The Lutheran/Catholic Joint Declaration on Justification

About a year ago, I wrote an article for Our Sunday Visitor's "The Catholic Answer" on the Lutheran/Catholic Joint Declaration on Justification. Since then, there have been a few significant developments, one being the addition of an "Annex" which changed some of the wording of the Joint Declaration, and second, the signing of the Joint Declaration (JD) and its Annex on October 31, 1999 by officials from both the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. This present article will give an update on the issues and offer a few opinions as to the significance of the signing. My goal in this article is to give a fair and honest assessment of the Joint Declaration, both its good points and its not-so-good points; what it is and what it is not.

Preliminary Conclusions

First, some perspective on two major goals of this Declaration: (1) "a consensus of basic truths on the doctrine of justification" (JD, paragraph 5), and (2) "In light of this consensus, the corresponding doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to today's partner..." (JD, paragraph 13). The "doctrinal condemnation of the sixteenth century" refer to the 33 canons of the Council of Trent on Justification, finalized in 1563.

We can understand the two goals of the Joint Declaration by viewing them through the actual purpose of the condemnations of the Council of Trent. Trent's anathemas single out no one, for in all the 33 canons, no one non-Catholic person or group is named. Each of the canons simply declare, in conditional language, "If anyone says...let him be anathema." Hence, these canons and their anathemas can apply to Catholics, Protestants, or anyone else who knowingly and deliberately says that the canons are false. All others, most of which fall into the category of "invincible ignorance," are not culpable, or at least not fully culpable, for the errors that were passed down to them and which most non-Catholics learned as children. In fact, the only Lutheran who was ever formally excommunicated over these issues was Martin Luther in the year 1520. Today, those who knowingly and deliberately deny the canons of Trent are informally excommunicated in that they excommunicate themselves.

Of course, the principle of excommunication is also true of Catholics who knowingly and deliberately deny *any* dogma of the Catholic Church. All the Church can do is stipulate the dogmas. The Church cannot know, for certain, the heart of the individual. Outside of formal excommunication, it is between the individual and God as to whether one believes the dogmatic teachings of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church can neither force its beliefs on an individual nor can it judge whether the individual will ultimately be saved.

In light of invincible ignorance, Pope Paul VI had already relaxed some of the force of the

conciliar condemnations upon the non-Catholic world at large, since it was understood that they could not be held fully responsible for the beliefs that were passed down to them, unless, of course, an individual out of that group knowingly and deliberately rejected the dogmas of the Catholic Church. But since people, even scholars, are so influenced by their culture and upbringing as to what they believe, there is a large degree of misinformation and ignorance which subjects them to the views they hold, sometimes in spite of their claims that they are not influenced by such external factors. The relaxation of condemnations is even more appropriate when a specific Protestant group, such as the Lutheran World Federation, (a) seeks to dialogue with the Catholic Church, (b) desires to form a basic consensus on the truths of Justification, and (c) actually surrenders some of its prior beliefs. These efforts are far from the "knowing and deliberate" heresies which would be cause for a formal excommunication. Thus today, the Catholic Church considers the anathemas of Trent as "salutary warnings" rather than as specific excommunications of those who hold in ignorance beliefs contrary to its dogmatic teachings.

In all this, however, the Catholic Church has not changed the anathemas of Trent, nor does it have the power to change them. Even the infallible Pope or Council has no authority to change the canons of Trent. All the Church can do is tell us, based on her wisdom and knowledge, to whom the anathemas formally apply, whether with specific individuals or groups at large. In the opinion of the Church today, those who want to dialogue with her and come to consensus on basic points are not formally deserving of the anathemas, whether or not all can agree on specific points. The mere fact that a group wants to dialogue with the Catholic Church, which has been the case for the last 30 years with the Lutheran World Federation, suggests that a "knowing and deliberate" attempt to circumvent Catholic dogma does not exist in their collective hearts. If certain individuals within these dialogues secretly wish to circumvent Catholic dogma, they will ultimately answer to God, who is the only One who can judge the hearts of men (Hebrews 10:26-31).

Analysis of the Media Reports on the Joint Declaration

In saying these things, let us now look closer at the documents of the Joint Declaration themselves. The first thing we need to point out is that although the media has displayed continual excitement over the Joint Declaration, newspaper reports have been notorious in exaggerating and sometimes distorting the areas of agreement between Lutherans and Catholics, so much so that the Catholic side has had to issue a statement warning of the "various erroneous interpretations by the communications media" (June 22, 1999). Thus, it is not the documents and their purpose which is our first concern, rather the interpretation of the documents. Here's a sample of the kind of distortion that still takes place: From the Scripps Howard News Service, on October 12, 1999, columnist Thomas Hargrove wrote:

> The great 482-year dispute between Catholics and Protestants is *about to end.* In three weeks, representatives of Pope John Paul II and the Lutheran World Federation will meet in Augsburg, Germany, to sign a theological declaration that salvation comes *only through faith* in God. (emphasis added).

Unfortunately, Mr. Hargrove's assessment is an exaggeration verging on misrepresentation. The "great 482-year old dispute between Catholics and Protestants" is ***not*** "about to end." First, there are thousands of "Protestant" denominations who have not even begun to talk with the Catholic Church, let alone settle the disputes stemming from the Reformation. Second, within the Lutheran World Federation there remain denominations who oppose any joint declaration with the Catholic Church, such as the more conservative Missouri and Wisconsin Synods. Third, many disputes that the Lutheran World Federation has with the Catholic Church have not even been addressed, and certainly not resolved, e.g., the Mass, the priesthood, the papacy, authority, tradition, Scripture, indulgences, purgatory, confession, contraception, Mary, the saints, to name a few. To illustrate the point, Luther wrote of the Catholic Mass: "No other sin, manslaughter, theft, murder or adultery is so harmful as this abomination of the popish Mass" (Weimar edition, 15, 774). Lutherans of today, including those of the Lutheran World Federation, have given no indication they have discarded Luther's opinion on the Mass, nor was this, nor any of the other dogmas listed above, part of the recent dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics. The significance? The Mass, confession, indulgences and purgatory are all part and parcel with Catholic justification. According to Church dogma, those who knowingly and deliberately refuse to accept them are under anathema.

