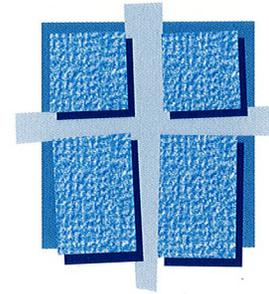


Justification



BY FAITH
THROUGH
GRACE

*Joint Declaration on the
Doctrine of Justification*

**Study Resources for
Congregations and Parishes**



 Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops

 Evangelical Lutheran
Church in Canada

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■ Introduction

Re-examining Mutual Condemnations

Just as individuals make use of passports or birth certificates to say who they are, creeds or confessions of faith are used to establish Christian identity. In fact, the Latin word for *creed*, which may be translated as *symbol* or *sign*, expresses this meaning.

Where the earliest Christians were interested in identifying themselves as distinct from the followers of other religions, later controversies led to the development of creeds, confessions or conciliar texts in which one church defines its specific teaching in relation to that of another. When differences are seen as serious enough to affect the Gospel, churches may seek clarity by condemning the teachings of the other.

In the sixteenth century, Lutherans and Roman Catholics were involved in a dispute about certain aspects of the New Testament teaching on justification. Mutual condemnations which were issued at this time continue to influence how each church sees the other.

Over the past number of years, dialogue has made real progress. It now seems appropriate to ask whether the beliefs that were condemned in the heat of controversy are actually held today. This question is central to the study of an Ecumenical Working Group of Protestant and Catholic theologians in Germany which published its findings in 1986 in a volume entitled, *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era – Do They Still Divide?*

Central Significance of the Doctrine of Justification

For the Reformers, the doctrine of justification is the article on which the church stands or falls. Justification by faith is a criterion or corrective for all church practices, structures and theology. It is the heart of the Gospel's proclamation of God's free and merciful promises in Jesus Christ which can be rightly received only through faith.

In the Lutheran tradition, the doctrine of justification has retained its special status. From the beginning, therefore, it has been an important topic in official Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogues. The following dialogue reports should be noted: *The Gospel and the Church* from the Joint Lutheran/

Roman Catholic International Study Commission in 1972; *Justification by Faith* from the USA Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue in 1983; *Church and Justification* from the Joint Lutheran/Roman Catholic International Study Commission in 1994. All of these dialogue reports have shown a high degree of agreement in their approach as well as their conclusions. Thus, members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) have agreed that the results of these dialogues should be summarized so that the two churches may be informed of the overall results and make binding decisions.

Current Phase of the Dialogue

A *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* was prepared by the LWF and the PCPCU in February 1995. After a preliminary circulation, the text was revised in June 1996 and again circulated. At the request of the LWF, some sections of this text were rewritten and a *Final Proposal of the Joint Declaration* was published in February 1997.

The *Joint Declaration* intends "to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran Churches and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ." Without attempting to cover all that either church teaches about justification, it expresses "a consensus on the basic truths concerning the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnation." (art. 5)

The current phase of the dialogue process has two interrelated aspects: 1) reception of the *Joint Declaration* as an accurate statement of the overall results of the dialogue; 2) education about the implications of reception of the *Joint Declaration* as well as the content of the teaching on justification.

Reception of the Joint Declaration

The *Joint Declaration* is not a "new, independent presentation" but an attempt to "summarize the results of our dialogues on justification." It explicates "the Common Understanding of Justification," under seven headings: "Human Powerlessness and Sin in Relation to Justification," "Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous," "Justification by Faith and through Grace," "The Justified as Sinner," "Law and Gospel," "Assurance of

Salvation,” “The Good Works of the Justified.” Each section contains three paragraphs: a summary of common belief and explanations of both the Catholic and the Lutheran positions. A final part of the declaration explores “The Significance and Scope of the Consensus Reached” and concludes: “a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics.” (art. 40)

On June 16, 1998, following worldwide consultation of its member churches, the LWF Council unanimously approved the *Joint Declaration*. Nine days later, the Vatican issued its official response in a two-part statement consisting of a “declaration” which affirms the existence of a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification, and a series of additional comments or “clarifications” which identify points for further study. At present, both the Vatican and the LWF Council are considering joint action to confirm the consensus and the nonapplicability of the mutual condemnations.

Educational Process

Reception of the results of bilateral and multilateral dialogues has been an important topic in ecumenical discussions over the past few years. This is a new question and it is a complex process which must involve all the members of the church.

With a view to encouraging as many persons as possible to reflect on the central themes of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), have prepared a series of bible studies for use in congregations and parishes.

Intended to promote local ecumenism, these texts are oriented toward joint study in neighbouring Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches. Even when joint study is not possible, the texts may provide a useful tool to develop an awareness of the content of the Reformation debate and its relevance for contemporary Christian life.

■ Suggestions for Group Study and Discussion

Initiating an Ecumenical Dialogue

This booklet has been designed as a resource for small group study and discussion. Since most people learn by associating new information with what they already know or do, a three-step process is suggested. In brief, participants are invited to: 1) name their own experience of the topic under discussion; 2) reflect together on what has been said by Lutherans and Catholics in dialogue; 3) consider an appropriate action or response which allows for integration of what has been learned. Many groups find that discussion is helped by the presence of a facilitator.

The booklet contains six sessions or workshops. The length of each session is approximately two hours. The suggested process may be adapted to the participants' needs and interests. For example, discussion may alternate between large and small groups according to the number of participants at each session. The sessions in this booklet may be used over a six week period or local groups may choose to select among them for a one or two day study.

The materials in this booklet are intended to promote study and discussion of the contents of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. Thus, each session concludes with a selection of articles from the *Joint Declaration*. In four of the sessions, reflection is assisted by means of a Bible Study on related biblical passages.

Two Methods of Bible Study

For Christians, study of the Bible is both a source of faith and an inspiration for daily living. Over the centuries, various methods of Bible Study have developed. Two of these are described below.

- I. *Lectio divina*, or “holy reading,” is a way of praying with Scripture which has been used by Christians since the sixth century. In it, the person: reads a passage of Scripture, reflects on the reading, prays a response that comes from the heart, and spends some time in Jesus' presence. For group study, the following process may be used.

- One member of the group opens the Bible to a selected passage and reads it aloud slowly, pausing between the phrases. All listen and note the words or phrases that strike them. In silence each imagines the scene, watches the actions and hears the words *as an observer*. After a few moments, the reader says aloud the phrase or word that impressed him or her. After another pause, the next person does the same. This continues around the entire group. No comments are made.
- Another member of the group reads the same passage – slowly and prayerfully. All listen again for a word or phrase which “strikes” them. In silence each enters into the scene – this time as *one of the characters*. Starting with the reader, one member after another speaks a word or phrase, leaving short pauses of silence between speakers.
- A third member of the group reads the passage slowly and prayerfully. This time each person places himself or herself in the scene *in relationship to Jesus*, the central figure. Beginning with the reader, each person again speaks his or her significant word or phrase.
- In a reflective attitude, all share their experiences of the prayer: What particularly impressed me? Did anything touch me? If so, how? How might this passage – or this prayer – influence my life? (Above method summarized from, A. Baranowski, *Praying Alone and Together*, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1988, p. 80)

II. *Biblical reflection on events or trends in contemporary society* has been widely used by many Christians in Latin America. The following method is adapted from a project of the Brazilian Conference of Religious.

- Begin by placing yourselves in the presence of God. Take a few moments to centre yourselves in that presence. Ask for the light to understand what God wishes to share with you today.
- Slowly read the Bible passage you have chosen.
- Together examine some biblical commentaries: the footnotes in your Bible, a biblical magazine or one of the homiletic services that offers biblical background to the text. You might also want to look at other translations and note the differences.

- Discuss how you understand the meaning the author intended in this text when it was written. You might want to distinguish between the meaning the writer has given to the text and your understanding of the original event.
- Read the text again slowly. Compare with other biblical texts.
- Does this reading suggest to you any current event or trend in society or in the world today? Discuss the general characteristics of this event or trend. Refer to a newspaper or magazine analysis of the situation.
- Read the text again slowly. Does this text shed any light on the “reading” of the world you have discussed? Does it offer another point of view? Does it introduce new values? Does it suggest another kind of response?
- Return to a time of silent prayer to allow God’s Spirit to speak to you. Is the word you receive from God confirmed by the message of the Bible as you have discussed it and by the understanding of today’s situation as you have shared it? What commitment can you draw as a faith attitude or response to the situation you have been discussing in the light of the Gospel? (Above method summarized from, *CRC Bulletin* 37/4, Winter 1997, p. 12)

SESSION I:

■ Identifying the Sources of Division

■ Goals of this session

To review the central importance of the doctrine of justification at the origins of the Reformation.

