

The Ecumenical Movement with Special Emphasis on The Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue on Justification

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I. Introduction

In Gesetzlich Wesen unter uns J. P. Koehler sets forth four theses. They are quite lengthy. In order to begin this paper with a proper attitude, we quote from Koehler:

In the previous section the first of the four theses set up was treated, 'Legalism among Christians consists in that they take the motives and forms of their actions from the law instead of letting them flow from the gospel. This comes from the flesh, which blends this inclination into every expression of the Christian's life and makes it superficial.' The following builds on the second thesis in its first part, 'This behavior manifests itself in the Lutheran church chiefly and principally in bravado of orthodoxy.'

Discussing the topic of ecumenism and the dialogue regarding the doctrine of justification between the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans demands a certain humility and a "watching out for" the demon of bravado of orthodoxy. A correct understanding of law and gospel was not a monopoly of the Lutheran church in Koehler's day, and it is hardly a monopoly of the WELS today. "Faith is created by the Holy Spirit. He creates the unity of the spirit. That is something internal."

Externally, however, it is possible that through all kinds of other influences a diversity in the intellectual conceptions of doctrine arises, with the result that people separate into various religious communions. Yes, even in the individual religious communions diversity in the conception of doctrine is prevalent. For what is written or spoken according to the external wording is, after all, not the conception of doctrine, but what is conceived inwardly in heart, soul and mind.

For this reason even today there is not a single truly united external religious communion, synod, or individual congregation. In fact, there has never really been an external unity of the church, not even in the ancient Catholic church.

We are reminded here of the dispute of Paul with Peter about food (Galatians 2:11-21) about the Council of Jerusalem dealing with circumcision (Acts 15), about the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41), about Montanus's pentecostal style legalism which seemed so appealing to Tertullian and the more

gospel-oriented approach of Cyprian (both men serving in North Africa with Cyprian serving somewhat later). The ancient Catholic church was not unified externally. Yet, then, as now, all true believers in Jesus Christ are known only to God and are perceived inwardly to be a part of the Holy Christian Church by the Judge of All. We can only perceive externally what God knows internally. We perceive a true confession to the pure gospel of Christ in the lives, doctrine, confession, and practice shown by ourselves to others and shown by others to us.

Koehler shows us the spirit of humility as he continues his warning against this bravado of orthodoxy.

But now, when we consider the doctrinal position of the Lutheran church as it appears originally in Luther, and how in the course of history within the Lutheran church it sets straight the aberrations cropping up again and again, we may justly affirm that here the Lutheran church has the correct doctrine. We declare it not in order to thank God that we are not like other people, but in order to confess the gospel and to extol the grace of God which we have experienced.

It is with this spirit of humility that we pray this paper may be written, delivered, and received.

II. Historical Overview

The Timelines

The two pages of the Twentieth Century Ecumenism Timeline attached to this paper are helpful to understand the relationships and the movements noted in this portion of the paper. There are five timelines shown and compared.

World Council of Churches
Synodical Conference
Confessional Ev. Lutheran Conference
Lutheran World Federation
Rome

The timelines are roughly synchronomous in listing, although the Synodical Conference line stresses a WELS viewpoint and notes more events than the other lines. While the paper will be written to stress the dialogues on the doctrine of justification between Lutherans and Catholics during this twentieth century, it is important to review the history of the ecumenical movement during this century rapidly retreating into the mist of the past and to note especially how what is happening in the world around us impacts upon all of Lutheranism and the WELS in particular. We are in the world.

We should also note that the attached sheet, numbered A1, entitled, *Highlights 20th Century Ecumenical Movement*, displays the ecumenical movement as if it were a river growing in power from its tributaries as it proceeds through the century. This presents us with the vivid picture that shows those who live, work, and serve in the church in this century and do not wish to participate in the mergers, mindset, and culture of false ecumenism, as people or church bodies who are swimming upstream against a current that is strong and growing and already very powerful.

The World Council of Churches

The river of ecumenism in this century begins with the Edinburgh Conference of 1910. This was a meeting of the International Missionary Conference under the chairmanship of John Mott. The goal of this conference was to survey the missionary activity throughout the world of non-Roman churches. The conference

boasted attendance of 1000 delegates from all over the world. Three movements grew out of the Edinburgh Conference. The work of the Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh Conference produced the first meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1921. This group merged with the World Council of Churches in 1961.

The second group to come out of the Edinburgh Conference is the World Conference on Faith and Order. Bishop Charles Brent of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA is the prime mover at the beginning of this group. He was missionary Bishop of the Philippines. Brent was excited about the dream of unity espoused in the Edinburgh Conference. An invitation to meet was sent out across the world in 1912. World War I delayed the preliminary meeting until 1920. Its first meeting was held in 1927. At its next meeting in 1937 it received a proposal from the World Conference on Life and Work to unite to form a World Council of Churches. It accepted that proposal. The two groups met in 1938 to begin the process with an exploratory meeting: The World Council of Churches in Process of Formation. World War II would delay its full implementation.

