

2011

# The Debate Over Justification by Faith

Norman R. Gulley  
*Southern Adventist University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd>

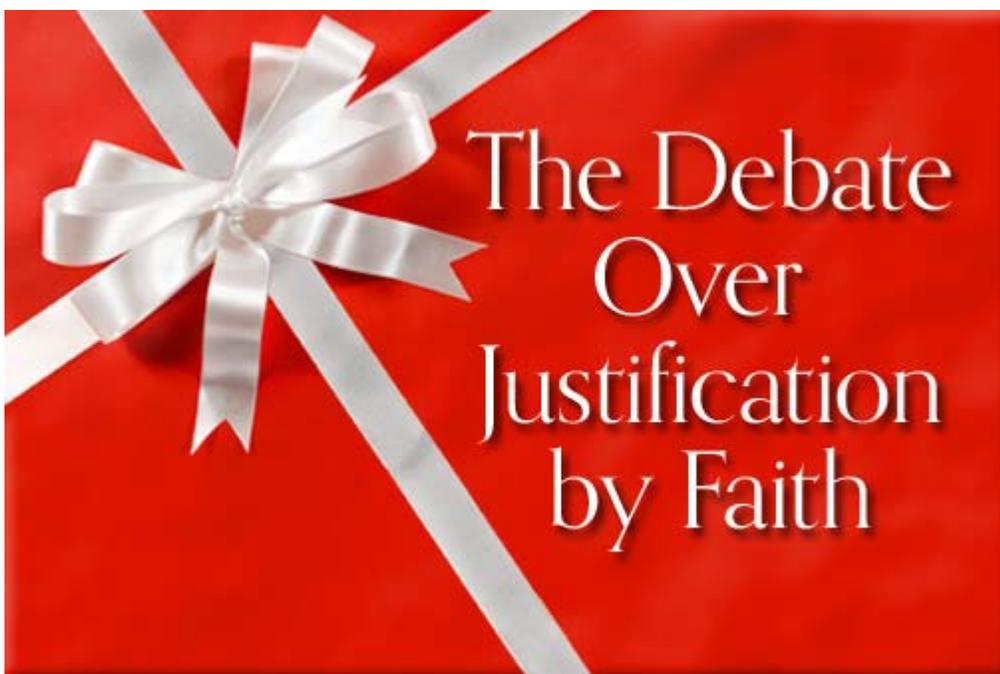
 Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Gulley, Norman R. (2011) "The Debate Over Justification by Faith," *Perspective Digest*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 4 , Article 3.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd/vol16/iss4/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Adventist Theological Society at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspective Digest by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).



***Some Evangelicals and Catholics think they have reached agreement on this issue, but they're overlooking some essentials.***

By Norman R. Gulley

[em português](#)

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 law" (vs. 28, RSV), with even faith a gift. Humans are "justified by His blood" (5:9, NKJV). Calvary was the "one act of righteousness" that "leads to justification and life for all men" (5:18, 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, NIV).

Justification is found in Christ, and is received by faith. This has nothing to do with Christ's faithfulness in the covenant that continues human membership in the covenant, as proposed by "New Perspectives on Paul" (NPP) scholarship. The NPP

“movement” rose in the latter part of the 20th century as a challenge to long-held Lutheran and Reformed interpretation of Paul’s writings.

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 and Greek “never refer to the infusion of righteousness, that is the transformation of someone from being ungodly to being virtuous.”<sup>1</sup> Justification is the same throughout human history, in old and new covenant periods, because it is about the one eternal gospel. Hence, “‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’” (Rom. 4:3, RSV), or “counted” to him (ESV). The word translated as *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’s substitutionary death for all humans.

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

At a deeper level, Christ was “delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (vs. 25, ESV). There is a post-Calvary dimension to God’s saving work that is often overlooked. Christ and the Holy Spirit both intercede in heaven for believers. The Book of Hebrews is like a fifth Gospel, and

focuses on Christ's 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 as a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:5, 6, ESV). Christ alone is qualified to intercede on the basis of His death.

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, NIV).