To clarify: What teachings gave rise to the mutual condemnations of the 16th century?

What understanding of justification has been affirmed in the *Joint Declaration*?

■ Welcome/Opening Prayer

After welcoming the participants, the facilitator suggests that they introduce themselves and say a little about why they have come and what they hope to learn. A brief opening prayer is said.

■ Process

1. Experience

Discussion might begin in small denominational groups with a focus on:
What does it mean for you to be a Lutheran?
What does it mean for you to be a Roman Catholic?

Then, in the group as a whole, participants will be asked to complete the following sentences:

Roman Catholic participants: "I think that Lutherans are/believe . . ."

Lutheran participants: "I think that Roman Catholics are/believe . . ."

Discuss: What questions do you have about Christian unity and the ecumenical movement? What fears or hopes do you have?

2. Reflection

Reflection on this topic may be **introduced** through the use of a film or a video. A list of resources is provided as an appendix to this session.

Some focus questions for viewing the film or video:

- In what way does this film reinforce or remove stereotypes?
- In what sense is the Reformation connected to Luther's personal spiritual struggle?

As an alternative to the film, a guest speaker or a panel of Lutherans and Roman Catholics might be invited to reflect on the personal, spiritual, political and theological origins of the Reformation.

Reflection on this topic may be **continued** through reading and discussion of the *Joint Declaration*, articles 15-17.

3. Response/Action

What was Luther's answer to the question: "How are sinners found acceptable by a just God?" What was the Catholic answer to this question? How did the answers differ? Why did they differ?

What do we think of the issues raised by this question? by the differing responses to this question?

Do these issues seem important today? What are equivalent issues today?

■ Conclusion

Take a few moments at the end of the meeting to share one thing you have learned during the session. Close with a prayer or hymn of your choice.

**In dialogue,
Lutherans
and Roman
Catholics
have said:**

In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.

All people are called by God to salvation in Christ. Through Christ alone are we justified, when we receive this salvation in faith. Faith is itself God's gift through the Holy Spirit who works through word and sacrament in the community of believers and who, at the same time, leads believers into that renewal of life which God will bring to completion in eternal life.

We also share the conviction that the message of justification directs us in a special way towards the heart of the New Testament witness to God's saving action in Christ: it tells us that as sinners our new life is solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift and we receive in faith, and never can merit in any way.

Joint Declaration, *articles 15, 16, 17*

■ Appendix: Some Resources on the Origins of the Reformation

Since every presentation on the origins of the Reformation will be marked by particular perspectives, it will be important for the facilitator to preview any film or video that is chosen.

The Roman Catholic teaching on indulgences is often misunderstood. For an accurate interpretation, it may be helpful to refer to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, articles 1471-1479. The Lutheran teachings adopted during the Reformation are summarized in "The Augsburg Confession," especially Article VI on Justification and Article XX on Good Works. See, Theodore G. Tappert, ed. *The Book of Concord*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.

■ Videos and Films:

Grace by Michael Himes, in his series on *The Mystery of Faith* (St. Anthony Messenger Press V1108).

Martin Luther 1483-1546 The CD-ROM from Augsburg Fortress (I-3147).

Reformation: Luther and the Protestant Revolt and *Changing Christianity: From Schism to Ecumenism* (800-257-5126; custserv@films.com).

Where Luther Walked narrated by Dr. Roland Bainton (Gateway Films. ISBN 1-56364-012-0).

■ Books and Articles:

Leif Grane. *The Augsburg Confession: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987.

Eric Gritsch. *Martin Luther: Faith in Christ and the Gospel*. Hyde Park: New York City Press, 1996.

Joint RC/Lutheran Commission. "Martin Luther, Witness to Jesus Christ," *One in Christ* 19 (1983) 291-297.

D. C. Steinmetz. *Luther in Context*. Bloomington, Indiana: UP, 1986.

G. Tavard. "Reassessing the Reformation," *One in Christ* 19 (1983), 355- 367.

SESSION II:

■ God's Saving Grace

■ Goals for this session

To explore common understandings of grace as God's power to save the person who has fallen under the power of sin.

To clarify: God's grace forgives sin, frees from sin's enslaving power and imparts new life in Christ.

God's saving grace is essentially gratuitous, freely given.

■ Welcome/Opening Prayer

After welcoming the participants, the facilitator suggests that they introduce or re-introduce themselves. Following a brief opening prayer, the facilitator may ask participants if they have any additional thoughts about last week's discussion or any particular questions about this week's topic.

■ Process

1. Experience

What do you mean when you speak of being "saved by the bell"? Are there aspects of this experience that help to clarify your understanding of God's saving grace?

Where do you experience the need for salvation in today's world?

How have you experienced God's graciousness in your life?

2. Reflection

Reflection on this topic may be **introduced** by means of a Bible Study on one of the following passages.

- Mt 20:1-16: "Why are you envious because I am generous?"
- Lk 15:11-21: the parable of the lost son

Reflection on this topic may be **continued** through reading and discussion of the *Joint Declaration*, articles 19-21.

3. Response/Action

How do you experience God's graciousness in community? in church?

How does the realization of God's graciousness change your self-understanding?

A question to the Lutheran partner: Explain clearly to your Catholic partner what the "word" means to you. How is reverence for the "word" expressed in your life/your church's life?

A question to the Catholic partner: Explain clearly to your Lutheran partner what the sacrament of the eucharist means to you. How is this expressed in your life/your church's life?

■ Conclusion

Take a few moments at the end of the meeting to share one thing you have learned during the session. Close with a hymn or prayer of your choice.

**In dialogue,
Lutherans
and Roman
Catholics
have said:**

We confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation. The freedom they possess in relation to persons and the things of this world is no freedom in relation to salvation, for as sinners they stand under God's judgment and are incapable of turning by themselves to God to seek deliverance, of meriting their justification before God, of attaining salvation by their own abilities. Justification takes place solely by God's grace. Because Catholics and Lutherans confess this together, it is true to say:

When Catholics say that persons "cooperate" in preparing for and accepting justification by consenting to God's justifying action, they see such personal consent as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities.

According to Lutheran teaching, human beings are incapable of cooperating in their salvation, because as sinners they actively oppose God and his saving action. Lutherans do not deny that a person can reject the working of grace. When they emphasize that a person can only receive (mere passive) justification, they mean thereby to exclude any possibility of contributing to one's own justification, but do not deny that believers are fully involved personally in their faith, which is effected by God's Word.

Joint Declaration, articles 19, 20, 21

SESSION III:

■ **The Free Gift of Faith**

■ **Goals of this session**

To explore common understandings of faith as a free gift of God and as human response.

To clarify: In the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God in whom the salvation of the world is realized.

Faith involves the free assent of the believer, complete confidence and trust.

■ **Welcome/Opening Prayer**

After welcoming the participants, the facilitator suggests that they introduce or re-introduce themselves. Following a brief opening prayer, the facilitator may ask participants if they have any additional thoughts about last week's discussion or any particular questions about this week's topic.

■ **Process**

1. Experience

What does "faith" mean for me/us?

- Experiencing something divine in ourselves?
- Believing in the truth of something divine?
- Acknowledging that God is right?
- Entrusting my life to Christ?
- Obeying Christ?
- Your own answer . . .

How do you experience or live your faith in the Church?

What responsibilities and privileges in the Church are given to me by baptism?

2. Reflection

Reflection on this topic may be **introduced** by means of a Bible Study on one of the following passages.

- Mk 4: 35-41: "Why are you afraid?"
- Mt 15: 21-28: the Canaanite woman

Reflection on this topic may be **continued** through reading and discussion of the *Joint Declaration*, articles 25-27.

3. Response/Action

What does my faith have to do with the faith of the church?

What are the consequences for me from the fact that I was baptized into the name of Jesus Christ in the church?

