believes the Holy Spirit and sacraments sanctify.

**Martin Luther (1483-1546)**

Luther was an Augustinian monk. The Reformation was a protest on behalf of the gospel. Bavinck was right when he said at “issue was nothing less than the essential character of the gospel.”<sup>27</sup> Luther considered grace as rooted in predestination, then later, without retracting that view, came to emphasize grace in Christ, with salvation as a universal gift (also Melancthon).<sup>28</sup> Luther would devote more time to justification by faith than any other doctrine, except the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>29</sup>

Augustine and Luther were converted through reading Romans (13:13, 14 and 1:17 respectively). Augustine changed from a profligate life, and Luther from salvation by works that nearly destroyed him. Luther said “I hated the word ‘righteousness’” in Romans 1:17, because he thought “God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.” Then he discovered it meant, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Luther said, “here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.” Later Luther read Augustine’s *The Spirit and the Letter* and found he had a similar understanding of the text, “as the righteousness with which God clothes us when he justifies us.”<sup>30</sup> Luther considered justification was a doctrine taught in Scripture,<sup>31</sup> and so he reached back beyond the subjectivism of medieval theology to Augustine and Paul.<sup>32</sup>

But did Luther’s view of justification change? Carl Trueman believes his view changed between 1515-1520,<sup>33</sup> and Alister McGrath puts the

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<sup>26</sup> *Summa Theologica* 4:2348-2349 (Q. 61. 3. 4).

<sup>27</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 3: 519.

<sup>28</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Dogmatics*, 3:520, 521.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1975, 3<sup>rd</sup> printing, 1<sup>st</sup> Ger. 1963), 225.

<sup>30</sup> *Luther Works: Career of the Reformer IV* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1960), 34: 336-337.

<sup>31</sup> Eric W. Gritsch, “The Origins of Lutheran Teaching on Justification,” in *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, eds., H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1985), 162, 163.

<sup>32</sup> Eric W. Gritsch, “The Origins,” 170.

<sup>33</sup> Carl Trueman, professor of historical theology and church history at Westminster Theological Seminary argues for a change in Luther’s understanding of justification by faith between 1515-1520. See “*Simul peccator et justus: Martin Luther and Justification*,” in

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change between 1514-1519.<sup>34</sup> Luther began lecturing on Romans at Wittenberg University in the summer of 1515 and completed the book in 1516, at the end of the summer. From Luther's published notes we gain two insights into his early understanding of righteousness by faith: (1) Outward justification is imputed by God to recipients, so the recipients are sinners (inwardly) but justified (outwardly), or as Luther put it they are "at the same time both righteous and unrighteous"<sup>35</sup> (*simul justus et peccator*); (2) God "has begun to heal him. . . he will continue to deliver him from sin until he has completely cured him."<sup>36</sup> This is "the gift of grace, which begins to take sin away."<sup>37</sup>

Comparing the two insights, the first seems to do with an outward reckoning, but the second is an inward healing; the reckoning seems to be a present extrinsic fact, but the healing begins an intrinsic process that reaches into the future. In simple terms Luther's justification includes sanctification. Luther's change also involves a departure from his earlier belief that human freedom made people capable of receiving justification without the need of God's grace, but now Luther believed that such an acceptance is only possible through God's grace that gifts faith to humans, and thus makes them capable of accepting justification. This new insight seems to have come while exegeting Romans in 1515.<sup>38</sup> "Luther, following Augustine, did not make the distinction between forensic justification and progressive sanctification, that emerges in later Protestantism." It was Philip Melancthon (1497-1560), Luther's younger colleague at Wittenberg, who introduced the concept of justification as forensic.<sup>39</sup>

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*Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce I. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 73-97. I am indebted to him for leading me to study into this development by going to the original sources, and concur with his findings, and add some of my own.

<sup>34</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of The Doctrine of Justification*; From 1500 to the Present Day (Cambridge, 1996, 1<sup>st</sup> 1986), 4, after as *Iustitia Dei* 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Luther Works* 25: 257, 258; quote on 258, italic words on both pages.

<sup>36</sup> *Luther Works* 25: 260.

<sup>37</sup> *Luther Works* 25: 261.

<sup>38</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* 2:1-14.

<sup>39</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 98-100, quote on 98. See also Peter Toon, *Foundations for Faith: Justification and Sanctification* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1983), 58.

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Luther was the rugged leader that launched the Reformation, whereas Melancthon was the systematician who wrote down Lutheran thinking with precision. For example in 1521 he wrote *Loci Communes*, which was the first systematic statement of Luther's theology. He also wrote the Augsburg Confession (1530) and its Apology (1531). He complemented the bombastic Luther with his quieter nature and clarity of writing.<sup>40</sup> It can be argued that Melancthon's word "forensic" to describe justification did not materially change the alien righteousness view of Luther, as both were speaking of a declarative or extrinsic righteousness imputed by Christ in distinction to being made righteous in sanctification.

### **John Calvin (1509-1564)**

Luther and Calvin were brought to Christ out of different experiences (which affected their understanding of salvation): Luther felt the curse of the law and was relieved when he understood forgiveness by faith alone; and Calvin was reticent to leave the Roman church in response to the Reformation, but eventually responded to God's will (basing salvation on God's elective will in eternity). Catholic theology claims that humans must work in order to be saved, Calvin's theology claims that God must work (elect) for a few to be saved. Catholic theology says Christ died for all, Calvin's theology says Christ died for a few. Even though in Roman theology Christ died to save all humans, this is called into question by human works as necessary for salvation. Reformed theology also calls into question Christ's death by his alleged dying only for the elect. So Calvary suffers in both theologies.

On August 1, 1559, justification was finally placed in the "benefits" segment of Calvin's system (Book 3), which focuses on the benefits of Calvary applied to Christians. Calvin is not interested in the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*),<sup>41</sup> which says justification precedes sanctification

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<sup>40</sup> R. V. Schnucker, "Melancthon, Philipp" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2001), 755, 756.

<sup>41</sup> However, in Book three (1559) Calvin takes up regeneration by faith (3.3) before justification (3.11). This was done to answer the Catholic claim that justification was "legal fiction" and didn't take regeneration seriously. However "Calvin makes justification to be logically prior to—and the foundation of—that bestowal of the Spirit of adoption by which the believer is regenerated." This understands justification as forensic, a verdict of acquittal through imputation. For the problem with this logic see Bruce McCormack, *What's at Stake in the Current Debates?* 103 and 100, 101 respectively.

which precedes glorification (chronological order; note the first two are reversed in 1 Cor 6:11); rather Calvin says about the first two: “Christ. . . justifies no man without also sanctifying him,” adding “Though we distinguish between them, they are both inseparably comprehended in Christ. Would ye then obtain justification in Christ? You must previously possess Christ. But you cannot possess him without being made a partaker of his sanctification: for Christ cannot be divided.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, union with Christ gives one a saving relationship with Christ, which means a reception of justification and sanctification with little interest in the order of receiving these benefits. In the opening of Book 3 Calvin speaks of the Spirit of sanctification, and that through the Spirit Christ unites himself to humans.<sup>43</sup> As Berkouwer says, Calvin’s thought is concentric—salvation in Christ.”<sup>44</sup>

#### **Alister McGrath**

Oxford University Alister McGrath’s book *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution, A History from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century to the 21<sup>st</sup>* (2007) focuses on biblical interpretation by individuals instead of by a church, which McGrath considered a dangerous idea, resulting in the pluralism of Protestantism.<sup>45</sup> McGrath traces a number of factors that led to the Protestant reformation, for some leaders were not moved by the doctrine of justification by faith, as was Luther. McGrath rightly states that if justification is the reckoning of Christ’s righteousness to believers what’s the point of purgatory?<sup>46</sup> The doctrine also renders “the cult of the saints

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<sup>42</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London: James Clarke, 1962), 2:99 (3.16.1).