The World Council of Life and Work was formed under the guidance of Archbishop Nathan Soderblom of Uppsala. His vision was a union of churches in service to a world in need of reconstruction following World War I. Its first meeting was in 1925. German theologians wanted the mission of the church to be the proclamation of the Gospel of the salvation of souls. Americans wanted a social gospel. Its continuation committee formed the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work in 1930. The proposal to form a World Council of Churches came from its 1937 meeting in Oxford.

The Oxford Proposals of unity were discussed at Utrecht in 1938 with the Faith and Order group. Again, implementation was delayed by World War II until a meeting in Amsterdam in 1948. Men who were active in promoting the 1938 Exploratory Union Meeting in Utrecht were William Adams Brown, Joseph H. Oldham, and William Temple. The violence of World War II did not dim the unity feeling of Christians from all nations working together that was experienced in 1938.

The 1948 Amsterdam meeting lasted for two weeks. Attendance was by 351 delegates from 147 churches in 44 countries. The Roman Catholic Church, the Synodical Conference Churches, the Southern Baptists, and the Russian Orthodox Church refused to join. The last major ecumenical group to join the WCC was the World Council of Christian Education which joined in 1971.

The Lutheran World Federation

Most of the churches of the Lutheran World Federation took an active role in the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948.

The Lutheran World Convention which was organized after World War I, was thought to be too loosely organized to be effective to meet the needs of warravaged Lutherans and others following World War II. It was also felt that the mission churches of Africa, Asia, and Latin America which had been cut off from their lines of support by the war needed an international agency of Lutherans to provide for their needs. The result was the formation of the Lutheran World Federation in Lund, Sweden, in 1947. Up until 1984, the LWF called itself a free association or agency of Lutheran churches. It did not exercise ecclesiastical functions or have power to legislate for member churches. But in its Budapest meeting of 1984, it changed its constitution to include the wording that its affiliates "understand themselves to be in pulpit and altar fellowship with each other." This amendment was not adopted unanimously.

The Roman Catholic Church

The power of the papal hierarchy reached its height following the infallibility decree of Vatican I in 1870. Although some relatively unsanctioned discussions between Roman Catholics and extreme AngloCatholics took place in the Conversations at Malines between 1923 and 1927, the official papal attitude towards nonCatholics was to view them as heretics. The 1950 decree regarding the assumption of Mary by Pope

Plus, XII, without the approval of a council seemed to be a great road block to ecumenical relations with Protestants. In 1954, Pius even forbade Roman Catholic delegates from entering the city limits of Evanston during the time when the WCC was meeting there.

Vatican II and the papacy of John XXIII marks an abrupt shift from this official policy of viewing all nonCatholic churches as heretical. Since 1968 Roman Catholic delegates have been participating observers at WCC conventions. The dialogue with the churches of the LWF began in 1965. In 1979 dialogue began regarding the doctrine of justification. Between 1965 and 1979 dialogues have been conducted on

The status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma of the Church
One Baptism for the Remission of Sins
The Eucharist as Sacrifice
Eucharist and Ministry
Papal Primacy and the Universal Church
Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church.

The justification discussions were all held in the United States between the U. S. Roman Catholic Bishop's Committee for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs and the U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation. These dialogues began and remained unofficial in status. The report that was produced by these meetings became the basis for the agreement between Rome and the LWF. Dates and places of the discussions include:

September 1978, Minneapolis, Minnesota
February, 1979, Cincinnati, Ohio
September, 1979, Princeton, New Jersey
March, 1980, Atlanta, Georgia
September, 1980, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania
February, 1981, Cincinnati, Ohio
September, 1981, Paoli, Pennsylvania
February, 1982, Biloxi, Mississippi
September, 1982, New York, New York
February, 1983, Belmont, North Carolina
September, 1983, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Delegates from the churches of the LWF and the Roman Catholic Churches will gather in Augsburg, Germany, on October 31, 1999, to sign the agreement that has been reached on the doctrine of justification.

The Synodical Conference

How were the churches and how are the churches of the former Synodical affected by the religious, ecumenical culture of the twentieth century? While we don't have enough space in this paper to develop this topic completely the Timeline gives us some hints to foster further thought. The 1872 formation of the Synodical Conference is an exercise in Scriptural ecumenism. Churches found themselves to be in doctrinal agreement with each other and joined into associations to better serve the world with the Gospel. The first essay at the first synodical conference meeting in 1872 was entitled: "Justification: Objective and Subjective," and was written by F. A. Schmidt. A 1982 translation by Kurt Marquardt can be found in the WLS library. The longlasting discussions regarding election and conversion also involved the doctrine of justification. The merger of the four synods to form what will become the WELS is another example of the spirit of the times impacting the WELS in a positive way.