## **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 of God was a philosophical view that questioned God's compassion, so self-power was a philosophical term introducing human autonomy to the doctrine of justification. Also the Greek word for "to receive one's share" was translated by the Latin word for "to be worthy of something,"

which brought the concept of merit into medieval theology, affecting the biblical doctrine of justification. So alien philosophical ideas distorted the biblical meaning of justification, contributing to the Roman Catholic 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. 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 it 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>

Augustine tells us that he didn't know Hebrew, and he disliked the difficulty of learning Greek. He was therefore limited to the Latin word *justifico*. The etymology of this word means to "make righteous" rather than to "declare righteous."<sup>7</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>8</sup>

*Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)*. Martin Luther called the medieval church the "Aristotelian church" for it depended on Aristotle more than on Scripture. Sacramental theology (systematized during 1050-1240) linked justification with the sacraments. This alleges that continuous justification is mediated

through the church and its sacraments. In the late 12th century, the idea of merit for works of continuous justification entered Roman Catholic theology. 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 that need not detain us. 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.

The *Summa Theologica* is the theological system of Thomas Aquinas. "This brilliant synthesis of Christian thought has had a decisive and permanent impact on religion since the thirteenth century and has become substantially the official teaching of the Catholic Church."<sup>9</sup> A. G. Sertillanges 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>10</sup> However, the system is a veritable source of church traditions and comments from philosophers, and it 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 more difficult writing is "an ark of salvation" for readers.

Aquinas claimed that God's being is immutable, that He predestines persons to salvation and reprobation, and that the Holy Spirit dwells in humans and gifts them with "sanctifying grace."<sup>11</sup> However, sacraments of the Old Law "were ordained to the sanctification of man"<sup>12</sup> (yet "they neither contained nor caused grace"),<sup>13</sup> and sacraments of the New Law are for "the sanctification of man,"<sup>14</sup> for they "contain grace" and are "an

instrumental cause of grace.”<sup>15</sup> Aquinas claims that, “The sacraments are signs in protestation of the faith whereby man is justified.”<sup>16</sup> Aquinas believed 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 correct when he said at “issue was nothing less than the essential character of the gospel.”<sup>17</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. Luther would devote more time to justification by faith than any other doctrine, except the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper.

Augustine and Luther were converted through reading Romans (13:13, 14 and 1:17 respectively). This caused Augustine to give up a profligate life; it brought Luther to victory over an internal struggle over 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 that it meant that “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 that Augustine had a similar understanding of the text, “as the righteousness with which God clothes us when he justifies us.”<sup>18</sup> Luther considered justification a doctrine taught in Scripture, so he reached back beyond the subjectivism of medieval theology to Augustine and Paul.

But did Luther’s view of justification change? Luther began lecturing on Romans at Wittenberg University in the summer of 1515. From his published notes of the time 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>19</sup>; (2) God “has begun to heal him. . . . He will continue to deliver him from sin until he has completely cured him.”<sup>20</sup> This is “the gift of grace, which begins to take sin away.”<sup>21</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 possible only 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. “Luther, following Augustine, did not make the distinction between forensic justification and progressive sanctification, that emerges in later Protestantism.” It was Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), Luther’s younger colleague at Wittenberg, who introduced the concept of justification as forensic.<sup>22</sup>

Luther was the rugged leader who launched the Reformation, whereas Melanchthon 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. It can be argued that Melanchthon’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; Calvin was reticent to leave the Catholic 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, which says justification precedes sanctification, which precedes glorification (chronological order; note the first two are reversed in 1 Corinthians 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>23</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>24</sup> As Berkouwer says, "Calvin's thought is concentric—salvation in Christ."<sup>25</sup>

*Alister McGrath.* Alister McGrath's book *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution*, focuses on biblical interpretation by individuals instead of by a church, which McGrath considered a dangerous idea, resulting in the pluralism of Protestantism. 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? The doctrine also renders "the cult of the saints redundant."<sup>26</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>27</sup>

At the beginning of the 20th 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. McGrath claims that more Protestants become Catholics than vice versa, because evangelicalism lacks historical roots and institutional connection with the New Testament. (It is doubtful that McGrath factored into this the number of Catholics becoming Protestants in South American countries.) In a criticism of Luther, McGrath said: "His 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>28</sup>

Earlier in his book, McGrath points out that Luther responded to indulgences. Indulgences were cause enough for reform, because they were 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>29</sup> At least this seems to be far more than a local concern, and it gets to the heart of Catholic theology: the replacing of the divine by the human. This seems 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 effort to reintroduce the gospel would include justification by faith alone, to counter the Catholic emphasis on salvation by human works.

