

Osiandrianism—Then and Now: Justification through Christ Dwelling in Us

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In the paper on justification which I presented at these meetings last summer I touched briefly on current attempts to disguise the difference between the scriptural, Lutheran teaching of justification and the Roman Catholic and Orthodox teachings of justification. The Lutheran teaching maintains that the only effective cause of our forgiveness is a verdict of God that takes place outside of us. The Catholic and Orthodox teachings make a change within man part of the cause of our forgiveness. One of the most subtle forms of this deceptive approach is the claim that “Christ dwelling in the believer by faith” is a cause of righteousness or justification. We may call such views of justification “Osiandrian” because they are very similar to the theory advocated by Andreas Osiander at the time of the Reformation. I have been asked to comment further on such Osiandrian views as the topic for this paper.

Lutherans who promote such Osiandrian views often claim that there is a contradiction between the doctrine of justification taught by the Formula of Concord, Article III, which teaches that God’s verdict of grace which takes place outside of us is the *only* cause of justification, and Luther’s doctrine of justification, which allegedly teaches that *both* God’s verdict and Christ’s dwelling in us by faith are causes of justification, that is, causes of forgiveness of sins. In Finland such a view is advocated in the writings of Tuomo Mannermaa. The same confused approach is reflected in the response of the ELCF (January 30, 1996) to the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” prepared by theologians representing the LWF and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. This Osiandrian version of justification is the most common approach advocated in Lutheran-Catholic and Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues, which are trying to obscure the doctrinal differences between Lutherans, Catholics, and Orthodox for the sake of ecumenical compromise. It is also the most common approach adopted in such dialogues in America.

Such compromise views of justification are not Lutheran. They are rejected by all of the Lutheran Confessions and by Luther himself. Osiander’s view was rejected by Luther when it appeared as “double justification” in the Regensburg Compromise of 1541 (WA, Br.9, 406:8).

In this paper we, therefore, will:

- 1) briefly review the scriptural doctrine of justification,
- 2) summarize the life and doctrine of Osiander,
- 3) demonstrate that both the Confessions and the writings of Luther reject the Osiandrian view,
- 4) examine some contemporary examples of Osiandrian views of justification.

I. The Scriptural Doctrine of Justification

We discussed the doctrine of justification more fully in last year’s meetings. Today we will just summarize the chief points briefly.

Justification by grace through faith is very properly called the doctrine on which the church stands or falls. When a church loses the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, it is no longer Christian. It is no longer a church.

The special identifying mark of the Lutheran Church has always been a clear, pure preaching of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. A church which compromises or confuses this doctrine no longer deserves the name Lutheran.

By the perfect life he lived, Jesus kept God’s law for us. By his suffering and death he paid the penalty for our sins. Between Christ and us God arranged what Luther called “the great exchange.” All of our sins

were charged to Jesus' bill, and he paid our debt for us. All his holiness and righteousness was credited to our account, so that God now sees us as holy (2 Cor 5:21, Rom 3:25-26, 1 John 2:2).

Christ made a complete payment for all the sins of everyone in the whole world. We call this payment "redemption" or "the atonement" or "satisfaction." This payment is the basis of God's verdict of justification.

The Nature of Justification

The verb "justify" (δικαιῶ) means "to declare someone to be innocent." Whenever a judge or jury declares someone on trial "not guilty," they have "justified" that person. "Justification" is not a change in the person. It is a declaration about the legal status of that person. In fact, a judge who is dishonest or has been misled may declare an innocent person guilty or a guilty person innocent. His mistaken declaration does not change the character of the person.

When God "justified" us, he pronounced a verdict of "not guilty" upon us. In his courtroom he declared us innocent. We may look at two aspects of God's verdict.

First, God pronounced a verdict of "not guilty" for everyone in the world, since Christ had paid for the sins of every one of them. God "reconciled," that is, he made peace with the whole world through what Christ did. God declared peace with the world by not charging their sins against them (2 Cor 5:19). "Not charging sins against the world" is the same as "declaring the world innocent." "Declaring the world innocent" is the same as "justifying the world." Since God has declared the whole world innocent of sin because Christ paid for their sins, we may call this verdict of God "world justification" or "universal justification." Because it does not depend on our feelings, we also call it "objective justification."

But for us to benefit from this objective verdict of God another step was necessary. "God has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:19,20).

God has declared peace with the world. That peace is an established fact. But people do not benefit from that peace unless they hear about it and believe it. God, therefore, has written a message of reconciliation which announces that peace. That message of reconciliation is the Gospel as it is found in the Bible. God has also appointed ambassadors to deliver this message to sinners. These ambassadors are the preachers of the Gospel. These ambassadors announce, "God has made peace with the world by forgiving the sins of all people. Trust in that payment which Christ has made for your sins. Enjoy that peace which you have with God. You do not have to be afraid of God's judgment anymore. You do not have to try to save yourself by your own effort anymore." When sinners hear this message of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit works through it to create saving faith in their hearts. Saving faith is trust in the payment which Christ made for my sins and for the sins of the whole world. By faith I receive the gift of forgiveness which Christ won for me. "We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Rom 3:28).