■ Conclusion

Take a few moments at the end of the meeting to reflect on the following questions:

What did you learn that you wanted to know?

What did you learn that was a surprise?

What did you learn that you did not want to know?

Close with a prayer or hymn of your choice.

In dialogue, Lutherans and Roman Catholics have said:

We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life. They place their trust in God's gracious promise by justifying faith, which includes hope in God and love for him. Such a faith is active in love and thus the Christian cannot and should not remain without works. But whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it.

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.

The Catholic understanding also sees faith as fundamental in justification. For without faith, no justification can take place. Persons are justified through baptism as bearers of the word and believers in it. The justification of sinners is forgiveness of sins and being made righteous by justifying grace, which makes us children of God. In justification the righteous receive from Christ faith, hope, and love and are thereby taken into communion with him. [cf. DS 1530] This new personal relation to God is grounded totally on God's graciousness and remains constantly dependent on the salvific and creative working of this gracious God, who remains true to himself, so that one can rely upon him. This justifying grace never becomes a human possession to which one could appeal over against God. While Catholic teaching emphasizes the renewal of life by justifying grace, this renewal in faith, hope, and love is always dependent on God's unfathomable grace and contributes nothing to justification about which one could boast before God. (Rom 3:27)

Joint Declaration, articles 25, 26, 27

SESSION IV:

■ Assurance of Salvation

■ Goals of this session

To explore our common understanding that salvation is assured through the mercy and promises of God.

To clarify: Christian assurance is always based upon God's unfailing faithfulness and not upon the measure of our human response.

God calls all to salvation.

■ Welcome/Opening Prayer

After welcoming the participants, the facilitator suggests that they introduce or re-introduce themselves. Following a brief opening prayer, the facilitator may ask participants if they have any additional thoughts about last week's discussion or any particular questions about this week's topic.

■ Process

1. Experience

When have you felt closest to/furthest from God?

What does "salvation" mean for me/us? Does it mean:

- fulfillment
- heaven/eternal life
- avoiding damnation
- your own answer . . .

2. Reflection

Reflection on this topic may be **introduced** by means of a Bible Study on one of the following passages.

- Mk 10:17-27: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"
- Lk 19:1-10: Zaccheus

Reflection on this topic may be **continued** through reading and discussion of the *Joint Declaration*, articles 34-36.

3. Response

What does it mean to trust in God?

How do we receive the gift of salvation?

How do I/we respond to the gift of salvation?

■ Conclusion

In silence, reflect on God's promise of salvation for us and for the world. Give thanks. You may wish to close with a prayer or hymn.

**In dialogue,
Lutherans
and Roman
Catholics
have said:**

We confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God. In spite of their own weakness and the manifold threats to their faith, on the strength of Christ's death and resurrection they can build on the effective promise of God's grace in Word and Sacrament and so be sure of this grace.

This was emphasized in a particular way by the Reformers: in the midst of temptation, believers should not look to themselves but look solely to Christ and trust only him. In trust in God's promise they are assured of their salvation, but are never secure looking at themselves.

Catholics can share the concern of the Reformers to ground faith in the objective reality of Christ's promise, to look away from one's own experience, and to trust in Christ's forgiving word alone (cf. Mt 16:19; 18:19). With the Second Vatican Council, Catholics state: to have faith is to entrust oneself totally to God, [cf. DV 5] who liberates us from the darkness of sin and death and awakens us to eternal life. [cf. DV 4] In this sense, one cannot believe in God and at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy. No one may doubt God's mercy and Christ's merit. Every person, however, may be concerned about his salvation when he looks upon his own weaknesses and shortcomings. Recognizing his own failures, however, the believer may yet be certain that God intends his salvation.

Joint Declaration, articles 34, 35, 36

SESSION V:

■ **The Good Works of Christians**

■ **Goals of this session**

To explore some implications of our common understanding that the justified person is responsible to live the grace received.

To clarify: Thanks to the inner renewal that comes from justification, Christians can, do, and must perform good works.

■ **Welcome/Opening Prayer**

After welcoming the participants, the facilitator suggests that they introduce or re-introduce themselves. Following a brief opening prayer, the facilitator may ask participants if they have any additional thoughts about last week's discussion or any particular questions about this week's topic.

■ **Process**

1. Experience

What does it mean to be "responsible" for our actions? Do you think that Christians are "too responsible," or "not responsible enough" for their actions? Give some examples.

Where do we see the effects of justification in the daily lives of Christians? How would we recognize these effects?

2. Reflection

Reflection may be **introduced** by means of a Bible Study on one of the following passages.

- Lk 10: 29-37: "Who is my neighbour?"
- Mt 25: 31-45: the last judgement

Reflection on this topic may be **continued** through reading and discussion of the *Joint Declaration*, articles 37-39.

3. Response/Action

At a meeting in Lund, Sweden, in 1952, the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order asked whether the churches "should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately."

On the basis of the agreement expressed in the *Joint Declaration* and our experience in this discussion over the past few weeks, what is it that we can/should do together that we haven't done before?

Are there specific "works of love" that we should be emphasizing in our local areas?

■ Conclusion

Take a few moments at the end of the meeting to share one thing you have learned during the session. Close with a prayer or hymn of your choice.

In dialogue, Lutherans and Roman Catholics have said:

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. Since Christians struggle against sin their entire lives, this consequence of justification is also for them an obligation they must fulfill.

Thus both Jesus and the apostolic Scriptures admonish Christians to bring forth the works of love.

According to Catholic understanding, good works, made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace, so that the righteousness that comes from God is preserved and communion with Christ is deepened. 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. Their intention is to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions, not to contest the character of those works as gifts, or far less to deny that justification always remains an unmerited gift of grace.

The concept of a preservation of grace and a growth in grace and faith is also held by Lutherans. They do emphasize that righteousness as acceptance by God and sharing in the righteousness of Christ is always complete. At the same time, they state that there can be growth in its effects in Christian living. When they view the good works of Christians as the fruits and signs of justification and not as one's own "merits," they nevertheless also understand eternal life in accord with the New Testament as unmerited "reward" in the sense of the fulfillment of God's promise to the believer.

Joint Declaration, articles 37, 38, 39

SESSION VI:

■ Looking Ahead Together

■ Goals of this session

To reflect both individually and as a group on the experience of dialogue and to identify some specific learnings.

To consider further steps that will assist in the building of positive relations between Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

To celebrate the achievement of this *Joint Declaration* as a significant moment in the search for Christian unity.

■ Process

1. Experience

How has your experience of dialogue over the past few weeks changed your views of other Christians?

What do you think is the most important thing you have learned about those with whom you have been in dialogue?

2. Reflection

Reflection on this topic may **focus** on a reading and discussion of the *Joint Declaration*, articles 40-43.

This is a significant agreement between our two churches. What inhibits us at a local level from living out the promise of the *Joint Declaration*?

3. Response/Celebration

This session may conclude with a joint worship service involving bishops and other church leaders to symbolize the two churches' ongoing commitment to continuing the search for Christian unity.

In dialogue, Lutherans and Roman Catholics have said:

The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics. In light of this consensus the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis in the understanding of justification described in paras. 18-39 are acceptable. Therefore the

Lutheran and the Catholic explications of justification are in their difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding basic truths.

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

Nothing is thereby taken away from the seriousness of the condemnations related to the doctrine of justification. Some were not simply pointless. They remain for us "salutary warnings" to which we must attend in our teaching and practice.

Our consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification must come to influence the life and teaching of our churches. Here it must prove itself. In this respect, there are still questions of varying importance which need further clarification. These include, among other topics, the relationship between the Word of God and church doctrine, as well as ecclesiology, authority in the church, ministry, the sacraments, and the relation between justification and social ethics. We are convinced that the consensus we have reached offers a solid basis for this clarification.

Joint Declaration, articles 40, 41, 42, 43

■ Prayer Service

The following service is based on the *Lutheran - Roman Catholic Service of the Word: Pew Edition*, Augsburg, 1986. (Augsburg # 12-1581)

GATHERING SONG "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less" #293 LBW

GREETING

Presider (P.) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Congregation (C.) And also with you.