<sup>43</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:462-466 (3.1.1-4).

<sup>44</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977, 1<sup>st</sup>. 1954), 28.

<sup>45</sup> The dangerous new idea of Protestantism is that everyone has the right to interpret the Bible for themselves, yet this has led to multiple interpretations. The priesthood of all believers helped in this effort, questioning the right of the priestly magisterium as the sole authority to interpret. There are a number of changes to be considered: (1) Possibly soon the Protestant majority will come to an end in the United States; (2) Protestantism has “changed, decisively and possibly irreversibly, in the last fifty years” (eg. Pentecostalism, seeker-sensitive churches); (3) Protestantism is growing rapidly in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

<sup>46</sup> McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea : The Protestant Revolution--A History From the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007), 44.

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redundant.”<sup>47</sup> “If Luther was right about justification—and his critics insisted that he was not—then the conceptual glue binding the [Roman] church’s rites, ceremonies, institutions, and ideas was fatally weakened. He [Luther] had shown that the complex edifice of salvation, largely constructed during the Middle Ages, lacked a solid foundation.”<sup>48</sup>

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Pentecostalism was launched and now numbers half a billion members. There are recent churches in Protestantism that don’t see any reason to be defined by the past.<sup>49</sup> McGrath claims that more Protestants become Catholics than viser versa, because of “evangelicalism’s lack of historical roots and institutional continuity with the New Testament.” (I wonder if McGrath factored into this the number of Catholics becoming Protestants in South American countries?). In a criticism of Luther, McGrath said:

His [Luther’s] fundamental conviction was that the church of his day had lost sight of some fundamental themes of the Christian gospel. After all, the theology he had been taught at Erfurt now seemed to him to be heretical, amounting to the idea of ‘justification by works’ the notion that humanity can achieve its own salvation by its moral or religious achievements. Yet Luther is open to criticism here, in that he appears to have extrapolated from his own local situation to that of the entire Christian church throughout Europe.<sup>50</sup>

Earlier in his book McGrath points out that Luther responded to indulgences.<sup>51</sup> Indulgences were cause enough for reform, because a blatant repudiation of the free gift of the gospel’s salvation, and indulgences were sold far beyond Wittenberg, throughout Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Norway and Sweden.<sup>52</sup> At least this seems to be far more than a local concern, and it gets to the heart of Roman theology—the replacing of the divine by the human. This seems to me to be the fundamental issue that Luther faced, and deserves to be considered the primary reason for the Reformation. It was a fight for the true gospel. It seems reasonable that any

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<sup>47</sup> McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea*, 250.

<sup>48</sup> McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea*, 44.

<sup>49</sup> McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea*, 403.

<sup>50</sup> McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea*, 58, (parenthesis supplied).

<sup>51</sup> McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea*, 45-49.

<sup>52</sup> David S. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church: The Middle Ages 1294-1517* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 6:761, 762.

effort to reintroduce the gospel would include justification by faith alone, to counter the Roman emphasis on salvation by human works.

In summary of this segment on history, the Reformation's decisive break from the medieval period was the distinction between justification and sanctification, yet Luther's justification spilled over into initial sanctification and Calvin finds them as inseparable in Christ. In other words impartation is taken up after imputation in Calvin's *Institutes*, or salvation supplied in Christ (objective side) is applied as benefits through the Holy Spirit (subjective side). Nevertheless it can be argued that relationship with Christ and all that this means is of primary interest to Calvin. Put differently, imputation and impartation are received from Christ and the Holy Spirit in Reformation soteriology. Superficially this seems the same as Roman theology, at least in the joining of justification and sanctification; but the major difference lies in Roman infusion instead of Reformation imputation/impartation, with Roman elevation of human nature producing works capable of merit (considered as on-going justification) rather than a covenant relationship with Christ and the Spirit in Reformation theology. This crucial difference needs to be clearly in mind when evaluating contemporary Catholic-Evangelical attempts to unite on this doctrine.

### **3. Roman Response Counter Reformation Council of Trent (1545-1563)**

Roman theologians made a dramatic change between the decade between Augsburg and Ratisbon. Their first response to the Protestant view on justification was to reject it as a novelty, not the same as what Roman theology had taught for a very long time. Then, Roman theologians made a sudden about face, saying that the Protestant view on justification was the same as Roman theology had taught for a very long time, but held to faith as the one point of difference, couching it in vague, ambiguous terms, with the ability to interpret the words in different ways. Ratisbon demonstrated that one point ambiguously presented is sufficient to later neutralize all the concessions made.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification : An Outline of its History in The Church and its Exposition from Scripture* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961, 1<sup>st</sup> 1867), 141-150.

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The concessions didn't hold. Just four years later the Council of Trent was convened (1545-1563), which discussed the subject of justification for seven months in 1547, which totally repudiated the Protestant views with anathemas. This demonstrates that Rome doesn't change, even though she may make carnelian moves to win compromise. This history should cause pause in the contemporary consensus-seeking which is using the same methods.

The intent of Trent's sixth session was to negate the "erroneous doctrine" of justification (their perspective) and to "strictly forbid" any teaching that did not agree with the present decree.<sup>54</sup> Trent is clear that humans are born with original sin, that Jesus Christ came to redeem all humans through his death, and the merit of his passion is bestowed on all who are born again. Justification is a "translation" from the state of sin (through first Adam) to the state of grace (through the second Adam). Without any human merit, God's "quickening and helping grace" enables adults to receive the call of God and they cooperate with grace that is received through hearing, and begin to love him (not fear him) and are moved against sin, to repent, do penance, and are baptized.<sup>55</sup>

Preparation is followed by justification, which includes sanctification, for an unjust person becomes just, an enemy becomes a friend. The final cause of justification is the glory of God and Christ, and eternal life; the efficient cause is the merciful God who washed and sanctifies, the meritorious cause is Christ's death, and the instrumental cause is baptism. The single formal cause is "the justice of God," not that by which He Himself is just, but that by which He makes us just, not merely "reputed" as just but "receiving justice within us" through the Holy Spirit poured out in our hearts. In other words forgiveness of sins, faith, hope, and charity are "infused at the same time." For "faith without works is dead" (James 2:17, 20) and "faith. . . worketh by charity" (Gal 5:6). Neither faith nor works "merit the grace of justification."<sup>56</sup>

The above two paragraphs seem to present the gospel, and no doubt contribute to the contemporary debate that seeks to find similarities between Roman and Reformation views of justification. There are similarities, but

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<sup>54</sup> H. J. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: Original Text with English Translation* (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1955), 29; after as Trent.

<sup>55</sup> Schroeder, *Trent*, 29-33 (chaps 1-6).

<sup>56</sup> Schroeder, *Trent*, 33-35 (chaps 7, 8).

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the differences determine the extent of the similarity. After the immediate relation between Christ and humans (above) seems to be replaced by a more mechanical means where the (1) infusion of original sin (guilt) from Adam is overcome by an (2) infusion of grace; and (3) deliverance is attained instrumentally through baptism.

The sixth session of Trent dealt with justification as “the most important item” on its agenda.<sup>57</sup> Trent decreed that the Latin Vulgate version of Scripture was the official Bible, but this version doesn’t do justice to the Greek word *dikaosune* which means “to declare righteous” for the Vulgate translates it by the Latin word *iustificare*, which means “to make righteous.”<sup>58</sup> To be declared righteous has nothing to do with personal merit, whereas to be made righteous led to works of merit. “The Greek verb refers to something outside of a person in question” whereas “the Latin refers to the qualities of the person in question.” This is why the Greek church never had a theology of merit as did the Latin church.<sup>59</sup> The Greek (or Eastern) church emphasized deification (*theosis*) rather than justification (Western church).