It is important to be clear about the relationship between faith and justification. Faith is not a *cause* of our justification. It is merely the *means* through which this gift is delivered to me. When we are contrasting faith with our own works, we can say that we are justified *by* faith, just as Romans 3:28 does. But when Paul is speaking more precisely about the cause of justification, he speaks differently: "For it is *by* grace you have been saved, *through* faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

II. The Life and Doctrine of Andreas Osiander

Luther often expressed the fear that after his death there would be a corruption of the doctrine of justification in the Lutheran Church. Andreas Osiander was the first to fulfill Luther's prophecy. In 1549 Osiander began to abandon publicly the forensic concept of justification as imputation (that is, he denied that

justification is a verdict of God which credits the merits of Christ to the believer). Instead, he returned to the Roman view of justification by infusion (that is, justification is a transplanting of the eternal essential righteousness of the divine nature of Christ into the believer). According to his own confession, Osiander had quietly held these views ever since about 1522. Yet he made no special effort to develop and to spread his ideas publicly during the life of Luther. After the death of the Reformer, however, Osiander is reported to have said, “Now that the lion is dead, I shall easily dispose of the foxes and hares” (that is, of Melancthon and the other Lutheran theologians). Osiander was, thus, the originator of the controversy “Concerning the Righteousness of Faith before God,” which was finally settled in Article III of the *Formula of Concord*.

Osiander is praised by church historians as the only real systematic theologian among the Lutherans of the first generation. He is described as a man who was talented, learned, eloquent, and energetic, but he was also proud, overbearing, and contentious. All of these qualities contributed to his role in the controversy concerning justification.

Osiander’s Life

Osiander was born on December 19, 1498, at Gunzenhausen, Franconia, Germany. He died on October 17, 1552, at Königsberg, where he was also buried with high honors in the Old City Church. In 1522 he had been appointed priest at St. Lawrence’s Church in the free city of Nürnberg. Here he immediately became a determined champion of the Reformation. He participated in some of the most important church meetings of the time. He was present at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, at which he made the personal acquaintance of Luther and the Wittenbergers. He also took part in the discussions at the Diet in Augsburg in 1530; at Smalcald in 1537; and at Hagenau and Worms in 1540.

When the Catholics imposed the Augsburg Interim on the Lutherans in Nürnberg, Osiander resigned, and with words of deep emotion, he left the church where he had labored more than a quarter of a century. On January 27, 1549, he arrived in Königsberg. Here he was joyously received by Count Albrecht of Prussia, whom he had gained for the Reformation in 1523. Moved by gratitude toward Osiander, whom he honored as his “spiritual father,” Count Albrecht appointed him pastor of the Old City Church and, soon after, as first professor of theology at the University of Königsberg. Osiander was honored with a double salary even though he had never received an academic degree. The jealousy which this unusual favor caused among his colleagues developed into hostility against Osiander. This dissatisfaction grew worse as a result of Osiander’s overbearing, domineering ways, as well as his scheming methods. No doubt, this personal conflict added to the intensity and violence of the controversy that was soon to follow, and during which the professors in Königsberg are said to have carried firearms into their academic sessions. Yet this tension cannot be regarded as the real cause or even as the immediate occasion of the conflict, which was really brought about by the unsound, speculative, and mystical views of Osiander on the image of God and, particularly, on justification and the righteousness of faith—doctrinal points on which he deviated from the Lutheran teaching to such an extent that a controversy was unavoidable. Evidently, Osiander’s error was either a case of relapse into Romanism, or, what seems to be the more probable explanation, Osiander had never attained to a clear understanding of the Lutheran truth nor ever fully freed himself from the Roman doctrine, especially in its finer and more veiled form of mysticism.

The Teaching of Osiander and that of His Opponents

Osiander, as stated earlier, had developed the basis ideas of his system long before he reached Königsberg. Already in 1524, when only twenty-six years of age, he revealed the main point of his theory in a publication entitled: *A Good Instruction*. Here he says:

Whoever hears, retains, and believes the Word, receives God Himself, for God is the Word. *If, therefore, the Word of God, Christ our Lord, dwells in us by faith and we are one with Him, we may say with Paul: 'I live, though not I, but Christ lives in me,' and then we are justified by faith.*

In the following year, 1525, he wrote in his *Action of the Honorable Wise Council in Nürnberg with Their Preachers*:

The one and only righteousness availing before God is God Himself. But Christ is the Word which we apprehend by faith, and thus *Christ in us, God Himself, is our righteousness which avails before God.*

The Gospel has two parts; the first, that Christ has satisfied the justice of God; the other, that He has cleansed us from sin and *justifies us by dwelling in us.*