PROMISE OF THE WORD

P. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

C. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return until they have watered the earth, making it to blossom and bear fruit, to give seed for sowing and bread to eat,

P. so shall the word that comes from my mouth prevail; it shall not return to me fruitless without accomplishing my purpose or succeeding in the task I give it.

PENITENTIAL RITE

P. O faithful God, St. John has testified: "If we say that we have not sinned we make him (God) a liar, and his word is not in us." (1 John 1:10 NRSV)
This holds good for sins against unity.

C. Thus in humble prayer we beg pardon of God and of each other, just as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Catholic participants:

In particular, we beg forgiveness from you, O God of mercies, and from our Lutheran brothers and sisters, for all prejudices, offensive words, reproaches without foundation, reprehensible gestures, or sheer indifference oftentimes, by which we, or our forbears, have offended them...

Lutheran participants:

... and we, in turn, also beg forgiveness from you, O God of mercies, and from our Catholic brothers and sisters, for all prejudices, offensive words, reproaches without foundation, reprehensible gestures, or sheer indifference oftentimes, by which we, or our forbears, have offended them.

C. In your mercy, Lord, grant the purification of the collective memory of our Churches and communities; grant us interior conversion and holiness of life. Through Christ, our risen Lord.

AMEN.

P. Kyrie, eleison.

C. Kyrie, eleison.

P. Christe, eleison.

C. Christe, eleison.

P. Kyrie, eleison.

C. Kyrie, eleison.

P. May the God of peace sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless. The one who calls you is faithful and will do this.

C. To God be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PRAYER

P. Lord, hear the prayers of your people and bring the hearts of believers together in your praise and in common sorrow for their sins. Heal all divisions among Christians that we may rejoice in the perfect unity of your Church and move together as one to eternal life in your kingdom. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

C. Amen.

FIRST READING: Ephesians 2:4-10, 13-22

MEDITATION HYMN: "Something Which is Known" # 393 CBW III

GOSPEL: Luke 24:35-48

P. The holy Gospel according to Saint Luke, the 24th chapter.

C. Glory to you, O Lord.

After the reading, the Presider may say:

P. The Gospel of the Lord.

C. Praise to you, O Christ.

HOMILY OR SERMON: followed by a moment of silence.

APOSTLES' CREED

PRAYERS

P. Let us pray.

Creator God, look upon us your people,
in our poverty and need.

The Lord Jesus taught us,

"where two or three meet in my name
I shall be there with them."

Trusting in God's presence and intercession
for the whole Church and the whole world,
we dare to pray:

C. Lord, hear our prayer.

P. For the whole Church of God around the world:
for its faithfulness in life and mission,
we pray to the Lord...

P. For the mutual forgiveness of offences
and the removal of all prejudices
among Christians and the churches,
among Lutherans and Catholics,
we pray to the Lord...

P. For our local congregations or parishes,
that they may grow in the desire for reconciliation,
healing and full visible communion,
we pray to the Lord...

P. For the grace of abandoning ourselves completely
to the truth of the Gospel,
we pray to the Lord...

P. For open hearts and minds to hear the Holy Spirit
speak to us through the Scripture,
and to hear and understand one another in love,
we pray to the Lord...

P. For grace to trust in your mercy and grace
in spite of questions raised and unanswered,
we pray to the Lord...

P. Into your hands,
we commend all for whom we pray,
trusting in your mercy through your Son,
Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C. Amen.

SIGN OF PEACE

P. Christ is our peace, who has made us one and has broken down the
dividing wall of hostility. Therefore, let us offer a sign of peace.

The sign and greeting of peace is given with the words: "The peace of the
Lord be with you."

OFFERING

P. You are forever kind and merciful, O Father, and you have given us
many gifts. We bring these gifts to come to the aid of those who are in
need, to help spread the good news of Jesus, to continue the work of
the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church ... in particular, we remem-
ber the work of those who strive to promote unity and reconciliation
among the churches.

An offering may be taken.

P. Loving God, we give from our hearts, in the name of Jesus, your Word, who calls us to unity by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and who lives and reigns with you, now and forever.

C. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

P. Filled with confidence in God's grace we are bold to pray:

C. Our Father, . . .

PRAISE

P. All your works praise you, O Lord.

C. And your faithful servants bless you.

P. Blessed are you, O Lord our God, sovereign of the universe. You made the whole earth for your glory; all creation praises you. We lift our voices to join the songs of heaven and earth, of things seen and unseen.

You stretched out the heavens like a curtain; you divided the day from the night; you appointed times and seasons for work and rest, for tearing down and building up. You blessed your people through all generations and guided them in life and death: Abraham and Sarah; Moses and Miriam; Isaiah and all the prophets; Mary, mother of our Lord; Peter, James, John, and all the apostles; and all the saints and witnesses in your Church of ages past, in whom your Spirit spoke and moved.

May the Spirit of truth guide us in all truth and glorify Christ among us. Grant us faith to know your gracious purpose in all things, give us joy in them, and lead us to the building up of your kingdom; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C. Amen.

BLESSING

P. May the God of all consolation bless you in every way and grant you peace all the days of your life.

C. Amen.

P. May God free you from all anxiety and strengthen your hearts in love.

C. Amen.

P. May God enrich you with gifts of faith, hope, and love, so that what you do in this life will bring you to the happiness of everlasting life.

C. Amen.

P. May almighty God bless you, + the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

C. Amen.

DISMISSAL

P. Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

C. Thanks be to God.

HYMN "Let All Things Now Living" #534 CBW III

■ JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

1997 (Final Proposal)

Preamble

1. The doctrine of justification was of central importance for the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century. It was held to be the “first and chief article”¹ and at the same time the “ruler and judge over all other Christian doctrines.”² The doctrine of justification was particularly asserted and defended in its Reformation shape and special valuation over against the Roman Catholic Church and theology of that time, which in turn asserted and defended a doctrine of justification of a different character. From the Reformation perspective, justification was the crux of all the disputes. Doctrinal condemnations were put forward both in the Lutheran Confessions³ and by the Roman Catholic Church’s Council of Trent. These condemnations are still valid today and thus have a church-dividing effect.
2. For the Lutheran tradition, the doctrine of justification has retained its special status. Consequently it has also from the beginning occupied an important place in the official Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue.

¹ The Smalcald Articles, II,1; *Book of Concord*, 292.

² “Rector et iudex super omnia genera doctrinarum” Weimar Edition of Luther’s Works (WA), 39,I,205.

³ It should be noted that some Lutheran churches include only the Augsburg Confession and Luther’s Small Catechism among their binding confessions. These texts contain no condemnations about justification in relation to the Roman Catholic Church.

3. Special attention should be drawn to the following reports: “The Gospel and the Church” (1972)⁴ and “Church and Justification” (1994)⁵ by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission, “Justification by Faith” (1983)⁶ of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue in the USA and “The Condemnations of the Reformation Era – Do They Still Divide?” (1986)⁷ by the Ecumenical Working Group of Protestant and Catholic theologians in Germany. Some of these dialogue reports have been officially received by the churches. An important example of such reception is the binding response of the United Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Germany to the “Condemnations” study, made in 1994 at the highest possible level of ecclesiastical recognition together with the other churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany.⁸
4. In their discussion of the doctrine of justification, all the dialogue reports as well as the responses show a high degree of agreement in their approaches and conclusions. The time has therefore come to take stock and to summarize the results of the dialogues on justification so that our churches may be informed about the overall results of this dialogue with the necessary accuracy and brevity, and thereby be enabled to make binding decisions.
5. The present Joint Declaration has this intention: namely, to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran churches and

⁴ Report of the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, published in *Growth in Agreement* (New York; Geneva, 1984), pp. 168-189.

⁵ Published by the Lutheran World Federation (Geneva, 1994).

⁶ Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII (Minneapolis, 1985).

⁷ Minneapolis, 1990.

⁸ “Gemeinsame Stellungnahme der Arnoldshainer Konferenz, der Vereinigten Kirche und des Deutschen Nationalkomitees des Lutherischen Weltbundes zum Dokument ‘Lehrverurteilungen-kirchentrennend?’,” *Ökumenische Rundschau* 44 (1995): 99-102; including the position papers which underlie this resolution, cf. *Lehrverurteilungen im Gespräch*. Die ersten offiziellen Stellungnahmen aus den evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

the Roman Catholic Church⁹ are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ. It does not cover all that either church teaches about justification; it does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.