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 was of primary interest to Calvin. Put differently, imputation and impartation are received from Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Reformation's doctrine of salvation.

Superficially this seems the same as Catholic theology, at least in the joining of justification and sanctification; but the major difference lies in Catholic infusion instead of Reformation imputation/impartation, with Catholic elevation of human nature producing works capable of merit (considered as ongoing

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.

### **Catholic Response—Counter Reformation**

Catholic theologians made a dramatic change in 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 Catholic theology had taught for a very long time. Then, Catholic 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.

The concessions didn't hold. Just four years later, the Council of Trent was convened (1545-1563). It discussed the subject of justification for seven months in 1547, and totally repudiated the Protestant views with anathemas. Rome doesn't change, even though she may make outward 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. Trent is clear that humans are born with original sin, that Jesus Christ came to redeem all humans through His death, and that 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 be baptized.

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, KJV) and "faith. . . worketh by charity" (Gal. 5:6, KJV). Neither faith nor works "merit the grace of justification."<sup>30</sup>

All of this seems to present the gospel, and no doubt contributes to the contemporary debate that seeks to find similarities between Roman and Reformation views of justification. There are similarities, but 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. Trent decreed that the Latin Vulgate version of Scripture was the official Bible, but this version

doesn't do justice to the Greek word *dikaiosunē*, which means "to declare righteous" for the Vulgate translates it by the Latin word *iustificare*, which means "to make righteous."<sup>31</sup> To be declared righteous has nothing to do with personal merit; whereas to be made righteous leads 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 Orthodox Church never had a theology of merit as did the Latin church.<sup>32</sup> The Greek (or Eastern) Church emphasized deification 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>33</sup> Faith, hope, and love are infused into the Christian. With the infusion of justification there begins a process of justification in which works merit further justification. This confuses the categories of justification and sanctification, and questions justification by faith alone, because works are included. Shedd is correct: "Men are justified in order that they may be sanctified, not sanctified in order that they may be justified."<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Catholic infused justification, or "physical justification," 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. This means there is no imputation of Christ who forgives all sin in this life. Remaining sin must be atoned for in purgatory. Catholic justification lacks imputation.

Scripture defines justification (or righteousness): "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6, NIV). This text is the basis for the New Testament presentation on justification (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23).

## **Contribution of the “New Perspectives on Paul” Movement**

No school of thought since the 16th-century Reformation, not even the Bultmann's in the 20th century, has had such an impact on Pauline studies as the “New Perspectives on Paul” (NPP), 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>35</sup> D. A. Carson says “the new perspective is the reigning paradigm.”<sup>36</sup> Even though there were other books before Sanders with his major thesis, his was a turning point because it was the first book following the Jewish Holocaust. 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.

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 “eschatological 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. Nevertheless, many scholars didn't follow Schweitzer, believing Paul gained much from Hellenism rather than from Judaism.

W. D. Davies's book *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (1948), “marks a watershed in the history of scholarship on Paul and Judaism,”<sup>37</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.

Krister Stendahl stated that justification by faith was Luther's focus and not Paul's. 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. Stendahl dismissed justification by faith as merely an Augustinian-Lutheran experience, but not a biblical experience.

