

Receptive Ecumenism And Justification: Roman Catholic And Reformed Doctrine In Contemporary Context

Sarah Timmer
Marquette University

Recommended Citation

Timmer, Sarah, "Receptive Ecumenism And Justification: Roman Catholic And Reformed Doctrine In Contemporary Context" (2014). *Dissertations (2009 -)*. Paper 362.
http://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/362

RECEPTIVE ECUMENISM AND JUSTIFICATION: ROMAN CATHOLIC
AND REFORMED DOCTRINE IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

by

Sarah M. Timmer

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

May 2014

ABSTRACT
RECEPTIVE ECUMENISM AND JUSTIFICATION: ROMAN CATHOLIC AND
REFORMED DOCTRINE IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Sarah M. Timmer

Marquette University, 2014

Receptive Ecumenism is a reassessment of the ecumenical process, in light of the remaining challenges and difficulties faced by ecumenists. It recognizes that ecumenism might need to adjust to the complex diversity of the Christian church today, especially amidst a culture that no longer sees diversity as a negative thing. The goal of traditional ecumenism, visible unity through theological and ecclesiological convergence, is put aside in favor of an ecumenism of mutual enrichment and self-examination. The Catholic-Lutheran Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification is an example of traditional ecumenism. This dissertation examines some strengths and weaknesses of the Joint Declaration, and argues for a more Receptive approach to justification in future ecumenical work.

The doctrine of justification is a particularly fruitful subject for Receptive Ecumenism because the differences in its articulation reflect deeper foundational differences between Catholics and Protestants. In particular, Catholic soteriology has an ontological setting that emphasizes process and increase of Christ's applied grace. In contrast, Reformed soteriology is situated in a much different forensic setting that emphasizes the declaration of Christ's accomplished grace. These are significant differences that say something about the identity and perspective of these traditions, and they require greater definition at the ecumenical table.

Receptive Ecumenism takes a much more modest approach to remaining areas of theological and ecclesial difference like justification. It more candidly affirms and appreciates those differences, with the hopeful expectation that because of them, each church may have something to learn from another church. Furthermore, Receptive Ecumenism identifies distinct gifts that each tradition brings to the ecumenical table. This dissertation suggests ways that Catholic and Reformed Christians can helpfully discuss justification in today's ecumenical milieu.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sarah M. Timmer