6. Our Declaration is not a new, independent presentation alongside the dialogue reports and documents to date, let alone a replacement of them. Rather, as the appendix of sources shows, it makes repeated reference to them and their arguments.
7. Like the dialogues themselves, this Joint Declaration rests on the conviction that in overcoming the earlier controversial questions and doctrinal condemnations, the churches neither take the condemnations lightly nor do they disavow their own past. On the contrary, this Declaration is shaped by the conviction that in their respective histories our churches have come to new insights. Developments have taken place which not only make possible, but also require the churches to examine the divisive questions and condemnations and see them in a new light.

1. Biblical Message of Justification

8. Our common way of listening to the word of God in Scripture has led to such new insights. Together we hear the gospel that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). This good news is set forth in Holy Scripture in various ways. In the Old Testament we listen to God's word about human sinfulness (Ps 51:1-5; Dan 9:5f; Eccl/Qo 8:9f; Ezra 9:6f) and human disobedience (Gen 3:1-19; Neh 9:16f,26) as well as of God's "righteousness" (Isa 46:13; 51:5-8; 56:1 [cf. 53:11]; Jer 9:24) and "judgment" (Eccl/Qo 12:14; Ps 9:5f; 76:7-9).

⁹ The word "church" is used in this Declaration to respect the self-understandings of the participating churches, without intending to resolve all the ecclesiological issues related to this term.

9. In the New Testament diverse treatments of "righteousness" and "justification" are found in the writings of Matthew (5:10; 6:33; 21:32), John (16:8-11), Hebrews (5:1-3; 10:37-38), and James (2:14-26).¹⁰ In Paul's letters also, the gift of salvation is described in various ways, among others: "for freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1-13; cf. Rom 6:7), "reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:18-21; cf. Rom 5:11), "peace with God" (Rom 5:1), "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17), "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11,23), or "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (cf. 1 Cor 1:2; 1:31; 2 Cor 1:1). Chief among these is the "justification" of sinful human beings by God's grace through faith (Rom 3:23-25), which came into particular prominence in the Reformation period.
10. Paul sets forth the gospel as the power of God for salvation of the person who has fallen under the power of sin, as the message that proclaims that "the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith" (Rom 1:16-17) and that grants "justification" (Rom 3:21-31). He proclaims Christ as "our righteousness" (1 Cor 1:30), applying to the risen Lord what Jeremiah proclaimed about God himself (23:6). In Christ's death and resurrection all dimensions of his saving work have their roots for he is "our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25). All human beings are in need of God's righteousness, "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 2:23; cf. Rom 1:18-3:22; 11:32; Gal 3:22). In Galatians (3:6) and Romans (4:3-9), Paul understands Abraham's faith (Gen 15:6) as faith in the God who justifies the sinner and calls upon the testimony of the Old Testament to undergird his gospel that this righteousness will be reckoned to all who, like Abraham, trust in God's promise. "For the righteous will live by faith" (Hab 2:4; cf. Gal 3:11; Rom 1:17). In Paul's letters, God's righteousness is also power for those who have faith

¹⁰ Cf. "Malta Report," paras. 26-30; *Justification by Faith*, paras. 122-147. At the request of the US dialogue on justification, the non-Pauline New Testament texts were addressed in *Righteousness in the New Testament*, by John Reumann, with responses by Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Jerome D. Quinn (Philadelphia; New York: 1982), pp. 124-180. The results of this study were summarized in the dialogue report *Justification by Faith* in paras. 139-142.

(Rom 1:17; 2 Cor 5:21). In Christ he makes it their righteousness (2 Cor 5:21). Justification becomes ours through Christ Jesus “whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith” (Rom 3:25; see 3:21-28). “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works” (Eph 2:8-9).

11. Justification is the forgiveness of sins (cf. Rom 3:23-25; Acts 13:39; Lk 18:14), liberation from the dominating power of sin and death (Rom 5:12-21) and from the curse of the law (Gal 3:10-14). It is acceptance into communion with God: already now, but then fully in God’s coming kingdom (Rom 5:1-2). It unites with Christ and with his death and resurrection (Rom 6:5). It occurs in the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism and incorporation into the one body (Rom 8:1-2, 9-11; 1 Cor 12:12-13). All this is from God alone, for Christ’s sake, by grace, through faith in “the gospel of God’s Son” (Rom 1:1-3).
12. The justified live by faith that comes from the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17) and is active through love (Gal 5:6), the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). But since the justified are assailed from within and without by powers and desires (Rom 8:35-39; Gal 5:16-21) and fall into sin (1 Jn 1:8,10), they must constantly hear God’s promises anew, confess their sins (1 Jn 1:9), participate in Christ’s body and blood, and be exhorted to live righteously in accord with the will of God. That is why the Apostle says to the justified: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13). But the good news remains: “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1), and in whom Christ lives (Gal 2:20). Christ’s “act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all” (Rom 5:18).

2. The Doctrine of Justification as Ecumenical Problem

13. Opposing interpretations and applications of the biblical message of justification were in the sixteenth century a principal cause of the division of the Western church and led as well to doctrinal condemnations. A common understanding of justification is therefore fundamental and indispensable to overcoming that division. By appropriating insights of recent biblical studies and drawing on modern investigations of the his-

tory of theology and dogma, the post-Vatican II ecumenical dialogue has led to a notable convergence concerning justification, with the result that this Joint Declaration is able to formulate a consensus on basic truths concerning the doctrine of justification. In light of this consensus, the corresponding doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to today’s partner.

3. The Common Understanding of Justification

14. The Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church have together listened to the good news proclaimed in Holy Scripture. This common listening, together with the theological conversations of recent years, has led to a shared understanding of justification. This encompasses a consensus in the basic truths; the differing explications in particular statements are compatible with it.
15. In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.¹¹
16. All people are called by God to salvation in Christ. Through Christ alone are we justified, when we receive this salvation in faith. Faith is itself God’s gift through the Holy Spirit who works through word and sacrament in the community of believers and who, at the same time, leads believers into that renewal of life which God will bring to completion in eternal life.
17. We also share the conviction that the message of justification directs us in a special way towards the heart of the New Testament witness to God’s saving action in Christ: it tells us that as sinners our new life is

¹¹ “All Under One Christ,” para. 14, in *Growth in Agreement*. 241-247.

solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift and we receive in faith, and never can merit in any way.

18. Therefore the doctrine of justification, which takes up this message and explicates it, is more than just one part of Christian doctrine. It stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith, which are to be seen as internally related to each other. It is an indispensable criterion which constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ. When Lutherans emphasize the unique significance of this criterion, they do not deny the interrelation and significance of all truths of faith. When Catholics see themselves as bound by several criteria, they do not deny the special function of the message of justification. Lutherans and Catholics share the goal of confessing Christ, who is to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (1 Tim 2:5-6) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts [cf. Sources, section 3]

4. Explicating the Common Understanding of Justification

4.1 *Human Powerlessness and Sin in Relation to Justification*

19. We confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation. The freedom they possess in relation to persons and the things of this world is no freedom in relation to salvation, for as sinners they stand under God's judgment and are incapable of turning by themselves to God to seek deliverance, of meriting their justification before God, or of attaining salvation by their own abilities. Justification takes place solely by God's grace. Because Catholics and Lutherans confess this together, it is true to say:
20. When Catholics say that persons "cooperate" in preparing for and accepting justification by consenting to God's justifying action, they see such personal consent as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities.
21. According to Lutheran teaching, human beings are incapable of cooperating in their salvation, because as sinners they actively oppose God and his saving action. Lutherans do not deny that a person can reject the working of grace. When they emphasize that a person can only receive (mere passive) justification, they mean thereby to exclude any

possibility of contributing to one's own justification, but do not deny that believers are fully involved personally in their faith, which is effected by God's Word.