According to Trent, justification “is not only a remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts whereby an unjust man becomes just and from being an enemy becomes a friend. . . .”<sup>60</sup> Faith, hope, and love are infused into the Christian.<sup>61</sup> With the infusion of justification there begins a process of justification in which works merit further justification.<sup>62</sup> This confuses the categories of justification and sanctification, and questions justification by faith *alone*, because works are included. Shedd is right: “Men are justified in order that they may be sanctified, not sanctified in

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<sup>57</sup> Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1961 [1st 1957]), 2:171.

<sup>58</sup> Michael S. Horton, “The *Sola*’s of the Reformation” in *Here We Stand: A Call from Confessing Evangelicals*, eds. James Montgomery Boice and Benjamin E. Sasse (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 122; Martin Chemitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1971), 1: 472, 473. The Paris edition of the Vulgate eliminated much of the corrupt transmissions in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Alister E. McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea*, 29.

<sup>59</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Iustia Dei*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Schroeder, *Trent*, 33 (6.7).

<sup>61</sup> Schroeder, *Trent*, 34 (6.7).

<sup>62</sup> *Trent*, 36 (6.10); see also 45 (Canon 24).

order that they may be justified.”<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Roman infused justification, or “physical justification,”<sup>64</sup> is a state in which only a partial remission of sins is experienced, for there is still guilt and debt to be met by temporal punishment, even beyond this world in purgatory.<sup>65</sup> This means there is no imputation of Christ who forgives all sin in this life. Remaining sin must be atoned for in purgatory. Charles Hodge rightly notes that Roman justification lacks imputation.<sup>66</sup>

Scripture defines justification (or righteousness): “Abraham believed (āman) the Lord and he credited (hāšab) it to him as righteousness (ṣedāqāh)” (Gen 15:6). This text is the basis for the New Testament presentation on justification (Rom 4:3, 9,22; Gal 3:6; James 2:23). The Hebrew word ṣādaq in the *qal* form means “to be righteous,” but in the *hiphil* form means “declare to be righteous.” Justification in Scripture is consistently in the *hiphil* form (Protestant view) and not in the *qal* form (Catholic view).<sup>67</sup>

#### 4. Contribution of the “New Perspectives on Paul” Movement to Justification by Faith

No school of thought since the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation, not even the Bultmannian (20<sup>th</sup> century) has had such an impact on Pauline studies as the New Perspectives on Paul (NPP),<sup>68</sup> contributed by E. P. Sanders, N. T. Wright, and James D. G. Dunn. Donald Hagner said NPP may be called “a Copernican revolution in Pauline studies.”<sup>69</sup> D. A. Carson says “the new perspective is the reigning paradigm” (2001).<sup>70</sup> Even though there were

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<sup>63</sup> William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003, 1<sup>st</sup> 1118, 1889), 800.

<sup>64</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 2:660.

<sup>65</sup> Trent, 46 (Canon 39).

<sup>66</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle of Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960, 1<sup>st</sup> 1886), 31.

<sup>67</sup> For more on these comparisons see Bruce Demarest, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology, The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 364-368.

<sup>68</sup> See Seyoon Kim, *Paul and The New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), xiv.

<sup>69</sup> Donald A. Hagner, “Paul and Judaism: Testing the New Perspective,” in Peter Stuhlmacher, *A Challenge to the New Perspective: Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification. With an Essay by Donald A. Hagner* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 75.

<sup>70</sup> D. A. Carson, “Summaries and Conclusions” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* InterVarsity, MI: Baker, 2001), 1:505.

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other books before Sanders with his major thesis, his was a turning point because it was the first book following the Jewish Holocaust.<sup>71</sup> Post-Holocaust times found a more friendly view of Jews. Though there are varying ideas that constitute the NPP, they oppose the old perspective that Judaism was a very legalistic system of works-righteousness (from Ferdinand Webster and others). W. Bousset was influenced by this old view, and he taught and influenced Rudolph Bultmann, who became one of the most influential New Testament scholars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>72</sup>

Rudolph Bultmann considered Judaism to be a legalistic religion, totally devoid of grace, and believed that Paul was totally opposed to Judaism. In contrast to an earlier conception of Paul in corporate or cultic terms, Bultmann believed Paul focused on the individual. This was undoubtedly influenced by Bultmann's preoccupation with existentialism (personal existence). As a Lutheran, Bultmann supported forensic justification in Paul's theology, yet this was not an inner change but an "schatological reality" experienced now by the believer. The NPP is a response to Bultmann.

Albert Schweitzer rejected justification by faith as central to Paul, accepting rather "being in Christ." Schweitzer also presented Paul as fully Jewish, and not persuaded by Hellenism.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, many scholars didn't follow Schweitzer, believing Paul gained much from Hellenism rather than from Judaism.

W. P. Davis' book *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (1948), "marks a watershed in the history of scholarship on Paul and Judaism,"<sup>74</sup> and paved the way for the NPP because it was the first to present Paul's positive acceptance of Judaism and the law, for his conversion was not from Judaism to a new religion. Christianity was not "the antithesis of Judaism" but "the full flowering of Judaism." For Davies, justification by faith was considered peripheral to the centrality of Christ in Paul's writings.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Donald A. Hagner, in Peter Stuhlmacher, *A Challenge to the New Perspective*, 76, 77.

<sup>72</sup> See Robert Egolf, "Reinventing Paul" Book Review, <http://www.the-paulpage.com/Reinvent.html>.

<sup>73</sup> See Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, Seabury, 1968; *Paul and His Interpreters*, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1950.

<sup>74</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1977), 7.

<sup>75</sup> W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1965, 1<sup>st</sup> 1948), 222-223.

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Krister Stendall stated that justification by faith was Luther's focus and not Paul's.<sup>76</sup> He critiqued the introspective conscience of the west (not found in the East, in the Orthodox church) but found in Augustine's *Confessions* and Luther's struggle as an Augustinian monk. This was not Paul's struggle in his conversion, for he had a rugged relationship to the law prior to his change of mission to the Gentiles.<sup>77</sup> Stendall dismissed justification by faith as merely an Augustinian-Lutheran experience, but not a biblical experience.

In 1971, Ernst Käsemann, student of Bultmann, believed justification is central to Paul, and to salvation history.<sup>78</sup> Käsemann's view of justification is corporate (rather than individual) and participatory, which basically questioned its forensic reality. Käsemann said, "Nowhere else in Judaism is Hab 2:4 ['the just shall live by his faith' KJV] seen in terms of attachment to a person."<sup>79</sup> He states it again as "a truth which transcends the individual and is directed toward a new world." Here is a "primacy of christology over anthropology."<sup>80</sup>

E. P. Sanders' book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) launched the NPP movement. Sanders studied a "great bulk" of the surviving Palestinian material from 200 BC to 200 AD<sup>81</sup> discovered that election got one into the covenant, and commandment-keeping was a response to this prior election.<sup>82</sup> "The Rabbis did not have the Pauline/Lutheran problem of

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<sup>76</sup> See Krister Stendall, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West" in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles: and Other Essays* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1976), 78-96. First published in English in the *Harvard Theological Review* :56 (1963), 199-215. cf. John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>77</sup> It is alleged that Paul was interpreted by the Reformers rather than Paul was interpreted by Paul. For example, from Augustine's *Confessions* to Luther's struggle, the focus was on the quest of a troubled conscience, which was read back into Paul's experience. By contrast Paul was zealously persecuting Christians because He believed this was God's will (see 1 Cor 15:9b; 1 Tim 1:13-16). He was filled with self-righteousness (Phil 3:3-7), not self-condemnation. His Damascus Road encounter with the risen Christ began a revelation of God's will for His life, a call to become God's minister to the Gentiles (Acts 9:3-18).