In 1938 the Missouri Synod adopted a resolution that said that "the Brief Statement, 'together with the

Declaration of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church and the provisions of this entire report...be regarded as the doctrinal basis for future church fellowship.” The Wisconsin Synod responded in its 1939 convention with a protest. “. . . it termed unacceptable ‘the doctrinal basis established by the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. Not two statements should be issued as a basis for agreement, it explained, a single joint statement covering the contested doctrines thetically and antithetically... is imperative.’” Here we begin a period of strife between the two synods that will grow until the Synodical Conference is destroyed. There was strife over chaplaincy during World War II. The 1944 Saginaw Convention of the Missouri Synod with its motions on boy scouts, prayer fellowship, and cooperation in externals caused problems between the synods of the Synodical Conference. The Common Confession between ALC and Missouri became a major point of contention until 1956 when the ALC took steps to merge with the American Lutheran Conference into a second and larger American Lutheran Church. The Wisconsin Synod viewed Missouri as swimming more and more with the current of false ecumenism and not swimming with the Scriptures against it. Immediately after the Synodical Conference Convention in 1952 in St. Paul, the Wisconsin Synod made an *in statu confessionis* declaration. “Because the confessional basis on which the synods of the Synodical Conference have jointly stood so far has been seriously impaired by the Common Confession, we continue to uphold our protest and to declare the Missouri Synod by retaining the Common Confession and using it for further steps toward union with the ALC is disrupting the Synodical Conference.”

The regular WELS convention in 1955, the special convention in 1956, and the New Ulm convention of 1957 were watershed conventions of the WELS. The timing of when to break with Missouri was hotly debated. In 1956 Missouri declared that the Common Confession would no longer serve as a union document and Missouri expressed gratitude at the Wisconsin concerns and admonitions. The New Ulm vote on the floor of the Wisconsin Convention did not follow the lead of the floor committee which had recommended a break with Missouri. The delegates voted 6177 to reject the recommendation to break fellowship and resolved to “continue our vigorously protesting fellowship.” A Conference of Theologians was recommended to draw up documents that would lead the synods of the Synodical Conference over the impasse. Justification was to be a part of the study, but the Conference of Theologians never got to it. Agreement was reached on Scripture, but not on the Antichrist or any other doctrine. The Conference of Theologians was a failure because Missouri could not agree to doctrines she had previous held with the rest of the Synodical Conference churches.

By a vote of 12459 the Wisconsin Synod Convention in Milwaukee in 1961 suspended fellowship with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. It would break from the Synodical Conference in 1963. Ninety plus years of fellowship and joint work were ended. The ecumenism of this ecumenical century had impacted upon the Synodical Conference and had destroyed it. We are a product of our times.

Professor Fredrick writes:

From 1938 to 1963 is a long time to carry through brotherly admonition. It was a quarter century that brought its share of frustration and heartache. But it was worth it because it was an endeavor to keep the unity of faith alive in the Synodical Conference.

The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference

In 1991 steps were taken in the WELS to form with other churches of like agreement in doctrine a conference in which mutual work and fellowship might be shared. The efforts resulted in the formation of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference which first met in Oberwesel, Germany in 1993. The theme was “God’s Word is Our Great Heritage.” The discussion draft of Article I, “Holy Scripture,” of *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the TwentyFirst Century*, was based upon the papers presented at the first meeting. The second meeting was held in 1996 in Puerto Rico. The topic was “Justification by Grace Through Faith: Our Heritage from the Lutheran Reformation.” It will form the basis for the second article of the proposed twentyfirst century confession. The 1999 convention of the CELC was held in Winter Haven, Florida, with a topic of “The Holy Spirit, His Person and Work.” Godwilling, the WELS, while continuing to swim upstream

against the current of false ecumenism, will continue to take a major role in the river of true ecumenism.

Comments

When one looks at the timeline one is struck by several concurrent secular and religious movements in twentieth century history and by several brief periods of time scattered throughout the century when key ecumenical things were initiated or accomplished. Again, we can only briefly dwell on a few of them. The impact of the devastation of the two world wars was huge. We have noted how unity efforts were set aside during the wars. The horror of human divisiveness, as manifested in war, as well as the unity of nations in common alliance to fight other groups of nations in common alliance, produced a desire for unity within the church to spread the gospel and to improve the human condition. Improvements in transportation and communication gave the impression that the world was becoming smaller and that it was important to have unity of religion to promote world peace. The practical aspects of transportation and communication improvements made unity a more reasonable and workable goal. The rise of the League of Nations and of the United Nations are a part of the spirit of finding solutions to mutual problems through organizations of mutual participation. But these things and others are only suggested when we compare the dates on the timeline to the events of world history and culture.