In 1971, Ernst Käsemann, student of Bultmann, believed that justification is central to Paul's writings, and to salvation history. Käsemann's view of justification is corporate (rather than individual) and participatory, which basically questions 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>38</sup> He states this idea again as "a truth which transcends the individual and is directed toward a new world." Here is a "primacy of christology over anthropology."<sup>39</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 B.C. to 200 A.D. and discovered that election got one into the covenant, and commandment-keeping was a response to this prior election. "The Rabbis did not have the Pauline/Lutheran problem of 'works-righteousness.'"<sup>40</sup> The bottom line was that the rabbis understood obedience to be a response to God's love for Israel. Sanders termed this "covenantal nomism."<sup>41</sup> Sanders concludes that because covenantal nomism was so pervasive during the four

centuries studied (200 B.C.-200 A.D.) that it was “the basic type of religion known by Jesus and presumably by Paul.”<sup>42</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. Wright says Paul’s gospel creates the church, whereas justification defines and sustains it.

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 opposition to Judaism as similar to Luther’s opposition to the medieval church. But the NPP claims that Palestinian Judaism was grace-based, that their works were 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>43</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 chose Israel, and in so doing was righteous, and understood as faithful. So Dunn considers the verb *dikaio* means both “make righteous” and “reckon righteous,” which practically makes the Catholic/Protestant debates pointless. The NPP, like liberal theology before it, is rooted in the historical-critical method, which is much more interested in alleged sources. Why should second Temple Judaism be the hermeneutical basis for

understanding Paul, when *sola scriptura* looks to the Old Testament, where Scripture interprets Scripture?

Second Temple Jews were engaged in “works of the law” to earn salvation, demonstrated by Paul before his conversion. 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. 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: All the law is important and not just a subset of Jewish markers. 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 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.”<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, the Halakhic Letter, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumran, supports the traditional view because legalistic works to earn salvation was a problem at Qumran. 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). 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 but through faith (Rom. 1: 17; 3: 28), which is a gift of God (5: 17).

### **Catholic-Protestant Divide**

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 toward Rome, because this was achieved through use of the historical-critical method of exegesis. Ernst Käsemann argues “that the historical-critical method is inseparable from Protestantism, is indeed its very genius.”<sup>45</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 New Perspectives on Paul, 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.'"46

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."47

*Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) 1: The Christian Mission for the Third Millennium* (1994).<sup>48</sup> In the Catholic *First Things: The Journal of Religion, Culture, and Public Life* (1994), is an article titled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium." 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 intends for all his disciples."<sup>49</sup> They concurred that "the scandal of conflict between Christians obscures the scandal of the cross, thus crippling the one mission of the one Christ."<sup>50</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>51</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. 7:27; 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." 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. In a later *First Things* journal is a report on post-ECT 1 study given to differences between Evangelicals and Catholics. In 1996, it was "determined that further progress depended upon firm agreement on the meaning of salvation, and especially the doctrine of justification."<sup>52</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 and 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 and that no one comes to the Father except through Christ. 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>53</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. 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? 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>54</sup> Note that Evangelicals believe in the biblical heritage of the Reformation and Catholics believe in the traditions of the church. This is what divided them in the 16th-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>55</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>56</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>57</sup> The inclusion of tradition as equal with Scripture (see Vatican II) means the Catholic Church uses human ideas along with divine revelation in Scripture, and how can those who believe in *sola scriptura* 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 a living tradition that adds to and takes away from Scripture, and the Magisterium that officially interprets Scripture for the church; whereas Protestants look to 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>58</sup> By contrast, Protestants believe that 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>59</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. In other words, the official Catholic understanding of Scripture discounts the unofficial ECT 3 document. How can papal infallibility, the alleged re-crucifixion of Christ in the mass, and the numerous changes made to God’s Ten Commandments 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*. Communion concerns union of beliefs as well as union in fellowship. Are Catholics and Protestants experiencing both? There are differences among 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 that 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. Although all true Christians are in a relationship with Christ, who is the Head of the body that 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 [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>60</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>61</sup> In other words, "The [Catholic] Church is 'the universal sacrament of salvation.'"<sup>62</sup> "The Church has been divinely sent to all nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation.'"<sup>63</sup>

Other churches are called "separated Churches" and not "sister churches" because the Roman Catholic 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 entrusted to the Catholic Church."<sup>64</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 Catholic Church reaches out to all humans to gift them salvation through the church. In fact, the 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. True communion of the saints is found in communion with Him. Carefully worded statements that seem to reflect, to some degree, the communion of saints, must always be interpreted against the unchanging official belief that the Catholic 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 Catholic Church. While the Catholic 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, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6, NKJV).