The undeveloped ideas of these early publications concerning justification were fully developed by Osiander in his book of 1550, *Whether the Son of God Would Have Had To Be Incarnated If Sin Had Not Entered the World*; and especially in his confession of September, 1551, *Concerning the Only Mediator Jesus Christ and Justification of Faith.*

The public conflict had already begun immediately after Osiander had entered upon his duties at the university. In his inaugural disputation of April 5, 1549, "Concerning the Law and Gospel," Osiander's vanity prompted him at least to hint at his peculiar views, which he well knew were not in agreement with the doctrine taught at Wittenberg and in the Lutheran Church at large. His colleague, Matthias Lauterwald immediately took issue with him. On October 24 of the following year Osiander held a second disputation ("On Justification") in which he came out clearly against the doctrine taught in the Lutheran Church. But now a much more able and determined opponent appeared in the arena, Joachim Mörlin, who henceforth devoted his entire life to defeating Osiandrianism and to vindicating Luther's forensic view of justification.

Mörlin was born at Wittenberg April 6, 1514, he studied under Luther and was made Master in 1537 and Doctor in 1540. Till 1543 he was superintendent in Arnstadt, Thuringia, and superintendent in Göttingen till 1549, when he was compelled to leave because of his opposition to the Augsburg Interim. Recommended by Elizabeth Duchess of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, the mother-in-law of Duke Albrecht, he was appointed preacher at the Cathedral of Königsberg in 1550.

Mörlin clearly understood that solid comfort in life and death is possible only as long as our faith rests solely on a foreign righteousness (*aliena iustitia*), that is, on the objective righteousness of Christ, which is outside of us, and which is offered in the Gospel and received by faith. He also realized that Christian assurance is incompatible with the doctrine of Osiander who taught that our faith is to rely on a righteous condition within ourselves. Mörlin publicly attacked Osiander from his pulpit and in every way emphasized that Osiander's teaching could never be tolerated in the Lutheran Church. Osiander counterattacked in his lectures. The situation thus created was most intolerable for the church. At the command of the Duke discussions were held between Mörlin and Osiander, but without success.

In order to settle the dispute, Duke Albrecht on October 5, 1551, placed the entire matter before the evangelical princes and cities with the request that the points involved be discussed at the various synods and that their verdicts be forwarded to Königsberg. This aroused the general interest and the deepest concern of the entire Lutheran Church in Germany. Numerous opinions of the various synods and theologians arrived during the winter of 1551 to 1552. The Württemberg *Response*, written by John Brenz, and the *Opinion* of Matthew Vogel, regarded Osiander's teaching as differing from the doctrine received by the Lutheran Church only in terms and wording rather than in substance. All the rest of the responses were unfavorable to Osiander. All of the opinions, even those of Brenz and Vogel, revealed that all the Lutheran theologians of Wittenberg, as well

as those of Jena, Brandenburg, Pomerania, and Hamburg, were firmly united in maintaining Luther's doctrine that the righteousness of faith is not the essential righteousness of the Son of God in us, as Osiander claimed, but the obedience of Christ the God-man which is imputed by grace to all true believers as their only righteousness before God.

Feeling safe under the protection of Duke Albrecht, and apparently not in the least impressed by the general opposition which his innovations raised from the other Lutherans, Osiander continued the controversy by publishing his *Proof That for Thirty Years I have Always Taught the Same Doctrine*. Irritated by an opinion of Melancthon (whom Osiander denounced as a deadly heretic), he wrote his *Refutation of the Unfounded, Unprofitable Answer of Philip Melancthon*. In this immoderate publication Osiander boasted that only the Philippist rabble, dancing according to the piping of Melancthon, was opposed to him.

Before long, however, also such opponents of the Philippists as Flacius, Gallus, Amsdorf, and Wigand were prominently arraigned against Osiander. Meanwhile Mörlin published a large volume entitled: *Concerning the Justification of Faith*. In 1552 and 1553 Flacius issued no less than twelve publications against Osiander.

When the controversy had just about reached its climax, Osiander died on October 17, 1552. Soon after, the Duke enjoined silence on both parties, and Mörlin was banished. He accepted a position as superintendent in Brunswick, where he zealously continued his opposition to Osiandrianism as well as to other corruptions of genuine Lutheranism. At Königsberg the Osiandrists continued to enjoy the protection and favor of Duke Albrecht and gradually developed into a quasi-political party. The leader of the small band was John Funck, the son-in-law of Osiander and the chaplain of the Duke. In 1566, however, the king of Poland intervened, and Funck was executed as a disturber of the public peace. Mörlin was recalled and served as bishop of Samland at Königsberg from 1567 until his death in 1571. The *Corpus Doctrinae Pruthenicum*, or *Borussicum*, composed by Mörlin and Chemnitz and adopted in 1567 at Königsberg, rejected the doctrines of Osiander. Mörlin also wrote a history of Osiandrianism entitled: *The Form Which the Osiandrian Enthusiasm Assumed in Prussia*. Thus we see that the doctrine of Osiander was condemned by virtually all of the Lutheran theologians of his day.