I wish to thank my husband, Greg, for his unfailing support of me and of this project. You are the love of my life, and I thank God for you. I also wish to thank my parents, Bruce and Jan Vander Laan, whose openness to the Lord, to people, and to life was infectious. Your godly example has been a rock of security for each of your children. Ultimately, I thank God for allowing me the opportunity to do this work. It has been a blessing. If any good comes of it, may it be to his glory: *solī Deo gloria*.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Ralph Del Colle. The topic was his idea, and many of the ideas in the finished work were the result of our own ecumenical discussions together. He directed this dissertation until his untimely death in July, 2012. He is my brother in Christ, and we will meet again.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..... | i |
| CHAPTER | |
| I. ECUMENICAL METHODOLOGY AND JUSTIFICATION..... | 1 |
| 1. The Ecumenical Movement..... | 1 |
| 1.1 The Early Ecumenical Movement and its Goals..... | 3 |
| 1.2 Methodology of Early Ecumenism: Theological and Ecclesiastical Convergence..... | 8 |
| 1.3 Early Signs of Trouble..... | 9 |
| 1.4 The “Winter” of Ecumenism..... | 15 |
| 1.5 Reassessing Ecumenical Goals and Methodology: Receptive Ecumenism..... | 21 |
| 2. Roman Catholic and Reformed Ecumenism..... | 32 |
| 2.1 History of Reformed-Catholic Divide..... | 33 |
| 2.2 The Reformed Tradition and Ecumenism..... | 35 |
| 2.3 The Roman Catholic Tradition and Ecumenism..... | 36 |
| 2.4 Reformed and Catholic Traditions in Dialogue..... | 40 |
| 3. Justification in Catholic-Protestant Ecumenism..... | 44 |
| II. THE CATHOLIC-LUTHERAN JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION..... | 49 |
| 1. History and Significance of the Joint Declaration..... | 50 |
| 2. Theology of Justification and the Joint Declaration..... | 61 |
| 2.1 Justification as Forgiveness and Renewal..... | 64 |
| 2.2 Justification and Sin..... | 68 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 2.3 Justification, Faith, and Grace..... | 73 |
| 2.4 Justification, Merit, and Reward..... | 77 |
| 3. Substantial Critique at the Heart of the Agreement..... | 83 |
| 3.1 Catholic Concerns over the Joint Declaration: Anthony Malloy and Avery Dulles..... | 83 |
| 3.2 Lutheran Concerns over the Joint Declaration: The Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod..... | 90 |
| 4. Conclusions..... | 94 |
| | |
| III .THE CATHOLIC DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION..... | 97 |
| 1. History of the Catholic Paradigm of Justification..... | 97 |
| 1.1 Early Understandings of Justification..... | 98 |
| 1.2 Thomas Aquinas and the Background of Catholic Soteriology..... | 107 |
| 2. The Catholic Doctrine of Justification..... | 115 |
| 3. Important Aspects of Justification..... | 119 |
| 3.1 Human Sin..... | 119 |
| 3.2 Faith and Assurance..... | 123 |
| 3.3 Grace..... | 127 |
| 3.4 Merit..... | 130 |
| 3.5 Ecclesiology..... | 137 |
| 4. Conclusion: The Catholic Doctrine of Justification..... | 142 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| IV. THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION AND THE REFORMED TRADITION..... | 145 |
| 1. History of the Reformed Paradigm of Justification..... | 145 |
| 1.1 John Calvin..... | 147 |
| 1.2 Calvin and the Saldoletto Debate..... | 148 |
| 1.2a Sadoletto’s Letter to the City of Geneva..... | 150 |
| 1.2.b Calvin’s Reply to Sadoletto..... | 153 |
| 1.2.c Conclusion of the Calvin-Sadoletto Debate..... | 157 |
| 2. Reformed Soteriology and Justification..... | 158 |
| 2.1 The Justification-Sanctification Distinction..... | 160 |
| 2.2 Imputed Righteousness..... | 164 |
| 3. Important Aspects of Justification..... | 168 |
| 3.1 Sin..... | 168 |
| 3.2 Faith..... | 177 |
| 3.3 Grace..... | 184 |
| 3.4 Justification and Eternal Life..... | 190 |
| 3.5 Ecclesiology, the Sacraments, and Justification..... | 200 |
| 4. Summary: The Reformed Tradition and Justification..... | 203 |
| V. JUSTIFICATION AND REFORMED-CATHOLIC RECEPTIVE ECUMENISM..... | 205 |
| 1. Receptive Ecumenism..... | 206 |
| 2. Similarity and Difference on the Doctrine of Justification..... | 210 |
| 2.1 Surprising Similarities..... | 214 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 2.2 Difficult Differences..... | 219 |
| 3. Gifts Offered in Receptive Ecumenism..... | 224 |
| 3.1 Gifts from the Reformed Tradition..... | 225 |
| 3.2 Gifts from the Catholic Tradition..... | 230 |
| 4. Conclusion..... | 236 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 238 |

Chapter One: Ecumenical Methodology and Justification

1. The Ecumenical Movement

It would be difficult to over-emphasize the importance of the ecumenical movement to the church today, as well as its impact on the church. This is true worldwide, amongst all Christian traditions and virtually all denominations. Ecumenism has simply changed the way we understand what the church is and what it does. Ecumenical conversations have led to mutual affirmations which put to rest the anathemas of the 16th century, as well as opened up new possibilities for combined efforts toward social justice. One significant contemporary example is the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification¹ (JDDJ) in which the Roman Catholic Church and the Worldwide Lutheran Federation reached historic agreement on the issue of justification.

In this chapter we will examine the early ecumenical movement and its particular goal of the visible unity of the Christian church. Simply put, full visible unity via theological and ecclesial convergence has been the most important objective of the ecumenical movement. Its methodology was about working toward that convergence. However, the history of ecumenism shows how this has been very difficult to achieve. Even an explication of what that unity means or looks like has proved highly controversial. Ecumenical progress has slowed as ecumenism has hit upon some of the stubborn differences between church traditions.

¹ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," vatican.va, accessed January 2013, http://vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html.

While some ecumenists are still advocating pushing through these differences toward convergence, other ecumenists have begun to reassess their ecumenical goals. A newer proposal has been named Receptive Ecumenism, and it takes into account the individuality and particular identities of different churches.² We will identify the perspective of Receptive Ecumenism, and discuss what it offers to the Church today.