The value of the charted timeline for me was to see how many key events in the ecumenical history of the twentieth century were grouped together into several key periods of time. You may notice others, but we concentrate upon 1935-1938 first. What became the WCC was planned in 1938. A union of all non-Roman churches was envisioned. The Missouri Synod and the ALC actively began discussions at that time. A second period is the 1944 to 1948 period. The Missouri Synod and the ALC more actively discussed fellowship and the Common Confession was written. The Missouri Synod changed its official stance regarding Boy Scouts and other fellowship issues at its Saginaw Convention in 1944. The Lutheran World Federation was organized in 1947. A third period of worldwide intense ecumenical-related activity is the 1961-1965 period. The Synodical Conference ended with the break of fellowship between the Wisconsin and the Missouri Synods. The Roman Catholic Church did a 180 degree shift in its attitude towards other churches as a result of Vatican II, 1962-1965. Rome began dialogues with the Lutheran World Federation in 1965. The International Missionary Conference merged with the World Council of Churches in 1961. A final period of activity is 1993 to 1999. The Confessional Ev. Lutheran Conference was formed in 1993. The agreement regarding justification after numerous dialogues between Rome and the ELCA will be signed in 1999 by Rome and the LWF.

III. The Agreement Regarding Justification Between Lutherans and Catholics, 1998

Dialogue VII Justification by Faith

Philip Melancthon was pressured by his prince, Elector Maurice of Saxony, in 1548 to compose an alternative to the hated Augsburg Interim that would be acceptable to Lutherans and Catholics alike. Maurice, in turn, was pressured by both his subjects, who called him the Judas of Meissen for betraying Lutheranism for political gain (to gain the electorship), and by Emperor Charles V, who wanted through the Augsburg Interim to begin the process of re-Romanizing the Lutherans. Melancthon consented to write the Leipzig Interim which caused considerable consternation and which later led to the controversies regarding justification, free will, good works, etc. that were addressed in the Formula of Concord.

Melancthon wrote two articles of the Leipzig Interim which led to the controversies regarding the Doctrine of Justification because of the ambiguous words which he uses and because he does not mention the Lutheran *sola fide*.

Although God does not justify man by the merit of his own works which man does, but out of mercy, freely, without our merit, that the glory may not be ours, but Christ's, through

whose merit alone we are redeemed from sins and justified, yet the merciful God does not work with man as with a block, but draws him, so that his will also cooperates if he be of understanding years. For such a man does not receive the benefits of Christ unless his will and heart be moved by prevenient grace, so that he is terrified before God's wrath and has dislike of sin.

Melanchthon's use of "although" and "but" to include two disparate approaches to Justification, Roman and Lutheran, is exactly the approach used in the dialogues that led up to the agreement to be signed on October 31, 1999. In Section #157 of *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, VII*, this statement is made:

#157. Involved in this agreement, as is apparent from ##6, 7, and 8, is a fundamental affirmation which was noted in the introduction (#4) as particularly helpful for our discussions: our entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Christ Jesus and on the gospel whereby the good news of God's merciful action in Christ is made known; we do not place our ultimate trust in anything other than God's promise and saving work in Christ. Such an affirmation is not fully equivalent to the Reformation teaching on justification according to which God accepts sinners as righteous for Christ's sake on the basis of faith alone; but by its insistence that reliance for salvation should be placed entirely on God, it expresses a central concern of that doctrine. Yet it does not exclude the traditional Catholic position that the gracewrought transformation of sinners is a necessary preparation for final salvation. The agreement, in short, is on the nature of trust or assurance of salvation, on the fundamental experiential attitude of the justified in relation to God (*coram deo*). There are, however, remaining differences on theological formulations and on the relation between theology and proclamation.

The ecumenists of the twentieth century are doing nothing different than the ecumenists of the sixteenth century did. When Melanchthon wrote in the Leipzig Interim:

And they who have thus received the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Ghost, and in whom the Holy Ghost begins faith and trust in the Son of God, love and hope, then become heirs of eternal salvation for the Saviour's sake, as Paul writes (Rom. 6): "Eternal life is a gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

he is trying to permit both the Lutheran forensic justification and the Roman transformational justification to be accepted. The differences between these two doctrines of justification are not just differences in theological formulations or differences between the relationship of religion to proclamation. These are fundamental differences which divided the churches in the sixteenth century and which still separate them today. The Formula of Concord was written to purge the Lutheran Church of those who followed and taught the theology which Melanchthon allowed in the Leipzig Interim.

The 1985 *Justification by Faith* dialogue continues:

It must be emphasized that our common affirmation that it is God in Christ alone whom believers ultimately trust does not necessitate any one particular way of conceptualizing or picturing God's saving work. That work can be expressed in the imagery of God as judge who pronounces sinners innocent and righteous, and also in a transformist view which emphasizes the change wrought in sinners by infused grace.

There is quite a difference between picturing something in imagery that applies to the culture of any

particular time in history, which pictures and imagery may be different in different times, and changing the doctrine by your pictures as the transformationalist view changes the Scriptural/forensic doctrine of Scripture. Justification is not a process. It is a forensic, declaratory act of God in which he declares us not guilty of sins.

2 Corinthians 5:19,20

19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.

Romans 3:24,28

24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

But the dialogue reads:

Wherever this affirmation is maintained, it is possible to allow great variety in describing salvation and in interpreting God's justifying declaration without destroying unityBut where the affirmation is accepted, Lutherans and Catholics can recognize each other as sharing a commitment to the same gospel of redemptive love received in faith.