Corruptions Involved in Osiander's Teaching

Osiander's theory of justification, according to which the righteousness of faith is the eternal, essential holiness of the divine nature of Christ inhering and dwelling in man, compelled him to maintain that justification is not an act by which God *declares* a man just, but an act by which God actually *makes* him inherently just and righteous. For Osiander justification is not an imputation of a righteousness existing outside of man, but an actual infusion of a righteousness dwelling in man. It is not a mere acquittal from sin and guilt, but includes regeneration, renewal, sanctification, and internal cleansing from sin. Justification is not a forensic or judicial act outside of man or a declaration concerning man's legal standing before God, but a sort of medicinal process within a person. The righteousness of faith is not a "foreign righteousness" (*aliena iustitia*, a term employed also by Luther) consisting in the obedience of Christ, but a quality, condition, or change effected in believers by the essential righteousness of the divine nature dwelling in them through faith in Christ. Faith does not justify because of the work of Christ *outside of man*, in which a believer trusts, but because of the quality which faith produces *in man*. Therefore, for Osiander justification is never instantaneous and complete, but gradual and progressive.

Osiander plainly teaches that the righteousness of faith (our righteousness before God) is not the obedience rendered by Christ to the divine Law, but the indwelling righteousness of God—essentially the same original righteousness or image that inhered in Adam and Eve before the Fall. For Osiander our righteousness indeed does not consist in our good works, but in a quality which makes all who receive it just and moves them to do what is right. Our righteousness is that Christ makes us holy by dwelling in us and renewing us. According to Osiander, Christ made satisfaction and acquired forgiveness for us by His suffering and death, but he did not thereby accomplish our justification. Christ's obedience as such does not establish our righteousness

before God, but merely makes the restoration of righteousness possible. Christ's death was necessary so that God could dwell in us and so become our life and righteousness. Faith justifies, not because it apprehends the merits of Christ, but because it unites us with the divine nature, the infinite essential righteousness of God, in which our sins are diluted and lost, as an impure drop disappears when poured into an ocean of liquid purity.

According to the teaching of Osiander the assurance that we are justified and accepted by God does not rest exclusively on the merits of Christ and the pardon offered in the Gospel, but must be based on a righteous quality inhering in us. Our confidence does not depend only upon what Christ has done *outside of us and for us*, but rather upon what He is producing *in us*. Not the *Christ for us*, but rather the *Christ in us*, is the basis both of our justification and assurance. Accordingly, in order to satisfy an alarmed sinner, it is not sufficient to proclaim the Gospel-promise of divine absolution. In addition, an investigation is required whether the righteousness and holiness of God is also really found dwelling in him. While Luther had urged alarmed consciences to trust in the merits of Christ alone for their justification and salvation, Osiander led them to rely on the new life of divine wisdom, holiness, and righteousness dwelling in their own hearts. From the very beginning of the controversy, Mörlin, Melancthon, and the other Lutherans emphasized that Osiander's doctrine robs Christians of the solid comfort which comes from knowing that the righteousness which saves them is not a subjective quality in their own hearts, but solely and only the objective and absolutely perfect obedience rendered by Christ many hundred years ago. It is this righteousness which we must rely upon for the assurance of salvation.

The innovation of Osiander destroyed the doctrine of justification restored to the church by Luther. In fact, his theory was simply a variation of the false teaching that had driven the Lutherans out of the Church of Rome. True, Osiander did deny that we merit justification by our own works. But the fact that he claimed that a subjective condition *in us* is our righteousness before God gives his doctrine an essentially Roman character, even though it may differ from Romanism in some details. Möhler, a renowned Catholic apologist, declared that properly interpreted and explained, Osiander's doctrine was "identical with the Roman Catholic doctrine." As stated before, Osiander's teaching was Romanism in its finer and more veiled form of mysticism.

Excerpts from Osiander's Writings

In his publications Osiander tries to prove that he is in complete doctrinal agreement with Luther. He claims, "Christ, true God and man, dwelling in us through faith, is our righteousness according to His divine nature. As Dr. Luther says: 'I rely on the righteousness which is God Himself; this He cannot reject.' 'Such,' says Luther, 'is the simple, correct understanding. Do not allow yourself to be led away from it.'"

Osiander's appeal to Luther is unwarranted. According to Luther Christ is our righteousness because his obedience for us is the obedience of God himself—the work not only of Christ's human nature, but also of his divine nature. According to Osiander everything that Christ did for us merely serves to bring about the indwelling of the divine nature of Christ in us. This essential holiness of Christ in us is our righteousness before God. That Osiander was not in agreement with Luther, as he claimed, appears also from Osiander's assertion that such statements of Luther as "Christ's death is our life" and "forgiveness of sins is our righteousness" must be explained figuratively.