Second, we will turn more specifically to the history of Roman Catholic and Reformed involvement in ecumenism, and to their ecumenical efforts together. These traditions have had different commitments in regards to ecumenism, and their history of mutual disagreement and antagonism is long. However, the last few decades have shown a definite warming of the relationship between Catholic and Reformed churches and some ecumenical dialogues have occurred between them. We will examine the documents resulting from these dialogues, discuss the methodology in them, and evaluate them.

Finally, this chapter will broach the subject of justification. Justification is often identified as the single most important issue of division in the Protestant Reformation. It is also an issue of identity for Catholic and Reformed believers, one that speaks to what it means to be Catholic or Reformed. And while Catholics and Lutherans have been able to reach some agreement on the issue of justification in the Joint Declaration, there is no such agreement between Catholic and Reformed churches. In the end, this dissertation proposes that Receptive Ecumenism is better able to address issues of significant traditional difference like justification. The remainder of this dissertation will be to show

² See the main proposal of Receptive Ecumenism and contributions to it by various ecumenists in the volume *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. by Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

how Receptive Ecumenism can benefit Catholic and Reformed dialogue on the issue of justification.

1.1 The Early Ecumenical Movement and its Goals

The contemporary ecumenical movement dates from the early decades of the twentieth century. Thomas Fitzgerald defines the movement as such: “The ecumenical movement is the quest of Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Old Catholic, and most Protestant churches for reconciliation, and the restoration of their visible unity in faith, sacramental life, and witness to the world.”³ It was born out of many grass-roots organizations, conferences, and youth clubs that shared an evolving concept of the Christian church. The movement appeared first in Western Europe, but its ideas were spread to North America, and from there to the world. Within a few decades, enthusiasm for a new ecumenical mindset and agenda had reached almost every corner of Christendom.

From the beginning, the ecumenical movement included a missionary agenda. Participants recognized that if Christians from different traditions could work together on the mission field, they could have a much greater impact on the world. Ruth Rouse describes what she calls an “Evangelical Awakening” of the 18th and 19th centuries in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States which led to the rise of the ecumenical movement.⁴ The awakening had some of its roots in the German Pietist movement of the 18th century. It flowered in England under the evangelistic campaigns of the Wesleys and

³ Thomas Fitzgerald, *The Ecumenical Movement* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 1.

⁴ Ruth Rouse, “Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Movement,” in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 307-349 (London: S. P. C. K., 1967), 309. From a different perspective, however, it could be argued that the Awakening also led to a time of tumult and division in the churches.

George Whitefield, and in America during the Great Awakening. Rouse says that the awakening was not limited to these nations or events; in fact, she lists revivals in Switzerland, Russia, Scotland, France, and the Netherlands in the early 19th century where missionary activity sparked increased interest in ecumenism.⁵ While these were mostly Protestant evangelical awakenings, the larger missionary push had genuine ecumenical involvement of non-Protestants, and of Protestants working cooperatively with Orthodox and Catholic Christians to spread the gospel to non-Christians.⁶

Thomas Fitzgerald notes the rise of ecumenical cooperative associations, particularly Bible societies, which came to prominence in the early 19th century.⁷ The Bible societies were not officially related to any particular church or denomination. The goal was simply to distribute Bibles, and the societies supplied them to Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox believers alike. Particularly, Rouse notes how the British Bible Society worked with Catholics, "employed them as agents, and circulated their versions of Scripture."⁸ Fitzgerald says that, "One could find Anglicans, Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox involved" in the Bible society movement.⁹

Overall the early decades of the 19th century saw a rise in ecumenical interest and activity. Christians were working together, united for evangelization and the causes of social justice. Indeed, Rouse comments that, "The early years of the 19th century were days of rapprochement between the Churches to a degree that is little realized today. Even between Protestants and Roman Catholics the rapprochement was closer than it has

⁵ Rouse, "Voluntary Movements," 310.

⁶ Rouse, "Voluntary Movements," 312-313.

⁷ Thomas Fitzgerald, *The Ecumenical Movement: An Introductory History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 61.

⁸ Rouse, "Voluntary Movements," 312.