The second matter of concern is Mr. Hargrove's conclusion that the signing of the Joint Declaration means that both sides agree "that salvation comes *only* through faith in God." It is precisely for such sweeping generalizations that the Vatican issued the press release titled "Clarification to the Doctrine of Justification" on June 22, 1999, which pointed out the "various erroneous interpretations by the communications media." In its clarification, the Vatican said: "Together we confess that the sinner is justified *through faith* in the salvific action of God in Christ," which appears to be a deliberate preemption of the qualifier "alone" in the Annex to the Joint Declaration.

Despite the June 22 clarification, there still seems to be some misunderstanding as to where the Catholic Church stands on the issue of Justification. On a recent radio program of the Catholic Family Network, Jeffrey Gros, a spokesman from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, was interviewed about the meaning of the Joint Declaration. When asked if Catholics can now say that individuals are *justified by faith alone*, Brother Gros said:

> Yes, in fact the text says that very clearly. If one looks very closely at the Council of

> Trent, its understanding, its definition of faith is somewhat different than the one that emerged in the Reformation texts. But as you look at the texts closely together and look back at St. Paul's letter to the Romans at grace and faith and what God does for us in Jesus Christ, we see that what Lutherans mean by faith alone is total reliance on the grace of God.

A similar statement is made by Nancy Frazier O'Brien of the Catholic New Service:

> The signing marked the end of a long, sometimes difficult journey from mutual Lutheran-Catholic condemnations to agreement that justification and salvation come by faith alone.

Ms. O'Brien's sweeping conclusion is made even more egregious when she equates her opinion "that justification and salvation come by faith alone" with a statement in the Joint Declaration that "the doctrine of justification set forth in this declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics."

Is this correct? Does the Catholic Church now teach that men are justified by faith alone? Does the historic Lutheran phrase "faith alone" mean that one totally relies on the grace of God, and does this imply that those, such as Catholics, who only use the word "faith" are in some fashion relying on themselves?

Preliminary Analysis of the Joint Declaration

For those who are not aware, the documents coming out of the October 31 agreement are: (1) The Joint Declaration, consisting of 44 numbered paragraphs, (2) the Annex, consisting of 9 paragraphs numbered and lettered, (3) the Clarification on the Doctrine of Justification written by the Catholic Church and issued on June 22, 1999, and (4) the Presentation of the Joint Declaration, which is composed of a few paragraphs of introduction by Cardinal Cassidy, head of the Pontifical Commission on Ecumenism.

In the 44 paragraphs of the Joint Declaration (JD), as noted above, the phrase "faith alone" is not used, except one time in paragraph 26 to explain that Lutherans understand "faith alone" to be a "distinction but not a separation...between justification itself and the renewal of one's way of life that necessarily follows from justification and without which faith does not exist." This is significant in light of the fact that the JD mentions the word "faith" 43 times (e.g., para. #5: "justification by God's grace through faith in Christ"; para, #9: "by God's grace through faith"; para. #11: "by grace through faith"; para. #25: "sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God"; etc); and the

word "alone" 6 times (e.g., para. #15: "by grace alone in faith"; para. #16: "Christ alone in faith"; para. #32: "the mercy of God which alone justifies them"), but never together in a joint Lutheran/Catholic proposition, such as a "We confess together..." statement.

Curiously, in all the documents, the only time the phrase "faith alone" appears as an actual statement of belief is in paragraph 2C of the Annex, which states: "Justification takes place 'by grace alone' (JD 15 and 16), by faith alone, the person is justified 'apart from works' (Rom 3:28, cf. JD 25)." There are four interesting facts about this statement:

(1) the Annex uses the word "faith" 8 times. Two of the more prominent usages appear in paragraph 2: "Together we confess: By grace alone, *in faith* in Christ's saving work..." In this instance, the mere fact that the word "alone" was coupled with "grace" but not added to "faith" shows a deliberate effort to exclude "alone" from "faith." The next instance is paragraph 2A: "Since we are *justified by faith*, we have peace with God (Rom 5:1)." Here drafters are more or less forced to exclude "alone" since they are quoting from Romans 5:1, which does not use "alone."

(2) Notice that the Annex makes reference to "JD 15 and 16" in paragraph 2C after it mentions "by grace alone," and makes reference to "JD 25" after it mentions "the person is justified 'apart from works' (Rom 3:28)," but it makes no reference to the JD after it uses the phrase "by faith alone." Why? Because, as noted above, there is no joint-statement of the phrase "faith alone" in the Joint Declaration. Paragraph 25 of the Joint Declaration only says, "We confess together that sinners are *justified by faith* in the saving action of God in Christ."

(3) The discrepancy between the Joint Declaration and the Annex becomes even more puzzling since paragraph 31 of the Joint Declaration also makes reference to Romans 3:28, but it does not use the word "alone." It states: "We confess together that persons are justified *by faith* in the gospel 'apart from works prescribed by the law' (Rom 3:28)."

Hence, in reference to Romans 3:28, the Annex, in opposition to the Joint Declaration, has given two versions of this very crucial issue: one version specifying "faith alone" (paragraph 2C), the other version specifying "faith" without the qualifier "alone" (paragraphs 2 and 2A), the latter usage being the only one agreeing with the language of the Joint Declaration. One can only conclude that the duplicity and/or ambiguity created in the Annex is deliberate. The drafters were well aware of the extreme historical volatility of the word "alone" as a qualifier of faith, and thus we wonder how the word "alone" suddenly slipped into the discussion, more or less, at the last minute, in only one part of an "Annex."