The manner in which Osiander maintained that Christ is our righteousness only according to His divine nature in us appears from the following excerpt:

Since Christ is ours and is in us, God Himself and all His angels behold nothing in us but righteousness on account of the highest, eternal, and infinite righteousness of Christ, which is His deity itself dwelling in us. And although sin still remains in, and clings to, our flesh, it is like an impure little drop compared with a great pure ocean, and on account of the righteousness of Christ which is in us God does not want to see it.

The *Formula of Concord* describes this strange teaching of Osiander, according to which he describes justification as a sort of mystico-physical dilution of sin, rather than as forgiveness of sins, with these words:

For one side [that is, Osiander] has contended that the righteousness of faith, which the apostle calls the righteousness of God, is God's essential righteousness, which is Christ Himself as the true, natural, and essential Son of God, who dwells in the elect by faith and impels them to do right, and thus is their righteousness, compared with which righteousness the sins of all men are as a drop of water compared with the great ocean. (917, 2; 791, 2)

That Osiander practically identified justification with regeneration, renewal, and gradual sanctification appears from the following quotations.

To justify means "to make a just man out of an unjust one," that is, to recall a dead man to life.

Thus the Gospel further shows its power and also justifies us, that is, it *makes* us just, even as, and in the same degree as, He also makes us alive. And here you see again how terribly those err who endeavor to prove by this passage of David and Paul [Romans 4] that our righteousness is nothing else than forgiveness of sin, for they have overlooked the covering of sin with the [essential] righteousness of Christ whom we put on in Baptism. They have also removed from justification the renewal of the inner man effected by regeneration.

Osiander was fanatical in denouncing those who identified justification with the forgiveness of sins. In his *Disputation* of October 24, 1550, he declared:

The entire fullness of the deity dwells in Christ bodily, hence in those also in whom Christ dwells.... Therefore we are just by His essential righteousness.... Whoever does not hold this manner of our justification is certainly a Zwinglian at heart, no matter what he may confess with his mouth.... They also teach things colder than ice [who hold] that we are regarded as righteous only on account of the forgiveness of sins, and not on account of the [essential] righteousness of Christ who dwells in us through faith.

They are errorists who say, teach, and write that the righteousness is outside of us.

The [essential] righteousness of Christ is indeed, imputed to us, but only when it is in us.

It is clear that for Osiander justification is not just God's gracious verdict. It is not just forgiveness of sins, but it is something more. No matter how cleverly the "something more" is disguised in words like "indwelling Christ" and "divine righteousness," this "something more" is an addition to God's gracious verdict which destroys the gospel.

Except for Brenz and Vogel, who, as stated before, regarded Osiander's doctrine as differing from the Lutheran view only in wording and manner of presentation rather than in substance, the Lutherans everywhere were unanimous in rejecting Osiander's theory as a refresh outbreak of the Romish justification by infusion.

III. Luther and the Confessions

Modern advocates of Osiandrian views often try to claim Luther as a supporter of their views just as Osiander did. In evaluating such claims we need to remember several points:

One must be very careful in evaluating quotations from Luther's writings that have been divorced from their original historical setting and context in order to claim Luther's support for some particular doctrinal position.

Luther's views are not uniform throughout his many writings, in part because Luther's views became clearer as the Reformation developed. In his early writings he does not always clearly distinguish between justification and sanctification. He sometimes uses "justification" in a wider sense.

Luther's writings are not confessional writings of the church. As great a treasure as Luther's writings are for us, many of them did not originate as carefully edited, precise doctrinal statements, as the Lutheran Confessions did. Many of Luther's writings, as we have them today, were not written and edited by Luther himself. They were prepared from notes made by people who had heard Luther speak. The Formula of Concord, on the other hand, was very carefully prepared. Several successive drafts received input and suggestions from a number of theologians before final approval. The Formula was precisely worded in order to deal with controversies and to reject vague terminology which had appeared

These differences in style, origin, and volume between Luther's works and the Confessions make it easier for people to misquote Luther than to misquote the Confessions. There is, however, no real doctrinal difference between Luther and the Confessions on justification as will be seen in the following citations.

Luther

Luther teaches forensic justification in his personal writings. In his exposition of Ps 51:2 from 1532 Luther says:

[A Christian] is righteous and holy by an alien or foreign holiness—I call it this for sake of instruction—that is, he is righteous by the mercy and grace of God. This mercy and grace is not something human; it is not some disposition or quality of the heart. It is a divine blessing given us through the true knowledge of the Gospel, when we know and believe that our sin has been forgiven through the grace and merit of Christ.... Is not this righteousness an alien righteousness? It consists completely in the indulgence of another and is a pure gift of God who shows mercy and favor for Christ's sake.... Therefore a Christian is not essentially righteous; he is not righteous according to quality or substance. (WA 40 II, 352f.)