⁹ Fitzgerald, 61-2.

ever been since that time.”¹⁰ She cites a number of early conversations and even books that were published on the idea of union between Catholics and Protestants in Western Europe.¹¹

The World Missionary Conference in Edinburg in 1910 is a prominent early example of the growing interest in ecumenism. Rouse identifies the conference as a “watershed” between an early ecumenical awakening and the modern ecumenical movement.¹² Kenneth Latourette agrees on the significance of this conference, calling it even “one of the great landmarks in the history of the Church.”¹³ The conference included 1,200 delegates from different Western European and North American Protestant churches. While that ecumenical diversity may fall far short of today’s standards, in 1910 it was unprecedented. One of the main topics addressed was promoting the cooperation and unity of missionaries from different church backgrounds. Significantly, Latourette notes that only included in the conference were those organizations whose work was among non-Christians. He says, “Efforts to win Christians from one form of the Faith to another...were not to be in the purview of the gathering.”¹⁴ And questions pertaining to ecclesiology or doctrine were expressly not to be sought out at the conference.¹⁵ Overall, the Edinburg Missionary Conference of 1910 marked a new day for the ecumenical movement. Latourette says that, “Edinburg 1910 was prophetic of a new movement towards the unity of the Churches.”¹⁶

¹⁰ Rouse, “Voluntary Movements,” 313.

¹¹ Rouse, “Voluntary Movements,” 313.

¹² Rouse, “Voluntary Movements,” 345.

¹³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, “Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council,” in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948* (London: S. P. C. K., 1967), 357.

¹⁴ Latourette, 357.

¹⁵ Latourette, 359-360.

¹⁶ Latourette, 361.

The World Conference on Faith and Order was another important historical event for the ecumenical movement. Growing out of the Edinburg conference, it was a world-wide ecclesiastical conference that met in Lausanne in 1927. It involved men and women from 108 different churches, including many Protestant, Old Catholic, and Orthodox churches,¹⁷ and its aim was to discuss matters more theological and practical than missionary. John Gibaut says that the impetus for the conference came from Charles Brent, a bishop in the American Episcopal Church and an attendee at Edinburg. Brent became an advocate for ecumenical dialogue, recognizing “the need to resolve issues of faith and order in the divided churches...in such a forum they might be discussed and resolved through dialogue.”¹⁸ In contrast from the Edinburg Missionary Conference, invitations were given to churches asking for official representatives to attend the conference.¹⁹ Tissington Tatlow, himself a participant, comments that “a new movement was afoot.”²⁰ The Faith and Order Commission still exists today as a significant assembly group that works under the larger auspices of the World Council of Churches; its purpose is “to proclaim the oneness of the Church of Jesus Christ, and to call the churches to the goal of visible unity.”²¹

A similar ecumenical conference that led to the birth of a movement was the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work. This conference was held in Stockholm in 1925, and its focus was more on the unity of Christian action, particularly

¹⁷ Tissington Tatlow, “The World Conference on Faith and Order,” in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948* (London: S. P. C. K., 1967), 42—421.

¹⁸ John Gibaut, “Faith and Order at 100,” oikoumene.org, accessed April 20, 2013, <http://oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/faith-and-order-at-100>.

¹⁹ Tatlow, 408-417.

²⁰ Tatlow, 407.

²¹ World Council of Churches, “What is Faith and Order?” oikoumene.org, accessed 20 April 2013, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/faith-and-order/what-is-faith-and-order>.

in the wake of the First World War. Nils Ehrenström comments, "Stockholm 1925 affirmed in unmistakable terms the responsibility of the Churches for the whole life of man...The conference was sometimes called the 'Nicea of ethics.'"²² A continuation committee was appointed to carry forth the idea of the conference, and Ehrenström says "The movement became a laboratory of fertile ideas and projects."²³

A final significant development for the ecumenical movement was the creation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. It was founded in part by a union of the Faith and Order movement with the Life and Work movement.²⁴ Fitzgerald calls its first meeting in Amsterdam an "unprecedented event" in modern church history, and it included delegates from 147 different churches from the Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant traditions.²⁵ Basis for membership in the Council was kept simple: "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of the churches, which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour."²⁶ Today the WCC consists of a few hundred member churches from a diverse and global body of Christian churches and traditions. The WCC is the greatest single ecumenical organization existing today. Member churches are called to the goal of "visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship."²⁷

²² Nils Ehrenström, "Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work 1925-1948," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 543-596 (London: S. P. C. K., 1967), 550.