(4) The most egregious fact about the presence of "faith alone" in the Annex is that no explanation is given for its sudden appearance. The Catholic side does not delineate what "faith

alone" means as opposed to "faith," in spite of the fact that its sudden appearance in the Annex leaves the impression that they agree with the Lutherans on the usage of "faith alone" in order to describe the mechanics of Justification. Since the Catholics lack an explanation or definition for the use of "faith alone" in 2C of the Annex, the only recourse the reader has is to refer back to paragraph 26 of the Joint Declaration where the phrase "faith alone" is used, but paragraph 26 is clearly the historic Lutheran understanding of "faith alone," not the Catholic understanding. The Catholic statement in the following paragraph, 27, neither uses the phrase "faith alone," nor does it accept, reject or comment on the Lutheran use of "faith alone." Paragraph 27 explains the traditional doctrine of Catholicism, that is, that faith, hope and love are infused into the individual at the moment of Justification, but paragraph 27 does not state or imply that this infusion can be described by the words "faith alone." Conversely, the Lutheran description of "faith alone" in paragraph 26 never directly concedes to the Catholic doctrine that faith, hope and love are infused into the individual at the moment of Justification. The closest the Lutherans come to the Catholic doctrine is the statement "Thereby the basis is indicated from which the renewal of life proceeds, for it comes forth from the love of God imparted to the person in justification," wherein the reference to "impart" could possibly be construed as akin to the concept of infusion, but this, unfortunately, is not specified by either the Lutherans or the Catholics. Hence, without the proper explanation in the Annex, the implication is that the Catholic side has favored the language of "imparting" love, as opposed to the traditional teaching of "infusing" love, since they give no contrary explanation, nor do they use the word "infused" in paragraph 27 of the Joint Declaration. This problem is compounded, since in the rest of paragraph 26 the Lutherans speak only in terms of love and renewal as *results* of justification by faith, not simultaneous with faith in justification.

Apparently, these issues created a severe problem between both sides. No doubt, it is one of the reasons why the Catholic side issued the "Clarification" to the Annex on June 22, 1999, which did not include the word "alone" in reference to faith. It simply stated: "Together we confess that the sinner is justified *through faith* in the salvific action of God in Christ. This salvation is given to him by the Holy Spirit in baptism which is the foundation of his whole Christian life." We can also understand why the Lutheran/Catholic dialogue almost collapsed prior to this statement. It was saved only by some last minute behind the scenes negotiations by Cardinal Ratzinger. It appears that the Vatican issued the "Clarification" to represent the correct interpretation of the Joint Declaration, which opposes the conclusion by Jeffrey Gros of the NCCB, and anyone else who promotes the "faith alone" formula.

In effect, the Annex's equivocation between "faith" and "faith alone" gives at least one indication of the nature of the Joint Declaration: it is an effort, however indecisive, to combine Lutheran and Catholic beliefs in such a fashion so as not to deny either side's opposing beliefs or offend the opposing side. Each side can extract statements from the Joint Declaration with which it

agrees and interpret them the way it sees fit. This sentiment is evident in Cardinal Cassidy's summation of the efforts at a Joint Declaration: "What we have tried to do in the dialogue has not been to pass judgment, neither on the Council of Trent nor Martin Luther." Instead, Cassidy stated, the two churches wanted to "say what are Lutherans and Catholics able to say together today." What was said "yesterday," or what will be said "tomorrow," then, remains to be seen.

The Council of Trent and the 1994 Catholic Catechism

All that being said, let's compare what the Annex said about "faith alone" to what the Council of Trent said:

> If anyone shall say that *by faith alone* the sinner is justified, so as to understand that nothing else is required to cooperate in the attainment of the grace of justification, and that it is in no way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will: let him be anathema (Session 6, Canon 9).

Canon 14 is just as explicit:

> If anyone shall say that man is absolved from his sins and justified because he believes for certain that he is absolved and justified...and that by this *faith alone* absolution and justification are perfected: let him be anathema.

Canon 19 says the same:

> If anyone shall say that *nothing except faith* is commanded in the Gospel, that other things are indifferent, neither commanded nor prohibited, but free, or that the ten commandments in no way pertain to Christians: let him be anathema.

Canon 29 adds the necessity of the Sacrament of Penance:

> If anyone shall say that he who has fallen after baptism cannot...but *by faith alone* without the sacrament of penance, contrary to what the holy Roman and universal Church taught by Christ the Lord and His apostles, has hitherto professed, observed, and taught: let him be anathema. (See also Canons 10, 11, 12, 20).

It is very clear that the Council of Trent did not teach that justification comes by "faith alone."

It gave four separate descriptions as to its invalidity. The Council of Trent understands "alone" very literally, that is, it means that "nothing else" is added to faith for justification. These Canons were aimed directly at Martin Luther, for he held that "nothing else" could be added to faith for justification, and thus, he called himself a "solafideist": "Hence, faith alone justifies when it takes hold of this [Christ]...Here we are perfectly willing to have ourselves called solafideists by our opponents" (LW 26, 138).

Some Catholic apologists attempt to justify using "faith alone" by claiming that the Council of Trent meant that its definition referred only to "understand[ing] that nothing else is required to cooperate in the attainment of the grace of justification," implying that Trent would have accepted definitions which would have included other virtues, such as hope and love, as a possible meanings of "faith alone." But there is no evidence of this. Trent did not say that only certain definitions of "faith alone" were disallowed but that other definitions were allowed. Thus, to assume that Trent would have accepted other definitions of "faith alone" is a clear case of begging the question and there is simply no way of proving it.

Of course, the real question concerns what, precisely, does the Lutheran World Federation believe? Do they still believe, as Luther, that "faith alone" means "nothing else" can be added for justification? Some commentators have suggested that modern Lutherans now include hope and love in their definition of "faith alone," and thus the phrase "faith alone" can now be accepted. Is this true? We will find out shortly from the Declaration itself. Before we do, let's lead into it by looking at another media interpretation so that we can see how deep the distortions of the Joint Declaration can run. In mid-1999, David Crumm, of the Free Press staff, wrote:

> For more than 30 years, Catholic and Lutheran leaders have been discussing the thorny question...How does God dispense salvation? Does God freely give salvation to people who have faith in Jesus or must humans earn salvation by their good works? Are humans who are sinners justified before God by their faith alone — or by those works? Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation officials are agreeing that salvation is freely given to believers...