<sup>78</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 21-32; "Justification and Salvation History in the Epistle to the Romans," *In Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1971), 60-78.

<sup>79</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 32.

<sup>80</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, both quotes, 93.

<sup>81</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1977), 18.

<sup>82</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestine Judaism*, 85.

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‘works-righteousness.’”<sup>83</sup> The bottom line was the Rabbis understood obedience to be a response to God’s love for Israel.<sup>84</sup> Sanders termed this “covenantal nomism.”<sup>85</sup> Sanders concludes that because covenant nomism was so pervasive during the four centuries studied (200 BC - 200 AD) that it was “the basic *type* of religion known by Jesus and presumably by Paul.”<sup>86</sup>

In the law-court setting, for N. T. Wright, righteousness is not about imputed or imparted righteousness to humans but God’s own righteousness (His covenant faithfulness). “Legal fiction” is a well known Catholic analysis of imputed righteousness (merely reckoned to be righteous, when not in reality, as in Luther’s theology). So at this point, Wright seems to be close to the Catholic view.<sup>87</sup> Wright says Paul’s gospel creates the church, whereas justification defines and sustains it.<sup>88</sup>

James Dunn claims that behind the Catholic-Protestant debate (make righteous-declare righteous respectively) is the more fundamental issue of Christianity’s relation to Judaism, or Paul’s gospel’s relation to his ancestral religion. Traditional New Testament scholarship considered Paul opposed to Judaism as Luther opposed the medieval church.<sup>89</sup> But the NPP claims that Palestinian Judaism was grace-based, their works as a response to grace to maintain their covenant membership rather than to gain entrance or earn merit. In this new context, justification by faith is the way Gentiles can be as acceptable to God as Jews. This is “one of the most vigorous debates in current NT studies.”<sup>90</sup>

The immediate context of justification by faith is “the righteousness of God” (Rom 1:16, 17). In Hebrew the word “righteousness” is a “relational concept.” For Dunn, God created humans, gave a call to Abraham, and choose Israel, and in so doing was righteous, and understood as faithful. So Dunn considers the verb *dikaio* means both *make righteous* and *reckon*

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<sup>83</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 100.

<sup>84</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 100-104, 106, quote on 100.

<sup>85</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 422.

<sup>86</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 426.

<sup>87</sup> N. T. Wright, *What Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 100-103

<sup>88</sup> N. T. Wright, *What Paul Really Said*, defines, 151, sustains, 158.

<sup>89</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of The Apostle Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 336-338.

<sup>90</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, 340, 354, 355.

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*righteous*, which practically makes the Catholic/Protestant debates pointless.<sup>91</sup> The NPP, like liberal theology before it, is rooted in historical-critical methods, which are much more interested in alleged sources, than in what Paul says himself. Why should second Temple Judaism be the hermeneutical basis for understanding Paul, when *sola scriptura* looks to the Old Testament, where Scripture interprets Scripture?

Seyoon Kim's doctoral dissertation<sup>92</sup> at Manchester University, under F. F. Bruce (1977), was published in Germany (1981) and in America (1984), which means Kim submitted his dissertation the same year that E. P. Sanders published his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, which introduced to New Testament scholars a new way to interpret Paul.

Second Temple Jews were engaged in “works of the law” to earn salvation, demonstrated by Paul before his conversion (Gal 1:13-16; Phil 3:3-9). The traditional doctrine of justification was by faith, contrary to any works of law to merit salvation; but the new doctrine of justification (by the New Perspectives on Paul study) was to dismiss circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath as boundary markers to distinguish between Jews and Gentiles.<sup>93</sup> Whereas the traditional doctrine of justification dismissed all law-keeping *to earn salvation*, the new doctrine of justification dismissed Jewish laws as unnecessary for Gentiles *to become covenant members*.

Proponents of the New Perspectives on Paul consider law-keeping, in second Temple Judaism, to be responsive works to God's grace given in the covenant. Such works were a mark of covenant membership, and were never works to gain entrance into the covenant. Proponents allegedly substantiate this conclusion from the Qumran community. However this conclusion is decisively called into question by J. V. Fesko, as follows: (1) all the law is important and not just a subset of Jewish markers (1QS 5; 1QS 5:10). The law is an entry requirement for covenant membership. For example:

But when a man enters the covenant to walk according to all these precepts that he may be joined to the holy congregation, they shall examine his spirit in community with respect to his understanding and practice of the Law, under the authority of the

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<sup>91</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, 341-344.

<sup>92</sup> Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>93</sup> See Seyoon Kim, 3.

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sons of Aaron who have freely pledged themselves in the Community to restore His Covenant and to heed all the precepts commanded by him, and the multitude of Israel (1QS 5:20).<sup>94</sup>

Moreover 4QMMT supports the traditional view because legalistic works to earn salvation was a problem at Qumran.<sup>95</sup> Romans 2:21-23 refers to the whole law and not merely to covenant badges. Legalism was a problem that Christ encountered (Matt 5:17-20; 23:1-38; Luke 18:9-14), and He ministered during second Temple Judaism. Works-righteousness was the problem Paul encountered in Rome and in Galatia, and not covenant badges (or subset of the law; circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath).<sup>96</sup> To understand justification by faith, one must return to the traditional understanding because the New Perspective is at odds with Scripture, and with historical evidence from the Qumran community. Justification is not through works of the law (Rom 4:28), but through faith (Rom 1:17; 3:28), which is a gift of God (Rom 10:17).

**5. Roman-Protestant Divide:  
Evangelicals and Catholics Together Documents  
Differences Need to be Studied**

The Fourth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation convened at Helsinki, Finland in 1963, to hammer out a current statement on the doctrine of justification by faith. Catholic observers were not the reason that the Lutheran leaders made changes towards Rome, because this was achieved through use of the historical-critical method of exegesis.<sup>97</sup> Ernest Käsemann argues “that the historical-critical method is inseparable from Protestantism, is indeed its very genius.”<sup>98</sup> This exegetical method is the foundation for the work done between Catholics and Evangelicals in subsequent meetings. The same historical-critical method contributed to the

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<sup>94</sup> J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding The Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, PA: P&R, 2008), 179.

<sup>95</sup> J. V. Fesko, *Justification*, 180.

<sup>96</sup> J. V. Fesko, *Justification*, 180-182.

<sup>97</sup> Robert D. Preus, *Justification and Rome: An Evaluation of Recent Dialogues* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1997), 21.

<sup>98</sup> James Wm. McClendon, *Doctrine: Systematic Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon 1994), 465. See Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*, tr. W. J. Montague (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1969), 1-65; R. C. Briggs, *Interpreting the New Testament Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1973), 21-24.