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>65</sup> This apparently overlooks the fact that justification by faith is presented in the Old Testament Book of Habakkuk (2:4), long before any Christian church was in existence.

Facing a common enemy (secularism, with its anti-family values, abortion, 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 16th century. There is one important difference between Catholic and Reformation understanding of justification—infusion (Catholic) 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 16th 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 II (1963-1965) marked a change in the Catholic Church. 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 II the Catholic Church reached out as a player to achieve its global ambitions (see Revelation 13:1-4, 11-16; 17:1-18). However, consider evidence that the Council of Trent is still influential today:

1. Vatican II 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>66</sup>

2. Vatican II referred to "The Fathers of this sacred Synod, furthering the work begun by the Council of Trent."<sup>67</sup>

3. The "veneration of the saints, Marian devotions, and eucharistic adoration," which Protestants revolted against in the Reformation, all continued after Trent. In fact, since Trent, Mary has been elevated to heights not endorsed at Trent.

4. Vatican II continued the focus on the infallibility of the Pope proclaimed in Vatican I. In Vatican II "there is in actuality no repudiation of Trent, or of the Vatican Council [Vatican I]. If anything, when Trent or the first Vatican Council are mentioned, the emphasis is never critical."<sup>68</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>69</sup> Those stressing discontinuity of Vatican II with Trent and Vatican I, “have occasionally forgotten that the Council [Vatican II] retracted nothing in the dogmas of Trent and Vatican I.”<sup>70</sup>

5. With respect to Scripture and tradition, the view of Trent continued in Vatican II: “‘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 II have declared their intention to follow (DV 1).”<sup>71</sup>

6. In the latest Catholic Catechism, 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>72</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 the Council of Trent in 1547 on the basis of, and more particularly *against*, the Reformers’ doctrine of Justification.”<sup>73</sup>

Paul Schrottenboer, general secretary for the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, noted in 1987 that Vatican II 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>74</sup>

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>75</sup> Bruce McCormack said, "Theological confusion" among Reformation churches over justification by faith is "hastening the demise of Protestantism in the West."<sup>76</sup>

D. A. Carson adds 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 II] 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>77</sup> So Trent is still influential, and true union between Evangelicals and Catholics can be achieved only through embracing the biblical gospel with its salvation through Scripture alone, by faith alone, through Christ alone. The word *alone* in these terms is crucial in the quest for true union.

7. The Pope commissioned the Council of Trent to come up with a different interpretation from the historicist view of prophecy, which the Reformers used to point to the Catholic 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 Catholic Church as antichrist.

8. Vatican II states that, "The Spirit guides the Church into the fullness of truth."<sup>78</sup> Statements of the infallible Pope (speaking *ex cathedra*) are "irreformable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit."<sup>79</sup> This concept supports a basic continuity between Trent and subsequent

doctrinal statements.

### **Protestant Decline**

Lutheran pietists didn't emphasize forensic justification (being 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 American evangelicals are practicing medieval Roman Catholics in their view of how one relates to God. 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>80</sup>

"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 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>81</sup>

"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>82</sup>

T. F. Torrance, of the University of Edinburgh, made a statement in 1965 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>83</sup>

Protestant theologians have joined Catholic theologians in placing tradition above Scripture, and this is the foundational

reason for Protestantism's 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 Catholic doctrines as non-biblical. Today, that Protestant prophetic voice has been largely muted because of the deconstruction of Scripture when Scripture 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.<sup>84</sup>

## 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 emphasis 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 theology has changed—and not for the better. The emergence of these new systems of thought [New Perspectives 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>85</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 kernel of the Reformation, which puts this doctrine of 'justification by faith' oddly and clearly in opposition to the 'meritorious works of Rome.'" He rightly urged "not to merge justification and

sanctification."<sup>86</sup> The Reformed Church also rightly urged 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>87</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 cooperation 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 today."<sup>88</sup>