The average reader would skip right by these words without noticing anything alarming. After all, don't we all agree that "salvation is freely given to believers"? Yes, we can agree, but historical Catholic doctrine does not agree with Mr. Crumm's suggestion that man is justified by "faith alone." Mr. Crumm's introduction to the matter makes it appear that previous to the Joint Declaration the Catholic Church believed that "humans earn salvation by their good works," and he implies that as of October 31, 1999 the Catholic Church has now abandoned that belief. This is not the case at all. The Catholic Church has never taught that one can "earn" salvation. To "earn" something means that

one acquires it by legal right, without any deference to grace or benevolence. It means that God owes salvation as a matter of legal debt. But that is not at issue in this debate. Listen again to the words of the Council of Trent:

> If anyone shall say that man can be justified before God by his own works which are done either by his own natural powers, or through the teaching of the Law, and without divine grace through Christ Jesus: let him be anathema (Canon 1).

Chapter 8 of the Council is even more specific: "...because none of those things which precede justification, whether faith or works, merit the grace itself of justification." It couldn't be clearer that the Catholic Church is against the idea of "earning" salvation.

Is this just an old and outdated teaching of the Catholic Church? Not according to the 1994 Catholic Catechism. Paragraphs 604, 1996 and 2010 state:

> ...God manifests that his plan for us is one of benevolent love, prior to any merit on our part...Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call...Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion.

Hence, both the Council and the Catechism are clear that God initiates the whole process by His grace. The Catholic Church believes that through faith, which is prompted by God's grace, we accept the atoning work that Christ underwent for us. The Council of Trent said: "...we are therefore said to be justified by faith because faith is the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and root of all justification, without which it is impossible to please God" (Session 6, Chapter 8). The 1994 Catholic Catechism says that faith is "a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him. Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him..." (Para. 153). There's a lot of grace in these statements, but certainly nothing about "earning salvation" or "faith alone."

So, contrary to Mr. Crumm's creative writing, the issue between Lutherans and Catholics is not that Lutherans came to the discussion table believing that a man is justified by faith alone and can't earn his salvation, while Catholics formerly believed, but now reject, that a man is justified by works and earns his salvation. In fact, in the phrase "whether *faith* or works," the Council of Trent warned in Chapter 8 that *even faith itself* could become a matter of "earning" salvation, since if one says to God: "I have *faith* therefore You owe me salvation" it is just as wrong as saying "I have *works* therefore You owe me salvation." Unfortunately, this is precisely how some Protestants understand

faith—as a one-time volitional act that now obligates God to save them, no matter what they do in the future, which is popularized in the adage "once saved, always saved."

But, you may ask, if the Catholic Church believes one cannot earn salvation, why would they, namely, the Council of Trent and the 1994 Catechism, be opposed to using the words "faith alone" in a justification formula? There are several reasons:

The Infamous Phrase: "Faith Alone" Reasons for Rejecting It:

(1) The Bible never says an individual is justified by "faith alone." In fact, the only time Scripture uses the phrase, it is preceded emphatically by the words "not by," to read: "a man is justified by works and *not by faith alone*" (James 2:24). If the phrase "justified by faith alone" was indigenous to the discussion, one would think Scripture would at least mention it once. Rather, as we see in James, it not only avoids such phrasing, it specifies the converse.

The New Testament uses the word "faith" and its derivatives over 200 times. It uses the word "alone" almost as much, but never combines the two in a positive statement. In fact, St. Paul used the word "alone" or "only" in the very contexts in which he taught about justification (Romans 3:29; 4:12, 16, 23; Galatians 2:10; 3:2; 4:18; 5:13), but never once did he use them to qualify the faith of justification as being in solitude. These facts are reinforced in that the Old Testament, neither in the Hebrew nor the Septuagint, uses the phrase "faith alone," and thus we can conclude that in all of Scripture "faith alone" is never inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is quite an ironic position for the Lutherans in this debate, since they claim to obtain their authoritative teaching from Scripture alone.

The epistle of James, the very book which explicitly denies justification by faith alone, was said by Luther to be an "epistle of straw...for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it" (LW 35, 362); and that "James concludes falsely that now at last Abraham was justified after that obedience...it does not follow as James raves" (LW 4, 26); "the epistle of James gives us much trouble, for the papists embrace it alone" (LW 34, 317); "we should throw the epistle of James out of this school, for it doesn't amount to much" (LW 35, 397).

How many times does either the Joint Declaration, the Annex, the Notes on the Resources for the Joint Declaration and Annex, or the Clarification of June 22 mention either James 2:21 ("Abraham was justified by works") or James 2:24 ("A man is justified by works and not by faith alone")? Not once. Do these same ecumenical documents ever mention the book of James at all? Only once, in JD 9, in the sentence: "In the New Testament diverse treatments of 'righteousness' and 'justification' are found in the writings of the Matthew (5:10; 6:33; 21:32), John (16:8-11), Hebrews (5:3, 10:37f) and James (2:14-26)." Thus, James is relegated merely to a "diverse treatment of...justification," with absolutely no explanation as to what "diverse treatment" means. This is in the

face of almost two dozen citations and/or explanations to the book of Romans. Ironically, where the "papists" of the sixteenth century were not afraid to quote James to deny Luther's "faith alone," apparently our ecumenical documents have decided to "throw Jimmy into the stove," just as Luther suggested (LW 34, 317).

(2) There is a great difference in saying (a) "a man is justified by faith alone," as opposed to saying, as Romans 3:28 actually says, (b) "a man is justified by faith apart from works of law." The first sentence, if taken as literally as the Council of Trent understood the term "alone," means that *nothing* can be added to faith for justification, not even love. Of course, that would contradict St. Paul's teaching in Galatians 5:4-6 that a man is "justified by....faith working through love," and his teaching in 1 Corinthians 13:2 that faith without love "is nothing."