To be honest with the Scripture and the Gospel they confess, the variety of expressions and the interpretation of the doctrine of justification they make cannot contradict the Scriptural integrity of the doctrine of justification as the transformationalist interpretation of Rome does. It is clear from the record of dialogue #VII that Rome has not changed its doctrine. It is willing to accept other "interpretations" of the doctrine of justification than the transformationalist model but it has not changed its doctrine. To change the transformationalist model, Rome would have to reject purgatory, the mediatorship of Mary and of the Saints, the treasury of merits, and indulgences (which have become so prominent in Roman proclamation as we near the millennium), along with many other teachings in connection with the Mass, the priesthood, confession, penance, and monasticism.

Justification by faith is the overarching principle which explains the theology and structure of Lutheranism. It truly is the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* of Lutheran doctrine. *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, VII*, speaks about the centrality of the Doctrine of Justification for Lutherans and then expresses some Roman Catholic thoughts:

#118 Catholics, on their side, are wary of using any one doctrine as the absolute principle by which to purify from outside, so to speak, the catholic heritage. They recognize, to be sure, the danger of absolutizing merely human ecclesiastical structures. While conceding that the church stands under the gospel and is to be judged by it, Catholics insist that the gospel cannot be rightly interpreted without drawing on the full resources available within the church. To speak of "Christ alone" or "faith alone," they contend, could lead, contrary to the intentions of Lutherans themselves, to the position that the grace of Christ is given apart from the external word of Scripture, Christian preaching, the sacraments, and the ordained ministry.

In *Justification and Rome* (an excellent book on this subject which should be read by every WELS pastor), Robert Preus notes that for 400 years, until the recent talks with Lutherans, Rome has been almost silent on the subject of Justification by Faith. Lutherans have been continually stressing the topic. We searched recent tools used by Rome to teach its laity for even a mention of Justification by Faith, and could not find the word, justification or its cognates in the various indexes or even a mention of it in the text. Despite the protestations of Dialogue VII that there is much common ground here for Lutherans and Catholics, this is one of the emptiest of their arguments.

The "Declaration" section of Dialogue VII, which was unofficial to this writing, is in a form of a

recommendation to the ELCA and to Rome.

#161 We believe that God's creative graciousness is offered to us and to everyone for healing and reconciliation so that through the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, "Who was put to death for our transgressions and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25), we are all called to pass from the alienation and oppression of sin to freedom and fellowship with God in the Holy Spirit. It is not through our own initiative that we respond to this call, but only through an undeserved gift which is granted and made known in faith, and which comes to fruition in our love of God and neighbor, as we are led by the Spirit in faith to bear witness to the divine gift in all aspects of our lives....

#164 We are grateful at this time to be able to confess together what our Catholic and Lutheran ancestors tried to affirm as they responded in different ways to the biblical message of justification. A fundamental consensus on the gospel is necessary to give credibility to our previous agreed statements on baptism, on the Eucharist, and on forms of church authority. We believe that we have reached such a consensus.

We would agree that the consensus is needed, but would not agree that they have reached it. What is meant when justification is described as "... an undeserved gift which is granted and made known in faith, and which comes to fruition in our love of God and neighbor, as we are led by the Spirit in faith to bear witness to the divine gift in all aspects of our lives?" Does this mean that as a fruit of justification we live sanctified Christian lives as Lutherans would read it, or does it mean that good works are a part of the transformation of the individual that occurs in justification and that causes the justified individual to produce good works that are guided and led and empowered by God, but that have the merit needed to complete the work of justification for the individual as Rome would interpret it? It must be understood that there has seldom been a question that Rome does not teach justification by grace. It does teach it, in the sense of infused grace. The questions must always be: What is the role of faith? What is the role of good works? The exclusive particles of Luther need to be employed vigorously in the discussions.

Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

The periodical, *Origins*, Vol 28, No. 8, (July 16, 1998), contains the full text of the Lutheran Catholic "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." While full consensus seems to be a done deal with both sides agreeing to sign it on October 31, the declaration has some real problems in it. Consider the following three paragraphs in connection with the conflict between Lutheran forensic justification and Roman transformation justification.

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

26. Justification and renewal are joined in Christ, who is present in faith.

27. The Catholic understanding also sees faith as fundamental in justification. For without faith, no justification can take place. Persons are justified through baptism as hearers of the word and believers in it. The justification of sinners is forgiveness of sins and being made righteous by

justifying grace.

“For persons are by faith united with Christ who in his person is our righteousness: both the forgiveness of sin and the saving presence of God himself.” “Justification and renewal are joined in Christ, who is present in faith.” One wonders if the Lutherans involved have never read the Formula of Concord, Article V, which deals with the same error mentioned here. Then they called it Osiandrianism. Osiander taught that man is justified by the indwelling of the Divine Nature of Christ and not by declaration of God which takes place outside of us. Osiander’s teaching in the sixteenth century was viewed by Lutherans as a compromise between Lutheranism and Rome. Here it is being used in the twentieth century to try to accomplish the same purpose. This is a smoke screen and not a breakthrough resolution of the differences between Lutherans and Rome on Justification.