Justification (forgiveness of sins) is that I live in Christ by faith. Sanctification (good works) is that Christ lives in me. Commenting of John 14:20 Luther says:

This is the first chief article: that a man goes out of himself and rises above himself into Christ. Thereafter the descent from above begins like this: As I am in Christ, so Christ, in turn, is in me. I have assumed Him and entered into Him, have stepped out of sin, death, and the power of the devil. So he now manifests Himself in me and says: Go your way, preach, comfort, baptize, serve your neighbor. (WA 45, 591)

In a 1540 sermon on Matthew 27:62 Luther says:

Christ has purchased two things for us: first, *gratiam*, grace; second, *donum*, the gift (of sanctification). First, then, I attain the forgiveness of sins without any contribution or good works of my own. God justifies me, considers his child and me holy because I believe in Christ.... Second, when I believe, the Son of God has thereby already laid the first stone—or the cornerstone—and adds to this faith the gifts, *dona*. (WA 49, 94f)

Note how clearly Luther distinguishes the grace of justification, which is outside of us, from the gift of sanctification, which is inside of us. Although the two go together, they are clearly distinguished.

When Luther speaks of “Christ living in us by faith,” he is referring either to 1) the fact that justifying faith is not merely an intellectual knowledge but a living power, or to 2) the indwelling of Christ and the Father and the Spirit in us, which produces sanctification. He is not referring to the cause of justification. It is true that justifying faith is a living power in us. It is true that the indwelling of God produces good works in us. Neither of these, however, is the meritorious cause of forgiveness.

Here it is to be noted that these three things are joined together: faith, Christ, and acceptance or imputation. Faith takes hold of Christ and has him as present, enclosing him as a ring encloses the gem. And whoever is found having this faith in the Christ who is grasped in the heart, him God counts as righteous.... Thus God accepts you or accounts you as righteous *only* on account of *Christ in whom you believe*. (WA 40, 233; LW 26, 132)

If it is true faith, it is a sure trust and firm acceptance in the heart. It takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object, but, *so to speak*, the one who is present in the faith itself.... Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ. But how he is present? This is beyond our thought; for here there is darkness, as I have said. Where the confidence of the heart is present, therefore, there Christ is present, in that very cloud and faith. This is the formal righteousness on account of which a man is justified. It is not on account of love as the sophists say. (WA 40, 229; LW 129-130)

Christ living in us motivates us and empowers us to good works, which are a *result* of justification, not a *cause* of justification.

When we have taught faith in this way, then we also teach about good works. Because you have taken hold of Christ by faith, through whom you are righteous, you should now go and love God and your neighbor.... These are truly good works, which flow from this faith and joy conceived in the heart because we have the forgiveness of sins freely through Christ. (WA 40, 233; LW 26, 133)

Christ lives in me in such a way that I still live my life in the flesh but do not live in the flesh in such a way that my life is of the flesh, in the flesh, or according to the flesh. No, then my life is in faith in the Son of God. (WA 2, 502; LW 27, 239)

The Confessions

All of the Lutheran Confessions teach the same doctrine of justification as a verdict. The Augsburg Confession leads the way:

Men...are freely justified for Christ’s sake through faith (*propter Christum per fidem*) when they believe that they are received into favor (*gratiam*) and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who by his death has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight. (AC, Art IV. *Trig.* p 45)

Properly and truly, by faith itself, we are for Christ’s sake accounted righteous or are acceptable in God’s sight. (Apology, Art IV (II) 72. *Trig.* p 140)

The Smalcald Articles express Luther's mature confession on the matter:

What I have up till now constantly taught concerning this I know not how to change in the least, namely, that by faith, as Peter says, we acquire a new and clean heart, and God will and does account us entirely and wholly righteous and holy for the sake of Christ, our Mediator.... And such faith, renewal, and forgiveness is followed by good works. (SA XII, 1,2. *Trig.* p 499.)

The Formula of Concord states the same teaching in somewhat more detail because of controversy which had arisen.

Our righteousness before God is this very thing, that God forgives us our sins out of pure grace, without any work, merit, or worthiness of ours, preceding, present, or following, that he presents (*donat*) and imputes to us the righteousness of Christ's obedience, on account of which righteousness we are received into grace by God and regarded as righteous.

Faith alone is the means and instrument whereby we lay hold of Christ, and thus in Christ of that righteousness which avails before God, for whose sake this faith is imputed to us for righteousness.

We believe, teach, and confess that this faith is not a bare knowledge of the history of Christ, but such a gift of God by which we come to a right knowledge of Christ as our Redeemer in the Word of the Gospel and trust in Him that for the sake of his obedience alone we have by grace the forgiveness of sins and are regarded as holy and righteous before God the Father and eternally saved. (FC III 2, 3, 4. *Trig.* p. 793)

See also the Formula of Concord, Th.Dec. III, 44-62. *Trig.* p 933-937.