The second sentence ("faith apart from works of law") merely means that "works of law," whatever it means to St. Paul, is the *only* thing that cannot be added to faith for justification, which leaves open the possibility of adding love and hope, that is, if they are not considered "works of law."

Of course, now we must discover just what St. Paul meant by "works of law." That answer is revealed just a few verses later in Romans 4:4: "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as a debt." In other words, the works St. Paul intends not to be coupled with faith for justification are "works of debt," that is, works whereby we try to earn, by legal right, our justification from God, as when an employee does work and then demands payment from his employer. St. Paul says "no, no!" You can't come to God by putting him in debt to you, because God owes no man anything (Romans 11:35). You must come seeking what cannot be earned, that is, God's grace. God wants you to believe in Him for who He is, not for what you can get out of Him. Thus, St. Paul is excluding only one kind of works — works of debt, wherein one tries to obligate God to pay him salvation. Then why did Luther exclude love and hope? Because, he said, St. Paul considered them as "works of law," which has certainly never been a Catholic belief.

The other kind of work that St. Paul accepts, and also commands us to perform to attain and maintain our justification, is work performed under God's grace. For example, in Romans 2:7 he says: "To those who persist in doing good...He will give eternal life." There's nothing here about "earning" eternal life, but plenty concerning God "giving," especially since Romans 2:4 refers to God's "kindness, tolerance and patience," which are His virtues we receive by grace. In Romans 2:13, St. Paul says, "For it is not the hearers of the law who are just with God, but the doers of the law will be justified." It is the grace-oriented and grace-blessed works that can be added to faith for justification because these works don't put God in debt to us. God rewards us with eternal life for our good works not because He owes us anything, but because He enjoys giving freely to those who please Him out of a sincere heart. That is what salvation is all about.

Aquinas and the Council of Trent versus Luther on "Merit"

Now here is where we need to make a grand distinction — one the Joint Declaration avoids but a distinction that is probably the most important in the whole discussion. Again, the 15th paragraph of the Joint Declaration states: "Together we confess: By grace alone, *in faith* in Christ's saving work and...not because of any *merit* on our part..." Following Luther, most Lutherans think of "merit" in one dimension, that is, as something that is earned by legal right without grace. This explains their opposition to that kind of "merit," and rightly so.

The Catholic Church thinks of merit in two dimensions: (a) that which is earned by legal right, and (b) that which is merited by grace (or what St. Thomas Aquinas distinguished as (a) "strict merit" and (b) "condign merit," the latter being the merit we receive by grace (See *Summa Theologica* I-II, Q. 114, a. 1, ad 3). It is the strict, legal merit which the Catholic Church maintains cannot justify a man, which is how she interprets the word "merit" in paragraph 15 of the Joint Declaration, and which is the same merit to which the Lutherans are opposed. But the Catholic Church has always believed, and still does believe, that a man attains justification through the merit God gives from His grace, not because we have legally "earned" justification. Yet it was this very concept of "gracious merit" (or what Thomas Aquinas called "condign merit") that Luther utterly rejected. Luther writes:

> They attribute the merit of grace and the forgiveness of sins to the mere performance of the work. For they say that a good work performed before grace can earn a 'merit of congruity'; but once grace has been obtained, the work that follows deserves eternal life by the 'merit of condignity.'...God has become a debtor and is obliged by right to grant eternal life. (On Galatians 2:16, LW 35).

Here Luther equated condign merit with "debt," and thus refused to acknowledge Aquinas' distinction between "strict merit" and "condign merit." The following is what the Council of Trent said in Canon 24 about the concept of condign merit (or what we may term as "grace-oriented" works):

> If anyone shall say that justice received is not preserved and also not *increased* in the sight of God through good works but that those same works are only the *fruits* and signs of justification received, but not *a cause* of its increase: let him be anathema.

Notice that, in opposition to Luther, the Catholic dogma assumes that justification "increases" and is not a one-time, static event – a view believed by Protestants. It also says that good works are not merely the fruits of justification (as Luther believed) but are "a cause" of justification's increase.

Whether today's Lutherans accept or deny the concept of gracious merit is not stated in the Joint Declaration, and thus the matter remains ambiguous.

Canon 32 is even clearer regarding the gracious merits of good works for justification:

> If anyone shall say that the good works of the man justified are in such a way the gifts of God that they are not also the *good merits of him who is justified*, or that the one justified by the good works, which are done by him through the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ (whose living member he is), *does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of that eternal life* (if he should die in grace), and also increase of glory: let him be anathema.

Notice the Council of Trent says that good works are not merely a by-product of faith but are truly the "good merits" of the justified individual, which "truly merit...eternal life" and its "attainment." This teaching is very clear. Anyone who knowingly maintains that good works are merely the fruits of justification but in no way "merits" justification (that is, graciously merited), he is anathematized.

What did the Joint Declaration say in regard to such works? Note the following from paragraph 37:

> We confess together that good works - a Christian life lived in faith, hope and love - *follow justification and are its fruits*. When the justified live in Christ and act in the grace they receive, they bring forth, in biblical terms, good fruit... (emphasis added).

The Catholic understanding of the above paragraph is stated in paragraph 38:

> According to Catholic understanding, good works, made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace...When Catholics affirm the "meritorious" character of good works, they wish to say that, according to the biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works...