4.2 *Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous*

22. We confess together that God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from sin's enslaving power and imparts the gift of new life in Christ. When persons come by faith to share in Christ, God no longer imputes to them their sin and through the Holy Spirit effects in them an active love. These two aspects of God's gracious action are not to be separated, for persons are by faith united with Christ, who in his person is our righteousness (1 Cor 1:30): both the forgiveness of sin and the saving presence of God himself. Because Catholics and Lutherans confess this together, it is true to say that:
23. When Lutherans emphasize that the righteousness of Christ is our righteousness, their intention is above all to insist that the sinner is granted righteousness before God in Christ through the declaration of forgiveness and that only in union with Christ is one's life renewed. When they stress that God's grace is forgiving love ("the favour of God"¹²), 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.
24. When Catholics emphasize the renewal of the interior person through the reception of grace imparted as a gift to the believer,¹³ 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. [Cf. Sources, section 4.2]

4.3 *Justification by Faith and through Grace*

25. We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they

¹² Cf. WA 8:106; American Edition 32:227.

¹³ Cf. DS 1528.

are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life. They place their trust in God's gracious promise by justifying faith, which includes hope in God and love for him. Such a faith is active in love and thus the Christian cannot and should not remain without works. But whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it.

26. 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.
27. The Catholic understanding also sees faith as fundamental in justification. For without faith, no justification can take place. Persons are justified through baptism as hearers of the word and believers in it. The justification of sinners is forgiveness of sins and being made righteous by justifying grace, which makes us children of God. In justification the righteous receive from Christ faith, hope, and love and are thereby taken into communion with him.¹⁴ This new personal relation to God is grounded totally on God's graciousness and remains constantly dependent on the salvific and creative working of this gracious God, who remains true to himself, so that one can rely upon him. Thus justifying grace never becomes a human possession to which one could appeal over against God. While Catholic teaching emphasizes the renewal of life by justifying grace, this renewal in faith, hope, and love is always dependent on God's unfathomable grace and contributes nothing to justification about which one could boast before God (Rom 3:27). [See Sources, section 4.3]

¹⁴ Cf. DS 1530.

4.4 *The Justified as Sinner*

28. We confess together that in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies, and truly renews the person. But the justified must all through life constantly look to God's unconditional justifying grace. They also are continuously exposed to the power of sin still pressing its attacks (cf. Rom 6:12-14) and are not exempt from a lifelong struggle against the contradiction to God within the selfish desires of the old Adam (cf. Gal 5:16; Rom 7:7-10). The justified also must ask God daily for forgiveness as in the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:12; 1 Jn 1:9), are ever again called to conversion and penance, and are ever again granted forgiveness.
29. Lutherans understand this condition of the Christian as a being "at the same time righteous and sinner." Believers are totally righteous, in that God forgives their sins through Word and Sacrament and grants the righteousness of Christ which they appropriate in faith. In Christ, they are made just before God. Looking at themselves through the law, however, they recognize that they remain also totally sinners. Sin still lives in them (1 Jn 1:8; Rom 7:17,20), for they repeatedly turn to false gods and do not love God with that undivided love which God requires as their Creator (Deut 6:5; Mt 22:36-40 pr.). This contradiction to God is as such truly sin. Nevertheless, the enslaving power of sin is broken on the basis of the merit of Christ. It no longer is a sin that "rules" the Christian for it is itself "ruled" by Christ with whom the justified are bound in faith. In this life, then, Christians can in part lead a just life. Despite sin, the Christian is no longer separated from God, because in the daily return to baptism, the person who has been born anew by baptism and the Holy Spirit has this sin forgiven. Thus this sin no longer brings damnation and eternal death.¹⁵ Thus, when Lutherans say that justified persons are also sinners and that their opposition to God is truly sin, they do not deny that, despite this sin, they are not separated from God and that this sin is a "ruled" sin. In these affirmations, they are in agreement with Roman Catholics, despite the difference in understanding sin in the justified.

¹⁵ Cf. Apology II:38-45; *Book of Concord*, 105f.

30. Catholics hold that the grace of Jesus Christ imparted in baptism takes away all that is sin “in the proper sense” and that is “worthy of damnation” (Rom 8:1).¹⁶ There does, however, remain in the person an inclination (concupiscence) which comes from sin and presses toward sin. Since, according to Catholic conviction, human sin always involves a personal element and since this element is lacking in this inclination, Catholics do not see this inclination as sin in an authentic sense. They do not thereby deny that this inclination does not correspond to God’s original design for humanity and that it is objectively in contradiction to God and remains one’s enemy in lifelong struggle. Grateful for deliverance by Christ, they underscore that this inclination in contradiction to God does not merit the punishment of eternal death¹⁷ and does not separate the justified person from God. But when individuals voluntarily separate themselves from God, it is not enough to return to observing the commandments, for they must receive pardon and peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation through the word of forgiveness imparted to them in virtue of God’s reconciling work in Christ. [See Sources, section 4.4]

4.5 *Law and Gospel*

31. We confess together that persons are justified by faith in the gospel “apart from works prescribed by the law” (Rom 3:28). Christ has fulfilled the law and by his death and resurrection has overcome it as a way to salvation. We also confess that God’s commandments retain their validity for the justified and that Christ has by his teaching and example expressed God’s will which is a standard for the conduct of the justified also.
32. Lutherans state that the distinction and right ordering of law and gospel is essential for the understanding of justification. In its theological use, the law is demand and accusation. Throughout their lives, all persons, Christians also, in that they are sinners, stand under this accusation which uncovers their sin so that, in faith in the gospel, they will turn unreservedly to the mercy of God in Christ, which alone justifies them.

¹⁶ Cf. DS 1515.

¹⁷ Cf. DS 1515.

33. Because the law as a way to salvation has been fulfilled and overcome through the gospel, Catholics can say that Christ is not a lawgiver in the manner of Moses. When Catholics emphasize that the righteous are bound to observe God’s commandments, they do not thereby deny that through Jesus Christ God has mercifully promised to his children the grace of eternal life.¹⁸ [Sources, section 4.5]

4.6 *Assurance of Salvation*

34. We confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God. In spite of their own weakness and the manifold threats to their faith, on the strength of Christ’s death and resurrection they can build on the effective promise of God’s grace in Word and Sacrament and so be sure of this grace.
35. This was emphasized in a particular way by the Reformers: in the midst of temptation, believers should not look to themselves but look solely to Christ and trust only him. In trust in God’s promise they are assured of their salvation, but are never secure looking at themselves.
36. Catholics can share the concern of the Reformers to ground faith in the objective reality of Christ’s promise, to look away from one’s own experience, and to trust in Christ’s forgiving word alone (cf. Mt 16:19; 18:18). With the Second Vatican Council, Catholics state: to have faith is to entrust oneself totally to God,¹⁹ who liberates us from the darkness of sin and death and awakens us to eternal life.²⁰ In this sense, one cannot believe in God and at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy. No one may doubt God’s mercy and Christ’s merit. Every person, however, may be concerned about his salvation when he looks upon his own weaknesses and shortcomings. Recognizing his own failures, however, the believer may yet be certain that God intends his salvation. [See Sources, section 4.6]

¹⁸ Cf. DS 1545.

¹⁹ Cf. DV 5.

²⁰ Cf. DV 4.

4.7 *The Good Works of the Justified*

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. Since Christians struggle against sin their entire lives, this consequence of justification is also for them an obligation they must fulfill. Thus both Jesus and the apostolic Scriptures admonish Christians to bring forth the works of love.
38. According to Catholic understanding, good works, made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace, so that the righteousness that comes from God is preserved and communion with Christ is deepened. 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. Their intention is to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions, not to contest the character of those works as gifts, or far less to deny that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace.
39. The concept of a preservation of grace and a growth in grace and faith is also held by Lutherans. They do emphasize that righteousness as acceptance by God and sharing in the righteousness of Christ is always complete. At the same time, they state that there can be growth in its effects in Christian living. When they view the good works of Christians as the fruits and signs of justification and not as one’s own “merits,” they nevertheless also understand eternal life in accord with the New Testament as unmerited “reward” in the sense of the fulfillment of God’s promise to the believer. [See Sources, section 4.7]

5. **The Significance and Scope of the Consensus Reached**

40. The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics. In light of this consensus the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis in the understanding of justification described in paras. 18 to 39 are acceptable. Therefore the Lutheran and the Catholic expli-

cations of justification are in their difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding basic truths.