IV. Present Day Osiandrian Views

Today the major sponsor of such attacks on the Gospel is the Roman Catholic Church. Roman Catholic theology teaches that we are saved by faith and works together. Catholic theology teaches that we are saved by "grace," but it uses a different definition of saving grace than the Bible does. Rome teaches that the "grace of God" by which we are saved is not the gracious attitude of God by which he forgives our sin, but a power which God puts into us which enables us to do the good works which complete our justification. This is called "infused grace." According to Roman Catholic theology justification is not a verdict outside of us by which God *declares* us righteous, but a process in us by which God *makes* us righteous. The Bible teaches that justification is complete for every one who believes, that is, everyone who believes in Christ has complete forgiveness from all of the punishment of every one of his sins. Catholic theology, on the other hand, teaches that justification is a gradual process in which we become more forgiven as we complete more works. In addition to the sinner's own works, the works of Mary and the saints and the evils that a person suffers in purgatory can also help sinners complete their payment of the penalty of sin.

The official Roman Catholic doctrine was proclaimed by the Council of Trent shortly after the Reformation. Trent declared:

The single essential cause [of justification] is the righteousness of God, not that by which he is himself righteous, but that by which he makes us righteous, or that by which we, being endowed by him, are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and are not only reputed to be, but are truly called

and are righteous, receiving the righteousness in us, everyone his own, according to the measure which the Holy Spirit imparts to each one as he wills and according to each one's disposition and cooperation. (Session VI, Chapter VII)

If anyone says that a man is justified either solely by the crediting of Christ's righteousness or solely by the forgiveness of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and charity which is poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit and stays with them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the favor of God, let him be damned (*anathema*). (Canon XI)

If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than trust in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is trust alone by which we are justified, let him be damned (*anathema*). (Canon XII)

These statements have not been retracted by Rome. In fact, the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms them.

Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man (Paragraph 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 for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life (Par. 2027).

The Catholic Church still teaches that salvation is obtained by a combination of faith and works. It still teaches three causes of justification: the merits of Christ, the merits of Mary and all the saints, and the good that we do and the evil that we suffer in penance or purgatory. This position clearly reveals the anti-Christian character of the papacy.

We have already seen that Scripture clearly rejects any compromise between grace and works. "If by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Rom 11:6). Including even one work as a necessary cause of justification destroys grace. "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (Gal 5:4). Paul's verdict on those who introduced even one work into justification is very clear. "As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Gal 1:9)

Mixing dirty water with clean water produces dirty water. Mixing poison with good food produces poison. Mixing work righteousness with grace produces work righteousness. Mixing Lutheranism with Catholicism produces Catholicism. There can be no compromise between the biblical, Lutheran teaching that justification is a verdict of complete forgiveness from God and the Catholic teaching that justification is a combination of God's grace and our works. Every such compromise destroys the Gospel.

In spite of this, Lutherans and Evangelicals in the USA and in Europe have been rushing to try to reach a compromise with Rome on justification. Usually the compromise contains words such as "We agree that our justification ultimately depends on the grace of God." Such formulas are a deception designed to disguise the difference between the Catholic and Lutheran doctrines. Catholics and Lutherans have always agreed that we are "saved by grace." But they have always disagreed about what that saving grace is. Lutherans, with Scripture, have confessed that saving grace is the attitude of God by which he forgives our sins freely for Christ's sake. Catholics have taught that saving grace includes an ability which God puts into us which enables us to earn the completion of our justification. These two views are utterly incompatible. The ambiguous joint statements adopted by Catholic and Lutheran theologians are intended to let the Lutheran teaching that justification is a *verdict by God* and the Catholic teaching that it is a *process of moral reform in man* stand side

by side as alternate ways of teaching justification. Such resolutions are an abandonment of the heritage which the Lutheran Reformation regained for us.

Catholics are willing to make statements which sound very Lutheran to deceive the unsuspecting. A prominent American Catholic theologian recently stated that Catholics can say we are saved by faith alone. He explained it this way, "Faith is loving obedience. In that sense, faith alone justifies." Here good works are made a part of faith, rather than a result of faith. Real Lutherans will not be fooled by such statements, but must reject them completely. There can be no compromise on the doctrine of justification.

Catholic-Lutheran Dialogues in the USA

In the mid-1980s a group of theologians from the Roman Catholic Church and from what is now the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America produced a joint statement of justification. It is not surprising that they produced a statement which allows two contradictory doctrines to stand side by side as different ways of expressing one gospel, since all of the participants held historical-critical views of the Bible. Since they believed that two different doctrines of justification (Paul's and James') stand side by side in the Bible, they believed that different theologies of justification may co-exist in the church today (paragraphs 122-142).

Including endnotes, this document fills 27 triple-column pages. Much of it is historical review. We have the time to examine only a few of its conclusions. The Catholic participants acknowledge past and present abuses in the way in which justification has been taught in the Catholic Church, but they maintain the traditional Catholic doctrine.

The Catholics grant that salvation in its totality depends on the gracious will of God, but within the totality of salvation they include a number of elements, some of which depend on others. In the fulfillment of God's saving plan there are certain conditions which we must fulfill if we are to benefit from the created effects of God's powerful decrees. Justification does not depend solely on God's verdict, but also on our sanctification and renewal.