Although in paragraph 38 the Catholic side makes reference to "growth in grace" in line with Canon 32 of Trent, it mentions nothing about Trent's teaching concerning "truly meriting eternal life, and the attainment of eternal life" by those same works. Moreover, although the Bible certainly speaks of "rewarding" our works, in paragraph 38 the Catholic side makes no mention of the Bible's solemn warnings that works will be judged to determine eternal destiny (heaven or hell), not merely

to receive rewards in heaven (cf., Matthew 12:36-37; 16:27; 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; 12:48; Romans 2:6-16; 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:17; 4:1-5; 2 Corinthians 5:9-11; Revelation 20:11-15; 22:12-15, et al). If works are judged to determine one's salvation, then they are integrally and inseparably related to justification. The only time any of the above verses are mentioned in the Joint Declaration's documents are paragraph 2E of the Annex, with the following interpretation:

> In the final judgement, the justified will be judged also on their works [verses listed]. We face a judgement in which God's gracious sentence will approve anything in our life and action that corresponds to his will. However, everything in our life that is wrong will be uncovered and will not enter eternal life.

Notice that this interpretation says nothing about the possibility of the person himself being judged and consequently being eternally damned for bad works, but only that the bad things in his life will not enter eternal life with him. The Annex presumes that the person is going to heaven. But even a cursory reading of the above Scripture texts will show that Scripture does not consider entrance into heaven a foregone conclusion. Most of the passages specify the possibility of God sending the judged person to hell for his bad works. The Scripture that don't specify eternal damnation certainly imply it. In the entire document, the Catholic side never mentions that the individual will be judged for his works at the end of time to determine the final outcome of his justification. Again, this is a glaring omission and would never stand up in an infallible Council such as the Council of Trent.

We need to say one more thing regarding the Catholic concept of works in opposition to historic Lutheranism. Trent made it very clear that, in opposition to Luther's rejection of Aquinas' concept of "congruent" merit, works done prior to justification are not sinful. In Canon 7 Trent stated:

> If anyone shall say that all works that are done before justification, in whatever manner they have been done, are truly sins or deserving of the hatred of God, or that the more earnestly anyone strives to dispose himself of grace, so much the more grievously does he sin, let him be anathema.

Notice that Trent says that a man can actually "dispose himself for grace" by doing works prior to justification. From Trent's teaching, works prior to justification can be considered good and wholesome by God such that they help the person to attain to the sanctifying grace of justification. The case of Cornelius in Acts 10 is a case in point. He did works of prayer and almsgiving which God noticed, and subsequently brought the angel to him to lead him to the sanctifying grace of justification in baptism (Acts 10-11).

More on the Infamous "Faith Alone"

(3) Faith cannot be alone in justification since the Council of Trent said the following regarding the infusion of grace: "...he is ingrafted, receives in the said justification, together with the remission of sins, *all these are infused at the same time: faith, hope and love*" (Session 6, Chapter 7). Here we see that the three theological virtues are given to an individual, actually infused, at the *moment* of justification, which is at baptism. In Catholic teaching, these divinely infused virtues are the basis upon which an individual is justified. Without one of them the individual would not be justified. It is clear the Council of Trent taught that faith is *never* alone in justification, since it is accompanied by hope and love from the very beginning.

Now we are ready to deal with the suggestion some have made that it is now acceptable for Lutherans to use "faith alone" because they, unlike Luther, are not excluding hope and love from faith. Here is what the Joint Declaration states of the Lutheran's belief about the relationship between faith, hope and love. Paragraph 26 says:

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

Notice that the Lutherans do not say that "faith alone" includes hope and love. It says that faith merely "*leads* to a life in hope and love," not that hope and love exist along with faith at the moment of justification. This belief is confirmed in the next statement which says that the "renewal" (i.e., hope and love) "necessarily *follows* from justification," not that hope and love are simultaneous with faith in justification, as Trent said. The Lutheran belief is confirmed again in the statement "the renewal of life *proceeds*." But everyone in this dialogue acknowledges that hope and love "proceed" from justification. The crucial issue is whether hope and love are *simultaneous* with faith at the moment of justification, which, by definition, does not allow faith to be "alone." The only "joining" the Lutherans are allowing between justification and renewal is "in Christ." But "in Christ" is very

ambiguous, since the whole Christian life can be said to be "in Christ." Consequently, the Lutherans are not capitulating on their historic definition of "faith alone," since they make no direct statement that hope and love are included with faith at the moment of justification. Their emphasis, stated three times, is that hope and love only come after faith. Let it be clear that we are not talking about hope and love *eventually* being added to faith, but about the *instant* of justification, which the Catholic Church says occurs at baptism (Session 5 of the Council of Trent).

The distinctive of the Lutheran belief is confirmed in paragraph 23:

> When they [Lutherans] stress God's grace is forgiving love ("the favor of God"), they do not thereby deny *the renewal* of the Christian's life. They intend rather to express that *justification remains free from human cooperation* and *is not dependent on the life-renewing effects of grace* in human beings. (emphasis added).

Once again, the Lutherans confirm that the "renewal" (which we understand as hope and love) has nothing to do with initiating or maintaining justification. They still agree with Luther that works or love are merely the fruits of justification, not the cause of its increase (See LW 26: 145, 153, 155, 161, 169, 220, 376).

The Catholic answer to this historic Lutheran belief mirrors their omission which we noted earlier concerning the specific stipulations in Canon 32 of the Council of Trent that an individual's works "truly merit...eternal life" and its "attainment." Here is paragraph 24:

> When Catholics emphasize the renewal of the interior person...they wish to insist that God's forgiving grace always brings with it a gift of new life, which in the Holy Spirit becomes effective in active love. They do not thereby deny that God's gift of grace in justification remains independent of human cooperation.