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new perspectives on Paul<sup>99</sup> which also questioned justification by faith. Much later, in 1992, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Lutheran Church in America evaluated the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Report VII, and said:

The abject capitulation to the historical-critical method. . . relativized the concept of pure doctrines well as the normative authority of Scripture and jeopardized the honest efforts of Lutherans and Roman Catholics to find any solid consensus on the article of justification. Also, ‘new modes of thinking,’ a kind of new logic, made doctrinal differences ‘not necessarily divisive.’<sup>100</sup>

The LCMS stated: “Having reviewed carefully the ‘Commitment Statement’ we have come to the conclusion that beneath the ‘differences in theological formulation’ often noted, there remain substantive differences between the churches which go to the very heart of the Gospel itself and are therefore divisive.”<sup>101</sup>

ECT 1: THE CHRISTIAN MISSION FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM (1994)<sup>102</sup>

In the Catholic *First Things: The Journal of Religion, Culture and Public Life* (1994),<sup>103</sup> is an article titled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium.”<sup>104</sup> This was the conclusion of a consultation beginning in September, 1992. It states: “We together pray for the fulfillment of the prayer of Our Lord: ‘May they all be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.’ (John 17). We together, Evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ

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<sup>99</sup> Guy Prentiss Waters, *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology: A Comparative Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 63.

<sup>100</sup> Robert D. Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 22.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>102</sup> See Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995).

<sup>103</sup> Charles Colson (Protestant) and Richard John Neuhaus, (Lutheran turned Catholic) led off in the ECT work. Richard John Neuhaus edited the journal *First Things*.

<sup>104</sup> *First Things* 43 (May 1994): 15-24.

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intends for all his disciples.”<sup>105</sup> They concur that “the scandal of conflict between Christians obscures the scandal of the cross, thus crippling the one mission of the one Christ.”<sup>106</sup> Within the one mission of the one Christ they state, “We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ.”<sup>107</sup> On the surface this seems to be biblical and welcome. But more importantly, doesn’t the alleged daily re-crucifying of Christ in the Catholic mass radically call into question the one mission of the one Christ’s unrepeatable sacrifice at Calvary (Heb 7:27b; 9:26)?

In the book *Is The Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (2005), Mark A. Knoll and Carolyn Nystrom devote a chapter to “Evangelicals and Catholics Together.”<sup>108</sup> There was much evangelical criticism of ECT 1, particularly because it failed to express salvation as by grace *alone* through faith *alone*. The words *alone* were the contribution of the Reformation, dismissing all human means to salvation, as found in Catholic theology. ECT 2, in part, was a response to the criticism of ECT 1.<sup>109</sup> In a later *First Things* journal is a report on post ECT 1 study given to differences between Evangelicals and Catholics.<sup>110</sup> In 1996, it was “determined that further progress depended upon firm agreement on the meaning of salvation, and especially the doctrine of justification.”<sup>111</sup>

ECT 2: THE GIFT OF SALVATION (1997)

After a full year of study, discussion and prayer, a statement was released in New York City on October 6-7, 1997. It was headed by John 3:16, Christ as Savior of the world, a truth that Calvinists may not be able to accept, because they believe Christ died for the elect alone. The statement admits “serious differences” remain, but all agree that Jesus Christ is the Savior. They refer to biblical texts that Christ is the only Mediator between God and humans (1 Tim 3:5) and that no one comes to the Father except

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<sup>105</sup> *First Things* 43, paragraph 2.

<sup>106</sup> *First Things* 43, paragraph 6.

<sup>107</sup> *First Things*, 43, paragraph 12.

<sup>108</sup> *Is the Reformation Over?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>109</sup> See *Is the Reformation Over?*, 158-161. This chapter contributed to this segment.

<sup>110</sup> *First Things* 79 (Jan 1998) : 20-23.

<sup>111</sup> *First Things* 79, first paragraph.

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through Christ (John 14:6; cf. 1 Pet 3:18).<sup>112</sup> But how is this possible when Catholics believe that the church, Mary and saints are also mediators between God and humans? Even though the statement says atonement was completed at the cross, how does this agree with salvation by works, and purgatory as necessary for atonement in Catholic theology? Evidently Catholics come to these texts and read into them their own traditions. In other words the texts seem qualified by the interpretation of the church, rather than by Scripture interpreting Scripture.

What does the ECT statement say about Justification? “In Justification, God, on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but to be his forgiven friends, and by virtue of his declaration it is so. . . We understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (*sole fide*).”<sup>113</sup> They admit there are differences between declarative righteousness and transformational righteousness, and mention purgatory and devotion to Mary as among further subjects to study.<sup>114</sup> But don’t these differences call into question the assumed unity they pronounce in the document? Furthermore, when it comes to the gift of salvation through Christ alone, isn’t this called into question by official Roman theology which presents Mary and the saints as participants in human salvation? If Christ is the sole mediator, why is there the need of church, saints, and Mary to mediate? Also, because there are differences between declarative justification and transformational justification, how can justification be considered as a belief that unites Catholics and Evangelicals?

The end of the document declares: “As Evangelicals who thank God for the heritage of the Reformation and affirm with conviction its classic confessions, as Catholics who are consciously faithful to the teaching of the Catholic Church, and as disciples together of the Lord Jesus Christ who recognize our debt to our Christian forbears and our obligations to our contemporaries and those who will come after us, we affirm our unity in the Gospel that we have here professed.”<sup>115</sup> Note that Evangelicals believe in the biblical heritage of the Reformation and Catholics believe in the

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<sup>112</sup> *First Things* 79, sixth paragraph.

<sup>113</sup> *First Things* 79, tenth paragraph.

<sup>114</sup> *First Things* 79, twentieth paragraph.

<sup>115</sup> *First Things* 79, final paragraph.

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traditions of the Church. This is what divided them in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation, so wouldn't these differences still divide them, in spite of saying they teach the same Gospel? Therefore it seems hollow when they say, "We reject any appearance of harmony that is purchased at the price of truth."<sup>116</sup>

ECT 2 stated, "Justification is central to the scriptural account of salvation, and its meaning has been much debated between Protestants and Catholics. We agree that justification is not earned by any good works or merits of our own; it is entirely God's gift, conferred through the Father's sheer graciousness, out of the love that he bears us in his Son, who suffered on our behalf and rose from the dead for our justification."<sup>117</sup> Although this seems an advance over ECT 1, and in agreement with Scripture, the official Catholic view of justification is an infusion (not the Protestant impartation), and the infusion enables the recipient to merit further justification.

Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ut Unam Sint* ("that they may be one"), based on Christ's prayer for Christian unity, issued May 25, 1995, gives insight into how differences are to be evaluated. "The examination of such disagreements has two essential points of reference: Sacred Scripture and the great Tradition of the Church. Catholics have the help of the Church's living Magisterium."<sup>118</sup> The inclusion of Tradition as equal with Scripture (see Vatican II)<sup>119</sup> means the Catholic church uses human ideas along with divine revelation in Scripture, and how can those who believe in *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) accept resolution of differences based merely on the uninspired ideas of humans that often are contrary to Scripture?

ECT 3: YOUR WORD IS TRUTH (2002)

There are obvious differences between Protestants who place Scripture above the church and Catholics who place the church above Scripture—in

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<sup>116</sup> *First Things* 79, ninth paragraph.

<sup>117</sup> *Is the Reformation Over?*, 159-160, cited from "The Gift of Salvation," *Christianity Today*, Dec. 8, 1997, 36.

<sup>118</sup> *The Encyclicals of John Paul II* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996), no. 39: 937.

<sup>119</sup> "Consequently, it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence." *Documents of Vatican II* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), 117 (2.2.9).