To describe this transformation in man Catholics use the concept of "divinization" and stress that the "inherent righteousness" of believers is primarily God's gift of himself dwelling in the believer (par. 79). This formulation places less emphasis on the *infusion of powers* into the sinner than traditional Catholic statements of justification have done. This new statement is more Osianrian in its emphasis on the *indwelling of God himself* as part of our justification. In contrast to the Finnish statements which emphasize the indwelling of Christ, the American statement emphasizes the indwelling of the Spirit. Otherwise, they are very alike in their Osianrianism.

A few sentences from the twelve "convergences" at the end of the document reveal that this is a patchwork, designed to let two contradictory doctrines co-exist.

The prerequisite of final salvation is righteousness. To be saved one must be judged righteous and be righteous.

By justification we are both declared and made righteous. Justification, therefore, is not a legal fiction. God in justifying effects what he promises; he forgives sin and makes us truly righteous (par. 156).

The final affirmation of the report states:

Our common affirmation that it is God in Christ alone whom believers ultimately trust does not necessitate any one particular way of conceptualizing 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 transformationist view which emphasizes the change wrought in sinners by infused grace (par. 156, 157).

In this statement the critical difference between Catholic and Lutheran teachings of justification has been reduced to nothing more than alternate ways of expressing the belief that somehow or other our salvation is ultimately due to God. The crucial question of *how* this has been done and how we are to find confidence before God's judgment has been left in limbo. The Lutheran participants have made deadly concessions by allowing Rome's confusion of justification and sanctification to receive equal status with the scriptural forensic justification, in which God declared that all of our sins were forgiven solely because of Christ's righteousness, not because of any righteousness in us. A compromised doctrine of justification is really the Catholic doctrine since their teaching has always made room for both faith and works as causes of forgiveness.

Tuomo Mannermaa

In connection with Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues, the Finnish theologian Tuomo Mannermaa set forth his views about justification through "Christ dwelling in us by faith." His writings have attracted considerable attention, because Mannermaa had been widely regarded as a theologian who was resistant to ecumenical compromise. In this case, however, we must conclude that Mannermaa has opened the door to a compromise which is, in fact, a betrayal of the Lutheran doctrine of justification. Because Mannermaa's writings have been reviewed by Lehtonen, Hardt, Marquart, and others, I will comment only on the most significant points.

- 1) Mannermaa claims that there is a contradiction between the views of Luther and the Formula of Concord, and that we, therefore, must choose between the two. As has been shown above, there is, in fact, no contradiction between Luther's position and the position of the Formula of Concord.
- 2) Mannermaa shows that both Luther and the Eastern fathers use language of deification (*theosis*). He neglects to show, however, that Luther's use of such deification language, unlike that of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, was given a Pauline interpretation. The key issue is the relationship of "deification" to justification. Is deification a cause or a result of justification? The mature Luther saw such "deification" as the result of justification, not as its cause. The Formula of Concord also very clearly excludes the indwelling of Christ as a cause of justification. It rather treats it as a result of justification.
- 3) In trying to summarize Luther's view, Mannermaa focuses too narrowly on Luther's comments on Galatians 2. His mistake might have been avoided if he had given equal attention to the whole range of Luther's writings. He also does not give adequate attention to the term "justification" in Scripture.
- 4) Mannermaa does not adequately distinguish justification from sanctification. It is surprising to hear a Lutheran theologian say, "The subdivision into justification and sanctification, which established itself within later Lutheranism, is as such no central distinction in the theology of Luther" (*In ipsa fide Christus adest*, p 56).
- 5) Mannermaa's view is being used to hide the difference between the Orthodox and Lutheran views of justification, in order to allow ecumenical compromise.

Luther agrees with the Formula of Concord. Mannermaa agrees with neither. This needs to be said clearly. Many Lutherans have made too much effort to find something positive in the Orthodox-Lutheran dialogues. What is necessary, however, is to criticize the blurring of the difference between the Orthodox and Lutheran views of justification. This is deadly danger, which the Lutherans of Finland must be warned against.

Conclusion

It is misleading and confusing to join together the righteousness which we have by imputation and the righteousness which we have through Christ dwelling in us. The righteousness which we have by imputation is the righteousness which Christ earned for us by his perfect life and death. We have this only through the verdict of God. This verdict, which we accept by faith, is the only effective cause of forgiveness. This is justification in the strict sense.

The righteousness which we have through Christ dwelling in us is sanctification in the narrow sense, that is, our imperfect efforts at good works, which God graciously accepts for Christ's sake. This righteousness is not a cause of forgiveness, but a result of forgiveness. Rome teaches that this righteousness is a cause of forgiveness.

Failure to distinguish carefully between these two kinds of righteousness conceals the critical difference between the biblical doctrine of justification, which teaches forgiveness of sins due to a righteousness which is outside of us, and the Roman false teaching which maintains forgiveness is in part due to righteousness which is in us. The compromise documents allow this deadly error to be maintained. This error is death to the soul. Today we must oppose it just as vigorously as the true Lutherans opposed the error of Osiander more than 400 years ago.

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