41. Thus the doctrinal condemnations of the 16th century, in so far as they relate to the doctrine of justification, appear in a new light: the teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration.
42. Nothing is thereby taken away from the seriousness of the condemnations related to the doctrine of justification. Some were not simply pointless. They remain for us “salutary warnings” to which we must attend in our teaching and practice.²¹
43. Our consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification must come to influence the life and teachings of our churches. Here it must prove itself. In this respect, there are still questions of varying importance which need further clarification. These include, among other topics, the relationship between the Word of God and church doctrine, as well as ecclesiology, authority in the church, ministry, the sacraments, and the relation between justification and social ethics. We are convinced that the consensus we have reached offers a solid basis for this clarification. The Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church will continue to strive together to deepen this common understanding of justification and to make it bear fruit in the life and teaching of the churches.
44. We give thanks to the Lord for this decisive step forward on the way to overcoming the division of the church. We ask the Holy Spirit to lead us further toward that visible unity which is Christ’s will.

²¹ *Condemnations of the Reformation Era*, 27.

Appendix

Resources to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

In parts 3 and 4 of the “Joint Declaration” formulations from different Lutheran-Catholic dialogues are referred to. They are the following documents:

“All Under One Christ,” Statement on the Augsburg Confession by the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission, 1980, in: *Growth in Agreement*, edited by Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer, New York/Ramsey, Geneva, 1984, 241-247.

Comments of the Joint Committee of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany and the LWF German National Committee regarding the document “The Condemnations of the Reformation Era. Do They Still Divide?” in *Lehrverurteilungen im Gespräch*. Göttingen, 1993 (hereafter: VELKD).

Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum ...* 32nd to 36th edition (hereafter: DS).

Denzinger-Hünemann, *Enchiridion Symbolorum ...* since the 37th edition (hereafter: DH).

Evaluation of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity of the Study *Lehrverurteilungen - kirchentrennend?* Vatican, 1992, unpublished document (hereafter: PCPCU).

Justification by Faith, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII, Minneapolis, 1985 (hereafter: USA).

The Condemnations of the Reformation Era. Do they Still Divide? Edited by Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, Minneapolis, 1990 (hereafter: LV:E).

To 3: The Common Understanding of Justification (paras. 14 and 18) (LV:E 68f; VELKD 95)

- “... a faith centered and forensically conceived picture of justification is of major importance for Paul and, in a sense, for the Bible as a whole, although it is by no means the only biblical or Pauline way of representing God’s saving work” (USA, no. 146).

- “Catholics as well as Lutherans can acknowledge the need to test the practices, structures, and theologies of the church by the extent to which they help or hinder ‘the proclamation of God’s free and merciful promises in Christ Jesus which can be rightly received only through faith’ (para. 28)” (USA, no. 153).

Regarding the “fundamental affirmation” (USA, no. 157; cf. 4) it is said:

- “This affirmation, like the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone, serves as a criterion for judging all church practices, structures, and traditions precisely because its counterpart is ‘Christ alone’ (*solus Christus*). He alone is to be ultimately trusted as the one mediator through whom God in the Holy Spirit pours out his saving gifts. All of us in this dialogue affirm that all Christian teachings, practices, and offices should so function as to foster ‘the obedience of faith’ (Rom. 1:5) in God’s saving action in Christ Jesus alone through the Holy Spirit, for the salvation of the faithful and the praise and honor of the heavenly Father” (USA, no. 160).

- “For that reason, the doctrine of justification – and, above all, its biblical foundation – will always retain a special function in the church. That function is continually to remind Christians that we sinners live solely from the forgiving love of God, which we merely allow to be bestowed on us, but which we in no way – in however modified a form – ‘earn’ or are able to tie down to any preconditions or postconditions. The doctrine of justification therefore becomes the touchstone for testing at all times whether a particular interpretation of our relationship to God can claim the name of ‘Christian.’ At the same time, it becomes the touchstone for the church, for testing at all times whether its proclamation and its praxis correspond to what has been given to it by its Lord” (LV:E 69).

- “An agreement on the fact that the doctrine of justification is significant not only as one doctrinal component within the whole of our church’s teaching, but also as the touchstone for testing the whole doctrine and practice of our churches, is – from a Lutheran point of view – fundamental progress in the ecumenical dialogue between our churches. It cannot be welcomed enough” (VELKD 95; cf. 157).

- “For Lutherans and Catholics, the doctrine of justification has a different status in the hierarchy of truth; but both sides agree that the doctrine of justification has its specific function in the fact that it is ‘the touchstone for testing at all times whether a particular interpretation of our relationship to God can claim the name of “Christian”. At the same time it becomes the touchstone for the church, for testing at all times whether its proclamation and its praxis correspond to what has been given to it by its Lord’ (LV:E 69). The criteriological significance of the doctrine of justification for sacramentology, ecclesiology and ethical teachings still deserves to be studied further” (PCPCU 96).

To 4.1: Sin and Human Powerlessness in Relation to Justification (paras. 19-21) (LV:E 42ff; 46; VELKD 77-81; 83f)

- "Those in whom sin reigns can do nothing to merit justification, which is the free gift of God's grace. Even the beginnings of justification, for example, repentance, prayer for grace, and desire for forgiveness, must be God's work in us" (USA, no. 156.3).

- "Both are concerned to make it clear that ... human beings cannot ... cast a sideways glance at their own endeavors ... But a response is not a 'work.' The response of faith is itself brought about through the uncoercible word of promise which comes to human beings from outside themselves. There can be 'cooperation' only in the sense that in faith the heart is involved, when the Word touches it and creates faith" (LV:E 46f).

- "Where, however, Lutheran teaching construes the relation of God to his human creatures in justification with such emphasis on the divine 'monergism' or the sole efficacy of Christ in such a way, that the person's willing acceptance of God's grace – which is itself a gift of God – has no essential role in justification, then the Tridentine canons 4, 5, 6 and 9 still constitute a notable doctrinal difference on justification" (PCPCU 22).

- "The strict emphasis on the passivity of human beings concerning their justification never meant, on the Lutheran side, to contest the full personal participation in believing; rather it meant to exclude any cooperation in the event of justification itself. Justification is the work of Christ alone, the work of grace alone" (VELKD 84,3-8).

To 4.2: Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous (paras. 22-24) (USA, nos. 98-101; LV:E 47ff; VELKD 84ff; cf. also the quotations to 4.4)

- "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" (USA, no. 156,5).

- "Protestant theology does not overlook what Catholic doctrine stresses: the creative and renewing character of God's love; nor does it maintain ... God's impotence toward a sin which is 'merely' forgiven in justification but which is not truly abolished in its power to divide the sinner from God" (LV:E 49).

- "The Lutheran doctrine has never understood the 'crediting of Christ's justification' as without effect on the life of the faithful, because Christ's word achieves what it promises. Accordingly the Lutheran doctrine understands grace as God's favor, but nevertheless as effective power ... 'for where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation'" (VELKD 86,15-23).

- "Catholic doctrine does not overlook what Protestant theology stresses: the personal character of grace, and its link with the Word; nor does it maintain ... grace as an objective 'possession' (even if a conferred possession) on the part of the human being – something over which he can dispose" (LV:E 49).

To 4.3: Justification by Faith and through Grace (paras. 25-27) (USA, nos. 105ff; LV:E 49-53; VELKD 87-90)

- "If we translate from one language to another, then Protestant talk about justification through faith corresponds to Catholic talk about justification through grace; and on the other hand, Protestant doctrine understands substantially under the one word 'faith' what Catholic doctrine (following 1 Cor. 13:13) sums up in the triad of 'faith, hope, and love'" (LV:E 52).

- "We emphasize that faith in the sense of the first commandment always means love to God and hope in him and is expressed in the love to the neighbour" (VELKD 89,8-11).

- "Catholics ... teach as do Lutherans, that nothing prior to the free gift of faith merits justification and that all of God's saving gifts come through Christ alone" (USA, no. 105).

- "The Reformers ... understood faith as the forgiveness and fellowship with Christ effected by the word of promise itself. This is the ground for the new being, through which the flesh is dead to sin and the new man or woman in Christ has life (*sola fide per Christum*). But even if this faith necessarily makes the human being new, the Christian builds his confidence, not on his own new life, but solely on God's gracious promise. Acceptance in Christ is sufficient, if 'faith' is understood as 'trust in the promise' (*fides promissionis*)" (LV:E 50).