²³ Ehrenström, 554.

²⁴ Fitzgerald, 107.

²⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Ecumenical Movement*, 109.

²⁶ Fitzgerald, 108.

²⁷ "What is the World Council of Churches?," oikoumene.org, last modified 2012, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/who-are-we.html>. Also, it is probably important to note that while the Catholic Church has chosen not to be a member church of the WCC, it meets regularly with the WCC. The Catholic Church is also an active member of the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order.

1.2 Methodology of Early Ecumenism: Theological and Ecclesiastical Convergence

The early decades of ecumenism were exciting and optimistic. A new sense of Christian purpose and identity seemed to be sweeping the globe. As stated above, many organizations and unions were founded whose goal was increased visible unity between separated churches. There was a desire to demonstrate and articulate the oneness of the church. Thus, the emphasis was on similarity, particularly on what the churches held in common. The goal was to take tangible steps toward overcoming long-held divisions in the church. These conversations focused on what could be said in common in order to address anew the areas of traditional difference and disunity. In an important article, Avery Dulles calls this the “Convergence Method” for ecumenism.²⁸ He explains:

The principle instrument of ecumenism over the past half century has been a series of theological conversations between separated churches. Proceeding on the basis of what they held in common, the partners tried to show that their shared patrimony contained the seeds of much closer agreement than had yet been recognized. Rereading their confessional documents in light of Scripture and early creeds as shared authorities, they produced remarkable convergence statements on traditionally divisive subjects such as justification, Mariology, Scripture and tradition, the Eucharist, and the ordained ministry.”²⁹

The emphasis was on what the churches shared—shared history, shared experience, shared tradition, and especially shared Scripture. Thus, these discussions were able to achieve new understandings of mutuality and similarity between divided Christians.

Indeed, much progress was achieved in these ecumenical meetings. It ought not be overlooked that the mere willingness of divided Christians to sit down together and to discuss the issues that have separated them for centuries is itself a victory. There have also been many ecumenical working groups and agreements that furthered ecumenical

²⁸ See Avery Dulles, "Saving Ecumenism from Itself," *First Things* 178 (Dec. 2007).

²⁹ Dulles, "Saving Ecumenism from Itself," 24.

interests and fellowship. For example, Dulles lists some of what he considers to be the most successful: "The achievements of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, the Groupe des Dombes, and the World Commission on Faith and Order in its Lima paper on baptism, Eucharist, and ministry deserve our admiration."³⁰ And more than any other, the Joint Declaration has been hailed by many as the most significant ecumenical agreement to date, overcoming for Catholics and many Lutherans the single greatest theological issue in contention in the Protestant Reformation: justification.

This was an exciting time, for it seemed as if the modern church was on the brink of an unprecedented unity. Convergence was the overarching goal of ecumenical activity, and it seemed achievable. If different churches could rectify the theological issues that had kept them divided for centuries, they were certain that their ecclesial divisions would be resolved as well.

1.3 Early Signs of Trouble

It is important to note, however, that even at the onset of ecumenism there were voices of caution and concern. Simply put, while ecumenism has championed Christian unity, not everyone's understanding of visible unity looked the same. And while early ecumenism worked to focus on what is common to all Christians, there always remained stubborn areas of difference and disunity in theology and practice.

These struggles were present almost from the very onset. One early example is how in 1826 the British Bible Society decided to only publish Bibles that did not contain the deuterocanonical books. This decision, which Rouse calls a "violent controversy,"³¹

³⁰ Dulles "Saving Ecumenism from Itself," 24.

³¹ Rouse, "Voluntary Movements," 318.

alienated the Catholic and Orthodox participants. Fitzgerald comments that, "The controversy demonstrated that even the publication and distribution of Bibles could reflect serious unresolved, historical differences among the churches."³²

Furthermore, some ecumenical groups pursued greater unity with only certain types of Christians. The Evangelical Alliance, for example, was founded in 1846 with the purpose of promoting the unity of Christians in brotherly love and providing evangelical enterprise in the face of social injustice.³³ From the beginning, it called for united prayer and initiated an annual week of ecumenical prayer. However, the Alliance was critical of Catholicism. In fact, Fitzgerald notes how in the American segment of the Alliance, the organization "drew strength from the fact that it was viewed as a bastion of nativism and anti-Catholicism."³⁴ Rouse speaks of the "incompatible objectives" of the Evangelical Alliance, for while it worked to further ecumenical unity, it was not interested in including Roman Catholics.³⁵

The Association for the Promotion of the Unity of the Christian Faith is another example of the difficulties of working for visible unity. This association demonstrates how even a fervent ecumenical desire for ecclesial convergence was not able to overcome some challenges posed by real differences in theology. This association was founded in 1857 and consisted of a small group of Anglicans, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians whose purpose was "to work and to pray for the corporate reunion of churches and church bodies in East and West."³⁶ Indeed the members committed themselves to

³² Fitzgerald, 62.