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a living tradition that adds to and takes away from Scripture, and the majesterium that officially interprets Scripture for the church; whereas Protestants ideally allow Scripture to interpret Scripture (*sola scriptura*). Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, who led out in organizing the ECT meetings, also edited a book *Your Word is Truth* (2002). In it the Catholic theologian Avery Cardinal Dulles wrote, “While revering Scripture as containing the word of God in unalterable form, she [Catholic church] denies that Scripture is sufficient in the sense that the whole of revelation could be known without tradition.”<sup>120</sup> By contrast Protestants believe Scripture interprets Scripture, and doesn’t need human traditions to do so. Hence it doesn’t make sense for the joint statement to affirm, “that Scripture is the divinely inspired and uniquely authoritative written revelation of God; as such it is normative for the teaching and life of the church.”<sup>121</sup>

The title *Your Word is Truth* cannot mean *Catholic Tradition is Truth*; because it sometimes discounts biblical truths (such as the sacramental work of the church, Mary and saints to obtain salvation, which are human additions that question the biblical truth that Christ is the only Savior, 1 Tim 2:5). In other words, the official Catholic understanding of Scripture discounts the unofficial ECT 3 document. How can papal infallibility,<sup>122</sup> the alleged re-crucifixion of Christ in the mass, and the numerous changes made to God’s Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1-17)<sup>123</sup> be the same as “Your Word is Truth?” For these Catholic traditions replace the truths of God’s Word, and replace Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God.

#### ECT 4: THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS (2003)

This document was published in another edition of *First Things*.<sup>124</sup> Communion concerns union of beliefs as well as union in fellowship. Are Catholics and Protestants experiencing both? There are differences among

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<sup>120</sup> Avery Dulles, “Revelation, Scripture, and Tradition” in *Your Word is Truth*, eds. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 57.

<sup>121</sup> “Your Word is Truth” document in *Your Word is Truth* (1-8), 5. The declaration affirms more, but the more doesn’t seem to take seriously the uniquely authoritative biblical revelation which is normative for the teaching and life of the church.

<sup>122</sup> Infallibility was even questioned by Catholic theologian Hans Küng in *Infallible: An Inquiry*, trans. Edward Quinn (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1972, Ger. 1970).

<sup>123</sup> See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1994), 505-611.

<sup>124</sup> See *First Things*, March 2003, 26-33.

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Protestants and Catholics about the saints. One big hurdle is the Catholic belief in purgatory which requires human intercession and human payments. There is a difference about the number of sacraments necessary for salvation, two (baptism and Lord's Supper) for Protestants and five additional sacraments for Catholics.

Communion is a union or relationship which is impossible for Protestants in terms of sharing in the Catholic mass, where the priest allegedly re-crucifies Christ. Protestants believe in a once for all, not to be repeated sacrifice, at the cross (Heb 7:27). Although all true Christians are in a relationship with Christ, who is the Head of the body which is the church, does it follow that there is only one true church? What about the following statement? : "The church itself can be understood as a sign and instrument of grace instituted by the one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, and, through the gospel, mediating his grace to the world. While the ancient formula 'outside the Church no salvation' may lend itself to misunderstanding. We agree that there is no salvation apart from the Church [Catholic church], since to be related to Christ is necessarily to be related, in however full or tenuous a manner, to the Church which is his body."<sup>125</sup>

The latest Catechism (1994) states, "the Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. 'Where there is Jesus Christ, there is the Catholic Church.' In her subsists the fullness of Christ's body united with its head; this implies that she receives from him 'the fullness of the means of salvation' which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession."<sup>126</sup> In other words, "the [Catholic] Church is 'the universal sacrament of salvation.'"<sup>127</sup> "The Church has been divinely sent to all nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation.'"<sup>128</sup>

Other churches are called "separated Churches" and not "sister churches;" because the Roman church calls itself the "mother Church." Communion with these separated churches is described as follows: "For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth

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<sup>125</sup> *First Things*, March 2003, 30.

<sup>126</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 220 (830).

<sup>127</sup> *Vatican II*, 247 (4. 4. 45).

<sup>128</sup> *Vatican II*, 584 (13. Preface).

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entrusted to the Catholic Church.”<sup>129</sup> In other words there is only one source for the fullness of grace, all other churches derive grace from that source whether they know it or not. The Roman Church reaches out to all humans to gift them salvation through the Church. In fact mother church reaches out to gather all humanity into her embrace.

This replaces Christ as the only source of salvation, the fullness of which is found in Him alone, and not confined to any church (cf. Matt 23:37). True communion of the saints is found in communion with Him. Carefully worded statements which seem to reflect, to some degree, the communion of saints, must always be interpreted against the unchanging official belief that the Roman church is the only church Christ established, and outside of that church there is no salvation. In other words, all the ECT documents must be understood within this end-time plan of the Roman church. While the Roman church claims to be the only source for the fullness of salvation, it dispenses non-biblical traditions as a means to God and salvation. By contrast, Christ said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6).

Catholic priest, Richard John Neuhaus argues that “justification by faith” is “a theological formula devised sixteen centuries” after the church; and claims “The Christian reality, comprehensively understood, is the Church. Surely it is the Church that judges the adequacy of theological formulations and not vice versa.”<sup>130</sup> This apparently overlooks the fact that justification by faith is presented in the Old Testament book of Habakkuk (Hab 2:4), long before any Christian church was in existence.

Facing a common enemy (secularism, with its anti-family values, abortions, gay rights, and moral relativism), Catholics and Evangelicals have strained at hermeneutics to bury the anathemas of Trent and those of the Reformers, as if the contemporary attack on the gospel by secularism is more important than the medieval Roman attack on the gospel (another kind of secularism). It is recognized by some that there must be a consensus about justification, or there will be no other consensus. So Evangelicals and Catholics together focus on common points of agreement, and overlook the differences that remain, as if the differences today are not as valid as they were in the sixteenth century. There is one important difference between

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<sup>129</sup> *Vatican II*, 346 (6. 1. 3).

<sup>130</sup> Richard John Neuhaus, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, eds., Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 207.

Roman and Reformation understanding of justification, that is infusion (Roman) and imputation (Protestant). Roman infused justification doesn't do justice to biblical imputation.

### **Council of Trent Still Influential**

It is clear from the ECT documents that the anathemas of Trent and the Reformation hurled at each other in the 16<sup>th</sup> century have been dismissed through the Justification debates. On the one hand this seems that the stand of the Catholic church against the Reformation made at Trent no longer exists. On the other hand, we must ask if there is evidence that Roman theology hasn't essentially changed since the Council of Trent?

Many believe that Vatican Council 11 (1963-1965) marked a change in the Roman Catholic Church (*aggiornamento*). It is true the Council focused on other denominations and religions, not done before. This was for ecumenical reasons, to bring the "separated brethren" back into the church, and reach out to other religions. In Vatican 11 the Roman church reached out as a global player to achieve its global ambitions (see Rev 13:1-4; 11-16; 17:1-18). However, consider evidence that the Council of Trent is still influential today.

1. Vatican 11 endorsed Trent: "This sacred council accepts the venerable faith of our ancestors. . . and it proposes again the decrees of the Second Council of Nicea, of the Council of Florence, and of the Council of Trent."<sup>131</sup>
2. Vatican 11 refers to "The Fathers of this sacred Synod, furthering the work begun by the Council of Trent. . ."<sup>132</sup>
3. The "veneration of the saints, Marian devotions, and eucharistic adoration." which Protestants revolted against in the Reformation, are all continued after Trent.<sup>133</sup> In fact since Trent Mary has been elevated to heights not endorsed at Trent.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Austin Flannery, O. P., gen ed., *Vatican Council 11: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, rev. ed. (Costello, 1988), 1: 412.

<sup>132</sup> *Vatican 11*, 456-457 (9.7. Conclusion).

<sup>133</sup> See Richard P. McBrien, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009), 85.

<sup>134</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *The Conflict with Rome*, trans. Supervisor, David H. Freeman (Philadelphia, PA: P&R, 1958), 174. cf. a fresco in the Vatican where Mary is "high in the center with the Father and Son seated on her left and right as instruments of her all-powerful will." *Ibid*, 162.