- Cf. The Council of Trent, Session 6, Chap. 7: "Consequently, in the process of justification, together with the forgiveness of sins a person receives, through Jesus Christ into whom he is grafted, all these infused at the same time: faith, hope and charity" (Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, vol. 2, London/Washington DC, 1990, 673).

- "According to Protestant interpretation, the faith that clings unconditionally to God's promise in Word and Sacrament is sufficient for righteousness before God, so that the renewal of the human being, without which there can be no faith, does not in itself make any contribution to justification" (LV:E 52).

- "As Lutherans we maintain the distinction between justification and sanctification, of faith and works, which however implies no separation" (VELKD 89,6-8).

- "Catholic doctrine knows itself to be at one with the Protestant concern in emphasizing that the renewal of the human being does not 'contribute' to justification, and is certainly not a contribution to which he could make any appeal before God. Nevertheless it feels compelled to stress the renewal of the human being through justifying grace, for the sake of acknowledging God's newly creating power; although this renewal in faith, hope, and love is certainly nothing but a response to God's unfathomable grace" (LV:E 52f).

- "Insofar as the Catholic doctrine stresses that 'the personal character of grace, and its link with the Word', this renewal ... is certainly nothing but a response effected by God's word itself and that 'the renewal of the human being does not contribute to justification, and is certainly not a contribution to which a person could make any appeal before God' our objection no longer applies" (VELKD 89,12-21).

To 4.4: The Justified as Sinner (paras. 28-30) (USA, nos. 102ff; LV:E 44ff; VELKD 81ff)

- "For however just and holy, they fall from time to time into the sins that are those of daily existence. What is more, the Spirit's action does not exempt believers from the lifelong struggle against sinful tendencies. Concupiscence and other effects of original and personal sin, according to Catholic doctrine, remain in the justified, who therefore must pray daily to God for forgiveness" (USA, no. 102).

- "The doctrines laid down at Trent and by the Reformers are at one in maintaining that original sin, and also the concupiscence that remains, are in contradiction to God ... object of the lifelong struggle against sin ... After baptism, concupiscence in the person justified no longer cuts that person off from God; in Tridentine language, it is 'no longer sin in the real sense'; in Lutheran phraseology, it is *peccatum regnatum* 'controlled sin'" (LV:E 46).

- "The question is how to speak of sin with regard to the justified without limiting the reality of salvation. While Lutherans express this tension with the term 'controlled sin' (*peccatum regnatum*) which expresses the teaching of the Christian as 'being justified and sinner at the same time' (*simul iustus et peccator*), Roman Catholics think the reality of salvation can only be maintained by denying the sinful character of concupiscence. With regard to this question a considerable rapprochement is reached if LV:E calls the concupiscence that remains in the justified a 'contradiction to God' and thus qualifies it as sin" (VELKD 82,29-39).

To 4.5: Law and Gospel (paras. 31-33)

- According to Pauline teaching it refers to the Jewish law as means of salvation. This was fulfilled and overcome in Christ. This statement and the consequences from it have thus to be understood.

- With reference to Canons 19f of the Council of Trent the VELKD (89,28-36) says as follows: "The ten commandments of course apply to Christians as stated in many places of the confessions. If Canon 20 stresses that a 'person ... is bound to keep the commandments of God,' this does not apply to us; if however Canon 20 affirms that faith has salvific power only on condition of keeping the commandments this applies to us. Concerning the reference of the Canon regarding the commandments of the church, there is no difference between us if these commandments are only expressions of the commandments of God; otherwise it would apply to us."

- The last paragraph is related factually to 4.3, but emphasizes the 'convicting function' of the law which is important to Lutheran thinking.

To 4.6: Assurance of Salvation (paras. 34-36) (LV:E 53-56; VELKD 90ff)

- "The question is: How can, and how may, human beings live before God in spite of their weakness, and with that weakness?" (LV:E 53).

- "The foundation and the point of departure (of the Reformers) ... are: the reliability and sufficiency of God's promise, and the power of Christ's death and resurrection; human weakness, and the threat to faith and salvation which that involves" (LV:E 56).

- The Council of Trent also emphasizes that "it is necessary to believe that sins are not forgiven, nor have they ever been forgiven, save freely by the divine mercy on account of Christ;" and that we must not doubt "the mercy of God, the merit of Christ and the power and efficacy of the sacraments; so it is possible for anyone, while he regards himself and his own weakness and lack of dispositions, to be anxious and fearful about his own state of grace" (Council of Trent, Session 6, chapter 9, 674).

- "Luther and his followers go a step farther: They urge that the uncertainty should not merely be endured. We should avert our eyes from it and take seriously, practically, and personally the objective efficacy of the absolution pronounced in the sacrament of penance, which comes 'from outside.' ... Since Jesus said, 'Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' (Matt. 16:19), the believer ... would declare Christ to be a liar ... if he did

not rely with a rock-like assurance on the forgiveness of God uttered in the absolution ... that this reliance can itself be subjectively uncertain – that the assurance of forgiveness is not a security of forgiveness (*securitas*); but this must not be turned into yet another problem, so to speak: the believer should turn his eyes away from it, and should look only to Christ's word of forgiveness" (LV:E 54f).

- "Today Catholics can appreciate the Reformer's efforts to ground faith in the objective reality of Christ's promise, 'whatsoever you loose on earth' and to focus believers on the specific word of absolution from sins. ... Luther's original concern to teach people to look away from their experience, and to rely on Christ alone and his word of forgiveness [is not to be condemned]" (PCPCU 24).

- A mutual condemnation regarding the understanding of the assurance of salvation "can even less provide grounds for mutual objection today – particularly if we start from the foundation of a biblically renewed concept of faith. For a person can certainly lose or renounce faith, and self-commitment to God and his word of promise. But if he believes in this sense, he cannot at the same time believe that God is unreliable in his word of promise. In this sense it is true today also that – in Luther's words – faith is the assurance of salvation" (LV:E 56).

- With reference to the concept of faith of Vatican II see Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 5: "The obedience of faith' ... must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering 'the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,' and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him."

- "The Lutheran distinction between the certitude (*certitudo*) of faith which looks alone to Christ and earthly security (*securitas*), which is based on the human being, has not been dealt with clearly enough in the LV. ... Faith never reflects on itself, but depends completely on God, whose grace is bestowed through word and sacrament, thus from outside (*extra nos*)" (VELKD 92,2-9).

To 4.7: The Good Works of the Justified (paras. 37-39) (LV:E 66ff; VELKD 90ff)

- "But the Council excludes the possibility of earning grace – that is, justification – (can. 2; DS 1552) and bases the earning or merit of eternal life on the gift of grace itself, through membership in Christ (can. 32; DS 1582). Good works are 'merits' as a gift. Although the Reformers attack 'Godless

trust' in one's own works, the Council explicitly excludes any notion of a claim or any false security (cap. 16; DS 1548f). It is evident ... that the Council wishes to establish a link with Augustine, who introduced the concept of merit, in order to express the responsibility of human beings, in spite of the 'bestowed' character of good works" (LV:E 66).

- If we understand the language of "cause" in Canon 24 in more personal terms, as it is done in chapter 16 of the Decree on Justification, where the idea of communion with Christ is emphasized, then we can describe the Catholic doctrine on merit as it is done in the first sentence of the second paragraph of 4.7: growth in grace, perseverance in righteousness received by God and a deeper communion with Christ.

- "Many antitheses could be overcome if the misleading word 'merit' were simply to be viewed and thought about in connection with the true sense of the biblical term 'wage' or reward" (LV:E 67).

- "The Lutheran confessions stress that the justified person is responsible not to lose the grace received but to live in it ... Thus the confessions can speak of a preservation of grace and a growth in it. If righteousness in Canon 24 is understood in the sense that it effects human beings, then it does not apply to us. But if 'righteousness' in Canon 24 refers to the Christian's acceptance by God, it applies to us; because this righteousness is always perfect; compared with it the works of Christians are only 'fruits' and 'signs'" (VELKD 94,2-14).

- "Concerning Canon 26 we refer to the Apology where eternal life is described as reward: '...We grant that eternal life is a reward because it is something that is owed – not because of our merits but because of the promise'" (VELKD 94,20-24).

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