³³ Fitzgerald, 66. See also the World Evangelical Alliance website, www.worldea.org.

³⁴ Fitzgerald, 63.

³⁵ Rouse, "Voluntary Movements," 323.

³⁶ Catholic League, "History," thecatholicleague.blogspot.com, accessed March 8, 2012, <http://thecatholicleague.blogspot.com/p/our-history.html>.

corporate prayer for church unity, but their prayers become controversial when differences of ecclesiology became evident. The Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute explains that “The problem, of course, was not the act of [common] prayer in itself as much as the questions that surfaced concerning the nature of the church and the nature of the unity being sought through prayer.”³⁷ The controversy led to Rome withdrawing its support for the association. The Catholic members that left the association then founded what is now known as the Catholic League in 1913. This organization still exists, promoting the unity of Christendom, but its labors toward that end are focused on uniting Christians under the bishop of Rome.

Overall, while the history of the ecumenical movement shows clear commitment to the idea and goal of greater visible unity of the Christian church, there is not an agreed-upon understanding of what that visible unity will be, nor is there a defined plan on how that goal will be accomplished. Part of the problem, according to Ristro Saarinen, is the World Council of Churches. Saarinen demonstrates how the WCC has had difficulty in articulating the nature of the church unity it seeks.³⁸ While in 1950 it declared that membership in the Council does not require holding to a specific doctrine about the nature of the unity of the Church, the WCC has throughout its history given explication to that unity. Saarinen identifies four unity statements--one each at New Dehli in 1961, Nairobi in 1975, Canberra in 1991, and most recently in Porto Alegre in 2006—that have been adopted by the Council.

³⁷ Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute, “A Brief History,” [geii.org](http://www.geii.org/wpcu_brief_history.htm), accessed March 2012, http://www.geii.org/wpcu_brief_history.htm.

³⁸ Ristro Saarinen, “Unity, Catholicity, and Identity: The Unity Statements of the World Council of Churches and their Reception in *The Nature and Mission of the Church*,” in *Receiving ‘The Nature and Mission of the Church’: Ecclesial Reality and Ecumenical Horizons for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Paul Collins and Michael Fahey (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

The New Dehli statement embraces a more specific or concrete understanding of unity and catholicity. Saarinen quotes from the 1961 statement, which says that the unity of the Church “is being made visible” in our time with “one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer...[where Christians are] united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all.”³⁹ The New Dehli statement reflects the optimism of early ecumenism and embraces a detailed concept of that full visible unity as the goal of the ecumenical movement and of the Council.

Saarinen shows how there is a decrease in the emphasis on visible unity within the unity statements of the WCC. He describes the unity explained in the later documents, like that of Porto Allegre and in the resulting WCC document, *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (NMC), as a catholicity “without spatial concepts.”⁴⁰ The more recent statements from the WCC endorse a catholicity of both unity and diversity, an emphasis not seen in earlier unity statements. Saarinen comments, “The biblical part of NMC tends to exclude any preferred models and to affirm a variant of ecclesiological pluralism.”⁴¹ Overall, the Council has had trouble in identifying the nature of the very unity it seeks, and Saarinen identifies some resulting tensions within the WCC pertaining to its own identity and mission. He perceptively concludes that:

The hesitations, tensions, and even contradictions present in the ecumenical language are not symptomatic of the lack of common agreement and clarity among drafters, but they reflect the hesitation of the churches. A church wants to proceed toward unity, but it also wants to preserve its identity and autonomy.”⁴²

³⁹Saarinen, “Unity, Catholicity, and Identity, 11.

⁴⁰Saarinen, “Unity, Catholicity, and Identity,”13.

⁴¹Saarinen, “Unity, Catholicity, and Identity,”15.

⁴² Saarinen “Unity, Catholicity, and Identity,”17.