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4. Vatican 11 continues the focus on the infallibility of the Pope proclaimed in Vatican 1.<sup>135</sup> In Vatican 11 “there is in actuality no repudiation of Trent, or of the Vatican Council [Vatican 1]. If anything, when Trent or the first Vatican Council are mentioned, the emphasis is never critical.”<sup>136</sup> In fact, “notwithstanding the apparent pastoral tone and the cultivation of an ecumenical spirit, there can be little doubt that the documents of the second Vatican Council follow in the tradition of Trent and the first Vatican Council.”<sup>137</sup> Those stressing discontinuity of Vatican 11 with Trent and Vatican 1, “have occasionally forgotten that the Council [Vatican 11] retracted nothing in the dogmas of Trent and Vatican 1.”<sup>138</sup>

5. With respect to Scripture and Tradition, the view of Trent continues in Vatican 11: “‘Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence’ (DV 9). This, of course, is a verbatim quotation from the Council of Trent in whose footsteps the Fathers of Vatican 11 have declared their intention to follow (DV 1).”<sup>139</sup>

6. In the latest Catholic Catechism (1994), justification is not an entry level phase of salvation; it “is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.”<sup>140</sup> This is the same as Trent. Eberhard Jüngel’s book *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith* (1999) evaluates the *Joint Declaration* saying it “promised so much.” But added, “In my judgment at least, there were no sound theological foundations laid here.” In fact, there are “pronouncements which almost without exception move in the area and on the level of the *Decree Concerning Justification* which the Roman Catholic Church had adopted at

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<sup>135</sup> *Vatican 11*, 48-49 (1. 3. 25).

<sup>136</sup> Henry T. Hudson, *Papal Power: Its Origin and Development* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2008, 1<sup>st</sup> 1981), 128.

<sup>137</sup> Henry T. Hudson, *Papal Power*, 130.

<sup>138</sup> Hermann Pottmeyer, “A New Phase in the Reception of Vatican 11: Twenty Years of Interpretation of the Council,” in Giuseppe Albergio, Jean-Pierre Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *The Reception of Vatican 11* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 40. See Richard P. McBrien, *The Church*, 199.

<sup>139</sup> See Timothy George, “An Evangelical Reflection on Scripture and Tradition” in *Your Word is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, eds. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 34.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 482 (# 1989).

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the Council of Trent in 1547 on the basis of, and more particularly *against*, the Reformers' doctrine of Justification."<sup>141</sup>

Paul Schrottenboer, general secretary for the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, noted (1987) that Vatican 11 makes no new contribution to the debate on justification by faith, and concludes, "Apart from a new Roman Catholic confession on justification by faith, Trent remains a major barrier between the heirs of the Reformation and Roman Catholicism."<sup>142</sup> So Rome seems to be the same, so who is changing? David Wells noted, "The evangelical world, in fact, is now coming apart because its central truths [like justification by faith alone], what once held it all together, no longer have the binding power that they once had and, in some cases, are rejected outright with no following outcry."<sup>143</sup> Bruce McCormack said, "theological confusion" among Reformation churches over justification by faith is "hastening the demise of Protestantism in the West."<sup>144</sup>

D. A. Carson adds (2005), that "paid masses to release souls from purgatory are still notoriously common in many parts of the Catholic world. As for the fundamental doctrinal issues that divided Reformers and Catholics half a millennium ago, although the polemic today is more courteous, the current pope [John Paul 11] and strong voices in the Curia such as Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger [who superintended the 1994 Catholic Catechism, and is now Pope Benedict XVI], are strictly Tridentine [representing Council of Trent]. Read the Current Catechism on, say, justification."<sup>145</sup> So Trent is still influential, and true union between Evangelicals and Catholics can only be achieved through embracing the biblical Gospel with its salvation through Scripture alone, by faith alone, through Christ alone. The words "alone" are crucial in the quest for true union.

7. The Pope commissioned the Council of Trent to come up with a different interpretation than the historicist view of Prophecy, which the Reformers

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<sup>141</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith*, tr., Jeffrey F. Cayzier (London: T & T Clark, 2006, Ger. 1999, 1<sup>st</sup> et, 2001), xxxiv, italics his.

<sup>142</sup> Paul G. Schrottenboer, *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988, 1<sup>st</sup> 1987), 66.

<sup>143</sup> David F. Wells, "Foreword," in *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification*, eds., Gary L. W. Johnson & Guy P. Waters (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 13.

<sup>144</sup> Bruce L. McCormack in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debate?* 83.

<sup>145</sup> D. A. Carson. *Becoming Conversant with Emerging Church : Understanding a Movement and its Implications* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 173-174.

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used to point to the Roman church as Antichrist. The Jesuits went to work, and eventually Luis De Alcasar suggested Preterism (past) and Francisco Ribera suggested Futurism (future), and both deflected attention away from the present, and hence away from the church. Futurism is widely accepted by Protestants, and so Trent still influences them to not discern the Roman church as antichrist.

8. Vatican II states that, “The Spirit guides the Church into the fullness of truth.”<sup>146</sup> Statements of the infallible Pope (speaking *ex cathedra*) are “irreformable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>147</sup> This is why there is a basic continuity between Trent and subsequent doctrinal statements.

### **6. Protestant Decline**

Lutheran pietism didn’t emphasize forensic justification (declared righteous), because they were more interested in experience, concentrating on believers being made righteous. This reminds us of Orthodox theology with its desire to experience God mystically, which also has no interest in justification by faith. Today Protestants come to debate Roman theologians with a weakness that makes a difference, as noted by a number of scholars:

In our day, the doctrine of justification is widely ignored, rarely central, and not infrequently denied outright by Protestant—tragically, even evangelical—theologians and pastors. If the statistics cited above are in any way indicative of reality, 87 percent of Americans evangelicals are practicing medieval Roman Catholics in their view of how one relates to God.<sup>148</sup> Today one can easily find theological professors at leading evangelical institutions who no longer find justification by faith alone to be true, much less necessary.<sup>149</sup> Michael S. Horton

When we examine our own position today, it is astonishing to find how close we have come to the Roman view even in the Church of Scotland. How frequently, for example, we find that appeal is made to ‘Christian

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<sup>146</sup> *Vatican II*, 17 (1.1.4).

<sup>147</sup> *Vatican II*, 48-49 (1.3.25).

<sup>148</sup> “The Solas of the Reformation” in *Here We Stand: A Call from Confessing Evangelicals*, eds. James Montgomery Boice and Benjamin E. Sasse (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 123.

<sup>149</sup> Foreword to R. C. Spoul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 13.

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instinct' or to 'the mind of the Church' over against the plain utterances of Holy Scripture, and often just at those places where the Word of God offends our will, opposes our habits, or cuts against the grain of our desire? And how massive is the effect of our several traditions upon the interpretations of the Bible? How easy it is to allow the Presbyterian tradition to determine our reading of the New Testament especially when it is a question of justifying our tradition before the critique of others! There can be no doubt that every one of the great Churches of the Reformation, the Lutheran, the Anglican, and the Reformed, has developed its own masterful tradition, and that that tradition today exercises massive influence not only over its way of interpreting the Bible and formulating its doctrine but over the whole shape and direction of its life. . . It is high time we asked again whether the Word of God really does have free course amongst us and whether it is not after all bound and fettered by the traditions of men.<sup>150</sup> Thomas F. Torrance

On the basis of the above analysis, it will be clear that there exist real differences between Protestant and Roman Catholics over the matter of justification. . . . In recent years, there appears to be increasing sympathy for the view that these differences, although of importance in the Reformation period, no longer possess the significance that they once had. This is not to say that the Christian denominations are agreed on the matter of justification, for it is obvious that their respective teachings have a very different 'feel' or 'atmosphere' to them. It seems that in the modern period the Christian denominations have preferred to concentrate on their points of agreement, rather than draw attention to their historical disagreements.<sup>151</sup> Alister McGrath

David Wells noted, "The evangelical world, in fact, is now coming apart because its central truths [like justification by faith alone], what once held it all together, no longer have the binding power that they once had and, in some cases, are rejected outright with no following outcry."<sup>152</sup> Bruce McCormack said, "theological confusion" among Reformation churches

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<sup>150</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London, SCM, 1965), 164-164.