Number 27 quoted above is even more confusing not that it is so subtle, but that it is so brazen. Being declared righteous is referred to by “through Baptism.” But Roman Catholic renewal or transformation justification is referred to by “being made righteous by justifying grace, which makes us children of God.” One statement immediately follows the other. No distinction is made about the fact that they are exclusive statements.

John Brug refers to the three paragraphs quoted above and concludes: “Rome has made no change in its false doctrine of justification. The new Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man. (Par. 2019).

No one can merit the initial grace which is at the origin of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and others all the graces needed to attain eternal life (Par. 2027).

Reinforcing the above, it should be noted that the preVatican II, 1949 edition of *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, (Baltimore Catechism, No. 3), does not mention justification. It does not use the word anywhere in its text. The postVatican II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, contains a section entitled, “Grace and Justification.” The transformational model is stressed: “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.” “With justification faith, hope, and charity are poured into our hearts, and obedience to the divine will is granted us.” “Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man.” In the article about penance it is noted that for those who have fallen into grave sin and have lost their baptismal grace “Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as ‘the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace.’” There is no mention of justification as the chief doctrine of the Christian Church or of it as the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*.

In speaking about “concupiscence” in # 30 the Declaration notes that Catholics do not see concupiscence as sin (and hence do not refer to it as original sin). “Since according to Catholic conviction, human sin always involves a personal element and since this element is lacking in this inclination, Catholics do not see this inclination as sin in an authentic sense.” This was not challenged by the Lutherans involved with writing this document. I believe that the differences between Lutheran and Catholic teachings on Original Sin are directly in opposition to each other and that the Roman false teaching greatly impacts upon her understanding of justification. No agreement on the Doctrine of Justification could ever be reached between Lutherans and Rome without agreement on the Doctrine of Original Sin. This document does not find any agreement at all.

The Declaration ends with five paragraphs of happy words. We quote two of them.

40. The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutheran and Catholics. In light of this consensus the

remaining differences of language, theological elaboration and emphasis in the understanding of justification described in Paragraphs 18 to 39 are acceptable. Therefore the Lutheran and the Catholic explications of justification are in their difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding basic truths.

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

This brings us to two inescapable questions. The first question is the same question they were debating from 1555 to 1577 in Germany: “Who is truly Lutheran?” Perhaps the Osiandrianism and the “make righteous” statements and the process justification and renewal or transformational modes of speaking in these documents are not so foreign to the ELCA and to the LWF as they should be because they have already, before these discussions, adopted these workrighteous approaches and have made them their own. The second question after looking at the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is: “What has really changed in Roman Catholic doctrine?”

IV. The Ecumenical Mindset

Seeking Understanding

This brings us to a third question: “How can extremely intelligent, ecumenically minded people, who often write and think with logical precision, seem so illogical, to our way of thinking, that they say that although Lutherans say ‘justification by faith through grace’ and Rome says ‘justification by grace through faith and sanctification (renewal, transformation)’ both are really saying the same thing and both have found common ground for agreement?”

Several things must be noted to help us understand. These items are not presented judgmentally. It is acknowledged that these are general statements which do not apply to every and all persons who consider themselves to have an ecumenical mindset.

- Although ecumenists may speak about the authority of the Scriptures, they do not by those words mean that the Scriptures have an absolute authority beyond linguistic, cultural, or religious boundaries.
- Scripture is authoritative within the culture and denomination/religion to which an individual belongs and it is a linguistic way of expressing truth for that culture and denomination/religion.
- Other cultures, denominations/religions may express that same truth that is from the same authoritative Scripture in different and even seemingly opposite ways.
- Such seemingly opposite and even contradictory expressions do not divide denominations/religions as they seek unity of understanding and acceptance of each other’s cultural, traditional, and linguistic communication of truth.

For an example of the above four observations, Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg write in *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?*:

It is pointless to dispute the question about the burden of proof and with which partner it lies. For both sides admittedly under the presuppositions of the exegesis of that day claim the support of Paul, the one side stressing the central importance of the concept of faith in Rom. 3:21-25 and Gal. 2:14-29, the other appealing to I Cor. 13:13 and stressing the unity of faith, hope, and love, with the preeminent importance of love.

Later they add:

When these misunderstandings and difficulties of comprehension have once been grasped, however, it emerges that what the Council of Trent rejects is precisely what the Reformers were also concerned to avert: security and selfconceit about one's own condition and a complacent certainty of being in grace, selfdeception about one's own weakness, insufficient fear of losing grace, comforting "feelings" as criterion, moral laxness under appeal to the assurance of salvation, and even more security of predestination. For its own part, the Council stresses the points which are, for Luther and the Reformers also, the foundation and the point of departure for their own view: the reliability and sufficiency of God's promise, and the power of Christ's death and resurrection; human weakness, and the threat to faith and salvation which that involves.