"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>89</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>90</sup> This is because Catholic theology identifies the church with Christ, for the church is alleged to be literally the “body of Christ” instead of metaphorically, as in Protestant theology. The debate over the doctrine of salvation 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. In fact, “the Church is only the Body of which He is the Head.”<sup>91</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 Catholic 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. He is exalted and seated at the Father’s right hand, and has all authority in heaven and earth. 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>92</sup> so that “the faithful must cling to their bishop,”<sup>93</sup> because the church is “the universal sacrament of salvation.”<sup>94</sup>

This is 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, NIV). Christians don’t need mediators to come to Jesus Christ, for He is the only mediator between God and humans: “There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5, NIV). He is the only authorized priest in the Christian era (Epistle to the 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, NIV). The good news: 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, NIV).<sup>95</sup>

---

*Norman R. Gulley, Ph.D., is Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

## REFERENCES

1. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformation Books, 1993), p. 343.
2. Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, 89 (15).
3. Ibid., 113 (65).
4. Ibid., 102 (45).
5. *On The Gospel of St. John Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series 7:21 (3. 9).
6. *On the Psalms*, NPNF First Series 8:22 (Psa 7. 5).
7. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, Joseph A. Burgess, *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), p. 18.
8. David F. Wright, "Justification in Augustine," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challengers*, Bruce I. McCormack, ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2006), p. 56.
9. Cover comment on each of the five volumes of the *Summa Theologica*.
10. Ibid.
11. *Summa Theologica*, 1:221 (Q. 43. 1. 3).
12. Ibid., 2:1068 (Q. 102. 1-11. 5).
13. Ibid., 4:2349 (Q. 61. 3. 4).

14. Ibid., 4:2342 (Q. 60. 3. 5); cf. 4: 2346 (61. 3. 1), 4: 2348 (61. 3. 1).
15. Ibid., 4:2351 (Q. 62. 3. 3).
16. Ibid., 4:2348-2349 (Q. 61. 3. 4).
17. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2006), vol. 2, p. 3519.
18. *Luther Works: Career of the Reformer 1V* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), vol. 34, pp. 336, 337.
19. Ibid., vol. 25, pp. 257, 258.
20. Ibid., p. 260.
21. Ibid., p. 261.
22. Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), p. 98.
23. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London: James Clarke, 1962), vol. 2, 99.
24. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 462-466.
25. G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977, 1954), p. 28.
26. Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History From the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), p. 250.
27. Ibid., p. 44.
28. Ibid., p. 58.
29. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church: The Middle Ages 1294-1517* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1960), vol. 6, pp. 761, 762.
30. H. J. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: Original Text With English Translation* (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1955), pp. 33-35.
31. Michael S. Horton, "The *Sola's* of the Reformation" in *Here We Stand: A Call for Confessing Evangelicals*, James

Montgomery Boice and Benjamin E. Sasse, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), p. 122.

32. Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of The Doctrine of Justification; From 1500 to the Present Day* (Cambridge: 1996, 1986), p. 15.

33. H. J. Schroeder, op cit., 33 (6.7).

34. William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2003), p. 800.

35. Donald A. Hagner, "Paul and Judaism: Testing the New Perspective," in Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification A Challenge to the New Perspective: With an Essay by Donald A. Hagner* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), p. 75.

36. D. A. Carson, "Summaries and Conclusions" in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2001), vol. 1, p. 505.

37. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), p. 7.

38. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 32.

39. Ibid., p. 93.

40. E. P. Sanders, op cit., p. 100.

41. Ibid., p. 422.

42. Ibid., p. 426.

43. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of the Apostle Paul* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 340, 354, 355.

44. J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: P&R, 2008), p. 179.

45. James W. McClendon, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2: Doctrine* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994), p. 465.

46. Robert D. Preus, *Justification and Rome: An Evaluation of Recent Dialogues* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1997), p. 22.