<sup>151</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Justification by Faith: What it Means for Us Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 71. McGrath wrote this six years before the "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" statement in March, 1994.

<sup>152</sup> David F. Wells, "Foreword," in *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification*, eds., Gary L. W. Johnson & Guy P. Waters (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 13.

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over justification by faith is “hastening the demise of Protestantism in the West.”<sup>153</sup>

Even though written in 1965, my major professor at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, T. F. Torrance, made a statement that is still true: “Justification by Christ alone calls in question all systems and orders, and calls them in question because Jesus Christ alone is central and supreme in the one Church of God. In any true theological system, justification is by reference to Christ alone, for conformity to Christ as the Truth of God for us is the one ultimate principle of unity. Likewise justification in ecclesiastical order or polity ought to be through appeal to Christ alone. Our quarrel with the Church of Rome in doctrinal matters concerns the centrality of Jesus Christ, the primacy and supremacy of Christology which is so obscured and compromised by Roman doctrines of merit and tradition, and above all by Maryology.”<sup>154</sup>

Protestant theologians have joined Roman theologians in placing tradition above Scripture, as the foundational reason for their decline. Both sides come to Scripture using critical tools, constrained by an external mission (to defeat secularism), but blind to their secular approach to sacred Scripture. The Bible fired the Reformation, exposing some Roman doctrines as non-biblical. Today that Protestant prophetic voice has been largely muted because of the de-construction of Scripture which alone can judge the authenticity of human theological conclusions. Today, a number of evangelical theologians question Scripture as revelation, relegating it to a mere witness to revelation.

### **7. Conclusion**

The New Perspectives on Paul (NPP), New Covenant Theology (NCT), and Federal Vision (FV) reject the doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*), the article on which the church stands or falls (*articula stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*).

R. Albert Mohler Jr., President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said, “By this historic and crucial measure [Justification by faith, the article on which the church stands or falls] evangelicalism in its contemporary form is largely falling—and falling fast.” He concludes, “The drama of the gospel has not changed, but the audience for evangelical

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<sup>153</sup>Bruce L. McCormack in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debate?*, 83.

<sup>154</sup>T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), 165.

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theology *has* changed—and not for the better. The emergence of these new systems of thought [New Perspective on Paul and Federal Vision], neither of which is as new as its proponents suggest, indicates a dangerous and potentially fatal weakening of evangelical conviction and doctrinal discernment.”<sup>155</sup>

Abraham Kuyper said in Scripture “justification occupies the most conspicuous place. And is presented as of greatest importance for the sinner.” It is “the very kernal of the *Reformation*, which puts this doctrine of ‘justification by faith’ oddly and clearly in opposition to the ‘meritorious works of Rome.’” The Reformed rightly urged “not to merge justification and sanctification.”<sup>156</sup> The Reformers urge that there be no merging of justification and sanctification. Protestants would do well to listen to Catholic apologist Robert Sungenis.

Between Catholics and Protestants lies a great divide concerning whether the Christian has imputed or infused righteousness. Indeed this difference is probably the most crucial in the ongoing debate, because it encompasses the most theological territory. In fact, the original motivation of the Reformation was to distance itself from the medieval concept of infused righteousness formulated largely by the theology of Augustine.<sup>157</sup>

Karl Barth adds:

[Trent] ‘speaks of the good works of the regenerate man, who is only a little sinner and commits only tiny sins, and who is the happy position of being able to increase the grace of justification in co-operation with it, and even to augment the degree of his eternal bliss. The practical consequence of all this is that the misery of man is not regarded in any way as serious or dangerous either for Christians or non-Christians. The Reformation communions could not unite with a Catholic Church which held this doctrine, and they cannot accept the call to reunion with it to-day.’<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Afterword: A Change in the Audience, Not in the Drama,” in *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification*, eds., Gary L. W. Johnson & Guy P. Waters (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007) 207.

<sup>156</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979, 1<sup>st</sup> 1900), 354, 355.

<sup>157</sup> Robert A. Sungenis, *Not By Faith Alone: The Biblical Evidence for the Catholic Doctrine of Justification* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing Co., 1997), 299.

<sup>158</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 4/2, 498.

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But with its doctrine of justification the Roman Church closed the door to self-reformation and deprived itself of all possibility of seizing the initiative in uniting the divided Church. It was impossible for the Evangelical Churches to return to fellowship with Rome when the decisive point of dispute was handled in this way. They could not surrender truth to unity.<sup>159</sup>

Barth's statements need to guide the contemporary process, for arguably truth has been surrendered for unity, and that is too high a price to pay for the war against secularism, for only truth will overcome error. False theology is just as secular as any other secularism, but more insidious because it is in the church rather than outside.

Richard John Neuhaus stated the Catholic difference from Protestants. "For the Catholic, faith in Christ and faith in the Church are one act of faith."<sup>160</sup> This is because Catholic theology identifies the church and Christ, for the church is alleged to be literally the "body of Christ" instead of metaphorically, as in Protestant theology. I concur with Mark Saucy that the soteriological debate between Evangelicals and Catholics has a deeper level in biblical ecclesiology. Christ as prophet, priest, and king cannot be confined within a church (as in Roman theology) because He is the head of the church (Ephes 5:23).<sup>161</sup> In fact, "the Church is *only* the Body of which He is the Head."<sup>162</sup>

In other words it is Christ who justifies, and not the church. In spite of all the work of ECT, there cannot be true union on justification unless the Roman church gives up its identity with Christ, because the church cannot be the extension of the incarnation. The church isn't Christ, nor is Christ the church. The ascended Christ was addressed as God by the Father (Heb 1:8). He is exalted and seated at the Father's right hand (Acts 2:33), and has

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<sup>159</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 4/1, 626. Although Barth wrote these comments in 1955, and 1953 respectively, they still have importance in the contemporary ECT debate.

<sup>160</sup> Richard John Neuhaus, "The Catholic Difference," in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, eds. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 216.

<sup>161</sup> Mark Saucy, "Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox Together: Is the Church the Extension of the Incarnation" in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, June 2000 (43 #2), 193-212.

<sup>162</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church: Order and Disorder* (London: Lutterworth, 1959) 1:106.

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all authority in heaven and earth (Matt 28:18a). To be Christian, the church must remain submissive, humble, and under Christ's authority—under the One who is truly infallible. Nor is it good enough to say bishops preside “in place of God over the flock”<sup>163</sup> so that “the faithful must cling to their bishop,”<sup>164</sup> because the church is “the universal sacrament of salvation.”<sup>165</sup> That's not what Peter (the alleged first pope) said: “Salvation is found in no one else [besides Christ], for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Christians don't need mediators to come to Jesus Christ, for He is the only mediator between God and humans (1 Tim 2:5), the only authorized priest in the Christian era (Book of Hebrews). “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb 4:16). The good news is, Christ “is able to save completely those who come to God through him [not through a church, human priests, saints or Mary], because he always lives to intercede for them” (Heb 7:25).

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<sup>163</sup> *Vatican II*, 40 (1.3.20).

<sup>164</sup> *Vatican II*, 52 (1.3.27).

<sup>165</sup> *Vatican II*, 79 (1.7.43).