Notice that the Catholic side has not admitted its historic belief that justification is dependent on the "renewal" (i.e., works and love). Instead, they put their belief in the form of a double-negative (i.e., "They *do not* thereby *deny*"), but they have not *confirmed* the historic Catholic opposition to the Lutheran belief that the "renewal" plays no part in justification. Luther believed, in opposition to Thomas Aquinas and the Catholic Church, that the faith which justified was "unformed" by love, that is, love was excluded from faith at the moment of justification. Luther writes: "...therefore love too is not from faith" (LW 26, 270-271). Although Luther sometimes speaks of love as being integral with the Gospel (LW 27, 51, 113), and sometimes opposes love against works (LW 26, 273, 329, 345; 27, 65), these are all after justification. One of his more revealing comments is as follows:

> They [the Catholics] say that we must believe in Christ and that faith is the foundation of salvation, but they say that this faith does not justify unless it is "formed by love." this is not the truth of the Gospel; it is a falsehood and pretense...For faith that takes hold of Christ, the Son of God, and is adorned by Him is the faith that justifies, not a faith that includes love. For if faith is to be sure and firm, it must take hold of nothing but Christ alone...Just as our opponents refuse to concede to us the freedom that faith in Christ alone justifies, so we refuse to concede to them, in turn, that faith formed by love justifies. (LW 26, 88-90).

Protestant H. Rashdall once commented on Luther's view with these words: "Luther's denial of this fundamental Catholic truth is the most regrettable feature of his teaching" (*The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*, p. 427).

Despite the opening denials of paragraph 26, if the Lutherans claim that in the closing statement: "Thereby the basis is indicated from which the renewal of life proceeds, for it comes forth from *the love of God imparted to the person in justification*" that, by the use of "imparted," their definition of "faith alone" includes hope and love at the initial moment of justification, then they should concede to the Catholics that their faith for justification is *not* alone. This is precisely the tack of Evangelicals today - they propagate the common adage: "a man is justified by faith alone but a faith that is not alone." Luther was the first to do this. He writes: "Faith alone does not suffice, yet faith alone justifies, because if it is real faith it beseeches the Spirit of love. But the Spirit of love flees all these things and thus fulfills the law and attains the kingdom of God. Hence the whole thing is attributed to faith" (LW 27, 30). No matter how good Luther's formula sounds to pious ears, his concept of "justifying faith" was condemned by the Council of Trent. One of the main reasons for the Council's denial of Luther's concept is that the only way love can be added to faith for initial justification (since the individual can only do *real acts* of love *after* baptism) is by the *infusion* of love into the soul by the Holy Spirit, along with hope and faith. Luther, Calvin, and others, denied the concept of infused love, and thus denied infused justification. Rather, they taught that justification was *imputed*, such that a man was "declared" just, not infused with justice. The importance of infusion is especially significant in regards to infants, which the Catholic Church teaches are infused with faith, hope and love, simultaneously, at baptism, even though their volitional capacity is negligible. Despite this, even some Catholics have fallen victim to using the "faith alone" formula in order to accommodate Protestantism and in the process have ignored the clear language of the Councils, the Catechism, and most of all, Scripture itself.

There exists an even more crucial reason why it is important to understand (as the Catholic Church does) that love must be *added* to faith for justification rather than saying (as modern Lutherans do) that "the renewal *necessarily follows* from justification." The reason: renewal does not

always follow from justification. Men fall into sin, some of whom do not repent of those sins. In other words, works *do not automatically* issue forth from faith. It takes as much effort to do good works as it does to avoid sin, and both are interrelated. This was precisely the problem with the Christians in James 2. According to verse 1, they were "believers in the Lord Jesus Christ," but they were showing favoritism to the rich man and denigrating the poor man (verses 2-12). Were good works just naturally flowing from them? The answer would have to be no. They had to be admonished to do good works (verses 2-8, 15-16) just as they had to be admonished not to sin (verses 9-13). But even though these works were not flowing from them, does this mean they are not Christians or do not have true faith? Not according to the Council of Trent. Canon 28 says:

> If anyone shall say that together with the loss of grace by sin faith also is always lost, or that the faith that remains is not a true faith, though it be not a living one, or that he, who has faith without charity, is not a Christian: let him be anathema.

Conversely, most Protestants believe that a person who claims to be a Christian but does not produce good works (what Luther called "the fruit of faith") is therefore not a Christian because he does not have "justifying faith." Luther said: "But he does not truly believe if works of love do not follow his faith" (LW 278, 30). Hence, in Protestant thought, if the love is absent then faith is automatically absent. This belief is integral to the adage: "a man is justified by faith alone but a faith which is not alone." But the Catholic Church says no. A person can have genuine faith, and yet for an indefinite period of time, not produce good works. According to Canon 28, the lack of good works does not cancel his faith, nor make it a false faith, nor deny him his Christian status.

Possible Reasons for Consensus

So, if all these beliefs of Luther are still unresolved, how can the Catholic Church come to any agreement with Lutherans? There are several reasons:

(1) the Lutheran World Federation, although it has some conservative theologians in its ranks, is largely from the more liberal strain of Lutheranism, which, by and large, is not as concerned with the more technical points of doctrinal issues as their more conservative branches, such as the Missouri Synod or the Wisconsin Synod. Thus, they have much more "liberal" definitions of theological terms than their more conservative brethren. This Lutheran battleground is demonstrated in that the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods refused to have any of its members participate in the Joint Declaration. Their feeling is that the Lutheran World Federation capitulated to the Catholic Church and dissolved many of the distinctives of Luther's protest. Last year, the Missouri Synod issued a

tersely worded critique against the ideas of justification stemming from the Lutheran World Federation. It became so bad that at one point Cardinal Cassidy and Cardinal Ratzinger had even questioned whether the LWF even spoke for most of the world's Lutherans.

As for the Catholic Church, they also have had their miscues about the Joint Declaration and the Annex. The fact that they were forced to issue the "Clarification on the Doctrine of Justification" shortly after the Annex to the Joint Declaration was released (the Annex which contained both "justified by faith alone" and "justified by faith"), shows that they recognized a high degree of volatility in the Annex. Why, in the first place, they would agree to the equivocal and ambiguous language of the Annex is a question that present and future generations of Catholics will be interested to probe and access. We can say this, however: neither the Joint Declaration nor its Annex are infallible dogmas of the Catholic Church. Only the Pope can make something binding and infallible, which in this case he has not done. In fact, neither he nor Cardinal Ratzinger (the second man to the Pope) signed the Declaration. All the Pope did was give his approval to the effort of the Joint Declaration to form "basic truths of the doctrine of justification."