The ecumenists are still talking about the presentations of the argument and not about the agreement or the disagreement of the arguments with Scripture. They are careful to present both sides as accurately in history and in exegesis as they can. But in so doing they allow for two opposite interpretations of Scripture. How can one speak of the reliability of Scripture if two opposing interpretations are allowed to stand? One can only do that if one has a "fluid" rather than a "static" understanding of Scriptural truth. A static understanding is my term for an understanding that Scripture is authoritative for all time and for all people and for all cultures and for all languages because it is God's absolute truth.

Theories to Help Understand the Ecumenical Mindset

George A. Lindbeck in *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* talks about three types of theological theories of religion.

1. Cognitive This type emphasizes the cognitive aspects of religion. It "stresses the ways in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities." He feels that traditional orthodoxies and heterodoxies follow this approach. He notes that it is both cognitive and philosophical. This is the AngloAmerican approach.
2. ExperientialExpressive "It interprets doctrines as non-informative and non-discursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations." This approach is a darling of the liberal, continental, Schleiermacherinfluenced theologians.
3. A Hybrid Approach This approach seeks to combine elements of the cognitive and the experientialexpressive. It is favored by ecumenicallyinclined Roman Catholics. It is a twodimensional outlook which has Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan as its most influential followers.

The CulturalLinguistic Approach: Regulative or Rule Theory

Lindbeck is looking for a different approach. He has a purpose for such a search. He wants to explain how the different denominations can state so blissfully that they have found agreement on this doctrine or on that doctrine, and yet each denomination claims to continue to follow their historic and once divisive doctrines. He writes: "There would be less skepticism about ecumenical claims if it were possible to find an alternative approach that made the intertwining of variability and invariability in matters of faith easier to understand." In other words, how can one find words to explain the concept of agreeing to disagree in historic areas that used to matter? He writes:

It has become customary in a considerable body of anthropological, sociological, and

philosophical literature ...to emphasize neither the cognitive nor the experiential-expressive aspects of religion; rather, emphasis is placed on those respects in which religions resemble languages together with their correlative forms of life and are thus similar to cultures (insofar as these are understood semiotically as reality and value systems that is, as idioms for the construction of reality and living of life). The function of church doctrines that becomes most prominent in this perspective is their use, not as expressive symbols or as truth claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action. This general way of conceptualizing religion will be called in what follows a ‘culturallinguistic approach, and the implied view of church doctrine will be referred to as a “regulative” or “rule” theory.”

Lindbeck likes this approach because he feels that a regulative approach allows for and explains the possibility of reconciliation between the denominations on an ecumenical level without capitulation. He explains this with the analogy of the driving rules in Great Britain as opposed to the United States. In Britain one drives on the left. In the USA one drives on the right. Both rules demand the opposite. Yet both rules are equally valid for their culture and society. “Thus oppositions between rules can in some instances be resolved, not by altering one or both of them, but by specifying when or where they apply, or by stipulating which of the competing directives takes precedence.”

Similarly, to return to the eucharistic example, both transubstantiation and at least some of the doctrines that appear to contradict it can be interpreted as embodying rules of sacramental thought and practice that may have been in unavoidable and perhaps irresolvable collision in certain historical contexts, but that can in other circumstances be harmonized by appropriate specifications of their respective domains, uses, and priorities. In short, to the degree that doctrines function as rules . . . there is no logical problem in understanding how historically opposed positions can in some, even if not all, cases be reconciled while remaining in themselves unchanged. Contrary to what happens when doctrines are construed as propositions or expressive symbols, doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation is a coherent notion.

We may not agree with this answer. But in a philosophical way it does answer our question about how these intelligent people can enter into such lengthy and intense discussions and dialogues, searching for the right ambiguous words “polish boots,” as Bente calls them and ask people to take them seriously.

A Basic Answer: The Question About Absolute Truth

There is a more basic answer to our question that will not be found in the words of the ecumenists. These people value unity in the world church above the truth of Scripture. They believe that their “tradition” is correct for its culture and history and denomination. But it is not absolute truth. They do not believe that absolute truth exists, or if it does exist, the Bible as God has permitted it be given to the world is only one of many expressions of absolute truth, or it is an absolute truth that may be interpreted in various ways valid for other cultures and denominations and churches. The different interpretations are all expressions of truth for that are valid for the denomination and culture in which they are found.

V. Godpleasing, Christian Ecumenism

Here we again turn our attention to J. P. Koehler and to *Gesetzlich Wesen Unter Uns*, not because he is the authority over Scripture, but because he writes from a thoroughly Gospel-driven perspective at the beginning of the Twentieth Century Ecumenical Movement (1914) about matters that are pertinent to our Twenty First Century proclamation of the Gospel.

True, Loving Ecumenism

But first, some familiar Scripture. We use the vehicle of our 1982 Small Catechism. Listen to the attitude of love and concern for people for whom Christ died, for Christ, and for His Gospel.

1 Peter 3:15-16

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

2 Timothy 2:14

14 Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.

Matthew 7:6

6 “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

1 John 1:3

3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

God wants us to be ready to share our faith with everyone who asks us about it.