47. Ibid., p. 23.

48. See Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, *Evangelicals & Catholics Together* (Dallas: Word, 1995).

49. *First Things: The Journal of Religion, Culture, and Public Life*, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/evangelicals-catholics-together-the-christian-mission-in-the-third-millennium>; accessed Dec. 4, 2011.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. [Http://www.leaderu.com/ect/ectmenu.html](http://www.leaderu.com/ect/ectmenu.html); accessed Dec. 4, 2011.

53.

[Http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9801/articles/gift.html](http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9801/articles/gift.html); accessed Dec. 4, 2011.

54. Ibid.

55.

[Http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9405/articles/mission.html](http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9405/articles/mission.html). Accessed Dec. 4. 2011.

56. Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom *Is the Reformation Over?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005) pp. 159, 160, cited from "The Gift of Salvation," *Christianity Today* (Dec. 8, 1997), p. 36.

57. "The Encyclicals of John Paul II," *Our Sunday Visitor* 39 (1996), p. 937.

58. Avery Dulles, "Revelation, Scripture, and Tradition" in *Your Word Is Truth*, Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 57.

59. "Your Word Is Truth" document in *Your Word Is Truth* (1-8), p. 5.

60. [Http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/the-communion-of-saints-17](http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/the-communion-of-saints-17); accessed Dec. 4, 2011.

61. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 220 (830).
62. *Vatican II*, p. 247 (4.4.45).
63. *Ibid.*, p. 584 (13. Preface).
64. *Ibid.*, p. 346 (6.1.3).
65. Richard John Neuhaus, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds. (Dallas: Word, 1995), p. 207.
66. Austin Flannery, O. P., gen. ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publ. Co., 1988), vol. 1, p. 412.
67. *Vatican Council II*, pp. 456, 457 (9.7.Conclusion).
68. Henry T. Hudson, *Papal Power: Its Origin and Development* (Unicoi, Tenn.: Trinity Foundation, 2008, 1981), p. 128.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
70. Hermann Pottmeyer, "A New Phase in the Reception of Vatican II: Twenty Years of Interpretation of the Council," in Giuseppe Albergio, Jean-Pierre Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), p. 40.
71. Timothy George, "An Evangelical Reflection on Scripture and Tradition" in *Your Word Is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 34.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 482.
73. Eberhard Jüngel, *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith*, Jeffrey F. Cayzier, tr. (London: T & T Clark, 2006,) p. xxxiv, italics in original.
74. Paul G. Schrotenboer, *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1988), p. 66.
75. David F. Wells, "Foreword," in *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification*, Gary L.

- W. Johnson & Guy P. Waters, eds. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007), p. 13.
76. Bruce L. McCormack, *op cit.*, p. 83.
77. D. A. Carson. *Becoming Conversant With Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 173, 174.
78. *Vatican II*, p. 17 (1.1.4).
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 49 (1.3.25).
80. Foreword to R. C. Spoul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), p. 13.
81. T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), pp. 164, 165.
82. Alister E. McGrath, *Justification by Faith: What It Means for Us Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988), p. 71.
83. T. F. Torrance, *op cit.*, p. 165.
84. Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2003), vol. 1.
85. 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*, Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters, eds. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007) p. 207.
86. Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 354, 355.
87. Robert A. Sungenis, *Not by Faith Alone: The Biblical Evidence for the Catholic Doctrine of Justification* (Goleta, Calif.: Queenship Publishing Co., 1997), p. 299.
88. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 4/2, p. 498.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 626.
90. Richard John Neuhaus, "The Catholic Difference," in Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds. *Evangelicals and*

*Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, (Dallas: Word, 1995), p. 216.

91. T. F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church: Order and Disorder* (London: Lutterworth, 1959) vol. 1, p. 106.

92. *Vatican II*, p. 40 (1.3.20).

93. *Ibid.*, p. 52 (1.3.27).

94. *Ibid.*, p. 79 (1.7.43).

95. This article is an adapted version of an article in the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*. More information will be provided in the final chapter of the author's *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation*, volume 3 (to be published by Andrews University Press in 2012).