As noted, there are many things about the doctrine of justification that the Joint Declaration does not cover, as it itself admits. This is not only true of the intrinsic elements of justification proper, but also of the peripheral issues related to justification like the Mass, Confession, Indulgences, Purgatory, Mortal and Venial Sin, etc. On such issues the Joint Declaration says that for now there can only be "unity in diversity." Yet as we have noted earlier, many of the issues the Joint Declaration covers are made vague and ambiguous, such as the concept of "merit," or whether justification comes "by faith alone" or "by faith," or whether eternal damnation can result from the judgment of works, and various other issues. In many places the Joint Declaration and the Annex did not resolve the issues but merely restated both sides of a particular issue in ecumenical language. An individual, then, who reads the Joint Declaration and its Annex might certainly be confused as to what the Declaration is really saying, or, as is often the case, he will escape the confusion by putting his own spin on what he thinks the document is saying, as we have proven earlier with citations of the "erroneous reports from the communications media."

A sample of related issues on which the Annex is equivocal and ambiguous are in:

Paragraph 2B: "concupiscence is used in difference senses": does this mean that concupiscence is sin or not? Neither the Joint Declaration nor the Annex specify. (See Canons 7, 25, 31 of the Council of Trent).

Paragraph 2D: "falling from their call": does this mean one can lose his salvation or not? Neither the Joint Declaration nor the Annex specify. (See Canons 16, 27 of the Council of Trent).

Paragraph 2E: "the justified will be judged by their works": does this mean the justified can lose his justification because of bad works or not? Neither the Joint Declaration nor the Annex

specify. (See Canons 18, 26, 30 of the Council of Trent).

Paragraph 2E: "by justification we are unconditionally brought into communion with God": does this mean that the condition cannot be broken or not? Neither the Joint Declaration nor the Annex specify. (See Canons 20, 23 of the Council of Trent).

Paragraph 2E: "we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection": does this mean that once one believes he is absolutely assured of the resurrection or not? Neither the Joint Declaration nor the Annex specify. (See Canon 15 of the Council of Trent).

Paragraph 2C: "The working of God's grace does not exclude human action": does this mean that man can cooperate with grace prior to justification or not? Neither the Joint Declaration nor the Annex specify. (See Canons 4, 5, 17 of the Council of Trent).

Paragraph 2A: "We are truly and inwardly renewed by the action of the Holy Spirit": does this mean that Lutherans now believe in transformational justification and are repudiating the forensic justification taught by Philip Melanchthon or not? Neither the Joint Declaration nor the Annex specify. (See Canons 11, 12 of the Council of Trent).

(2) As noted in (1), the Lutheran Church, by and large, has changed since the time of Martin Luther 475 years ago. The change had started soon after Luther died. Philip Melanchthon, Luther's protégé, had already made a 180 degree turn regarding Luther's denial of free will, as did the Dutch Reformer Jacob Arminius. This was significant since Melanchthon had a large hand in formulating the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, and the Formula of Concord, three of Lutheranism's major doctrinal statements. Andreas Osiander understood justification as transformational, opposing both Luther's and Calvin's idea of imputed justification. The Swiss Reformers such as Martin Bucer, Huldreich Zwingli, Johannes Oecolampadius, and Heinrich Bullinger also leaned more toward the concept of transformational justification in opposition to Luther and Calvin.

After the first Lutheran/Catholic dialogue in the mid 1960's, John Paul II had noticed such changes in the Lutheran church that in 1980 he suggested the Catholic Church might remove some of the anathemas issued at the Council of Trent. In the Lutheran/Catholic dialogues of Geneva in 1995, Lutheran theologians had acceded to the Catholic concept of "transformational" justification, that is, that because of infused grace a man was justified from the inside, not merely the outside.

(3) As we have noted throughout this article, one of the reasons two differing sides can come to some kind of agreement without denying their core beliefs is due to the choice of language and the omission of opposing beliefs. Documents can be crafted in such a way where both sides can agree to general concepts, whereas if more specific stipulations were added the two sides would remain at odds. My previous analysis of the double-meaning of "merit" is a case in point. The Protestant conception of "faith alone" is another case in point. Indeed, many times in the course of the dialogue

it was stated that Catholics and Lutherans could agree on the "general" concepts of salvation, not on its specifics. A general consensus could be reached on the more salient points, i.e., that man is justified by grace. But this is not a breakthrough of doctrine as much as it is a breakthrough of men's minds and hearts, for now each side can see that the other is not denying the basic tenet of salvation — grace.

(4) After 475 years of being separated, we now live, at least to a certain degree, in an age of ecumenism. Some have reasoned that its better to agree on general points rather than cease communication because of specific points. My only warning to all involved in this ecumenical effort is: don't *ever, ever*, compromise the truth. As I have detailed, there are some instances in the Joint Declaration and its Annex where errors and omissions in doctrine are very apparent.

If we can only have unity in diversity, then so be it. Perhaps that is the best we can do for now in this battered and bruised humanity in which we find ourselves living in this soon to be 21st century. May God's grace be with us all, and may I suggest two things from this entire paper: (1) let no one ever think that he "earns" his salvation from God, be it Catholic, Lutheran or any other religion, and (2) let us not use the phrase "faith alone" to describe this truth, since neither Scripture, the Council of Trent, the Catholic Catechism, nor a Papal encyclical has ever instructed us to do so, despite the addition of "faith alone" to the Joint Declaration's Annex. Anyone who teaches that justification comes by "faith alone" falls under the anathemas of Trent, as stipulated in Canons 9, 14, 19, 29, and other related Canons. The Catholic Church issued its interpretation of the Annex in the Clarification of the Doctrine of Justification on June 22, 1999, which did not include the "faith alone" wording. Once again, the Clarification stated: "Together we confess that the sinner is justified *through faith* in the salvific action of God in Christ..."

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January 1, 2000