Romans 16:17

17 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

2 Corinthians 6:14,17; 7:1

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 17 “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.

1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God

God forbids us to join in fellowship with anyone who persists in mixing anything false with God’s Word.

Note The Love The Gospel-Driven Action!

2 Corinthians 13:8

8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.

Psalms 119:30,31,103,104, 105

30 I have chosen the way of truth;

I have set my heart on your laws.

31 I hold fast to your statutes, O LORD;

do not let me be put to shame.

103 How sweet are your words to my taste,

sweeter than honey to my mouth!
104 I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path.
105 Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path.

God wants us to separate ourselves because we are his children who love the truth and hate anything false.
Separation out of love for the truth of God's Word.

Matthew 7:15

15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

2 Corinthians 11:3

3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

God wants us to separate ourselves because that which is false will spread to us and weaken or destroy our faith.
Separation out of love for our own souls.

James 5:19-20

19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

God wants us to separate ourselves from those who mix something false with God's Word to warn them about the great danger to their souls. Separation out of love for their Souls.

Love, love for God, Love for the Gospel, love for all people for whom Christ died, this love permeates Koehler's words as he writes about legalism in contrast to the ecumenical spirit that is Godpleasing. We quote extensively:

The Zwinglian, that is, the intellectualizing legalistic approach, is attended by an indifference to doctrinal unity, and an unprincipled willingness to make common cause with the opponent in other ecclesiastical matters. And predictably so. For if one has nothing more to point to than only his purely human interpretations, then it is also improper on that account to cause division. On the other hand, when legalism gains ground among Lutherans in doctrinal discussion, then the direct reverse appears, the absence of an ecumenical spirit.

The distorted term, the true visible church, which to be sure can be correctly understood, has much to do with this unecumenical attitude. The ecumenical spirit follows directly from the gospel. If it is true that there is a holy Christian church, the communion of saints, and that the unity of the spirit, that is, the same mind in faith in the Lord Jesus, exists among them, then it cannot be otherwise than that the faith of the one feels drawn to the faith of the other. This ecumenical spirit accordingly does not consist in our having a doctrine of the invisible church. This is a great gift of God. But we make it into something external, if pondering stops there. Again, however, the ecumenical spirit also does not consist in the unprincipled overlooking of the inner differences, which certainly must divide, if one wants to remain truthful. Such indifference is also of an external, superficial kind.

By ecumenicity of evangelical preaching I understand that one always fosters the sensibility for the one true invisible church, the communion of those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus, as opposed to the partisanship of the various concrete church bodies in the world

who claim for themselves that they are the true visible church. The ecumenical spirit is something internal which belongs to the individual person through the Holy Spirit.

It consists in this, that I find joy in the fact that someone else believes in the Lord Jesus, no matter in which fellowship I meet him, and that I can do nothing else than acknowledge him and also in that way my Savior and, as there is opportunity, foster this partnership in salvation in the truth. When I meet anywhere someone who believes in the Lord Jesus, then what interests me above all else is that he so believes, and that through faith he is a child of God and a member of the body of Jesus. I will express as much in emphasizing the things that unite us in faith and not, by finding fault and criticizing, mainly emphasize the things that separate us.

On the other hand, intellectualism and the lack of an ecumenical spirit, which mutually depend on each other, express themselves with an air of superiority by judging and condemning and thus display the character of legalism. Selfevidently, in the evangelical spirit, truth rules. Thus also criticism will not be wanting, but it receives its emphasis through the gospel.

As with all practical application of Scripture Gospel in the church, it would be so nice and so simple to have a law book or a code book. Then we would not have to think about these things. Then we would not have to constantly remind ourselves to present things in Gospel ways. That can be so timeconsuming. But that is certainly God's way. It is God's way to be concerned about the soul of the person to whom we are talking. It is God's way to let the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ shine in our hearts and from our words and actions. Even when involved in warning others about the dangers of false doctrine, it can be done in a way that flows out of the Gospel, out of concern for bloodbought souls.

Ecumenism is all around us today. We find it in our culture to such a degree that we and our members are impacted by it everywhere. Our tendency is to react in ways that will be legalistic and nonevangelical. We love the truth. That is good. But if our response to those who do not believe the whole truth, and who are not advocating or promoting their false doctrine, is one of legalism, we are being unloving to Jesus who died for that soul, to the Gospel, which is the opposite of the Law, and to the person who does not know or believe the whole truth.

God lead us to express joy at the faith of all people who believe with us in justification by faith. God lead us to correct false doctrine in love for God's truth, love for Christ's blood-bought souls, including our own, and love for our Savior who paid the price of His life to redeem us.

If this humble paper has helped in some way to promote the true Gospel of Christ in an ecumenical age, as we discussed the ecumenical treatment of the Doctrine of Justification, it has accomplished its purpose. May God lead us to promote His Gospel. May He keep us from legalism, traditionalism, rationalism, humanism, false ecumenism, and all of the other "-isms" that would lead us away from His Gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and arisen.

Alan H. Siggelkow
September 28, 1999

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