Over the years, the WCC has been forced to deal with the complexities of diversity and identity in a way that proponents of earlier convergence ecumenism did not foresee.

The *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (JES) offers another example of both the early optimism of ecumenism and a small but growing sense of the difficulty ahead. The journal was launched in 1964. In the introduction to its inaugural edition, the editors speak of “the new spirit” of ecumenism and “the developing world Christian community.”⁴³ Interestingly, the original editors say that their journal “will not be written by polemicists and malcontents” and instead invite articles “by men and women who truly belong to their churches and at the same time are possessed by a sense of responsibility to the unity of Christians.”⁴⁴ Overall, it reflects the spirit of the times: very hopeful and optimistic towards the anticipated unity of Christians and the Church.

In this vein, the first edition of the JES is instructive. It generally contains articles confident about the expected progress of ecumenism, like the article “All who call on the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ” by Oscar Cullmann.⁴⁵ It also includes a short editorial by Hans Küng entitled “The Historic Contingency of Conciliar Decrees,” certain to raise some Catholic eyebrows.⁴⁶ And one article by Markus Barth is entitled “The Challenge of the Apostle Paul,” arguing for a reassessment of Paul’s teaching on justification by

⁴³ Leonard Swidler, “Purpose of the Journal of Ecumenical Studies,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (Win 1964), iii-v.

⁴⁴ Swidler, “Purpose of the Journal of Ecumenical Studies,” iii-v.

⁴⁵ Oscar Cullmann, “All who call on the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (Win 1964), 1-21.

⁴⁶ Hans Küng, “The Historic Contingency of Conciliar Decrees,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (Win 1964), 109-111.

Catholics and Protestants which the author believes could contribute toward visible unity.⁴⁷

At the same time, this first edition of the JES contains indications that any real visible unity of Christendom may be far off. Indicative of this is one significant article from Joseph Ratzinger entitled “The Ministerial Office and the Unity of the Church.”⁴⁸ In it, the future Holy Father insists that the church cannot be properly defined without the Roman Catholic notion of Office. He contrasts Catholic and Reformed understandings of the church, finding the Reformed sorely lacking. He cites both biblical and theological grounds for his position, and he states them strongly. Yet Ratzinger uses the Vatican II terminology for Protestants, calling them “separated brethren” and concludes that, “the unity of the church is still evolving and will finally be completed only in the Eschaton.”⁴⁹ Ratzinger is aware of the challenges, even the uniquely Catholic challenges, in seeking full visible unity between Catholics and Protestants.

Thus there is already present in the initial edition of JES an admission of the difficulty—perhaps even the impossibility—of attaining the full visible unity of Christendom which ecumenism is striving for, at least on this side of glory. Whether the issues standing in the way of convergence are theological, ecclesiological, or both,—they are significant.

From this it seems fair to say that the goal of visible unity remains a serious challenge for ecumenism. Members of distinct traditions self-identify with the struggles, strengths and weaknesses of their churches. They appreciate the idiosyncrasies of their

⁴⁷ Marcus Barth, “The Challenge of the Apostle Paul,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (Win 1964), 58-81.

⁴⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, the future (2005) Pope Benedict XVI, “The Ministerial Office and the Unity of the Church,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (Win 1964), 42-57.

⁴⁹ Benedict XVI, “Ministerial Office and Unity,” 57.

worship, and cherish the emphases of their theology. These differences are more than superfluous: they inform the believer's Christian faith and help structure his or her experience of the triune God.

1.4 The "Winter" of Ecumenism

Generally-speaking, some of the optimism and enthusiasm of the early ecumenical movement gave way to a growing sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction. Cardinal Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Church Unity from 2001-2010, acknowledges "a spirit of resignation" or "a phase of hibernation" in current ecumenism.⁵⁰ This is not a new experience or idea. For example, Hans Küng in 1969 expressed what he believed was a widely-held growing impatience for the lack of real change in the church in spite of the work of the ecumenical movement.⁵¹ Indeed, it seems fair to say that the goal of visible unity has been achieved neither to the degree nor on the timeline assumed by early ecumenists.

There have been different ways to address this disappointment or frustration among ecumenists. The *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* in the winter of 1980 exemplifies some of these ways. This issue is entitled "Consensus in Theology?" and it is significant because it responds to the controversy surrounding the official censure of Hans Küng by the Catholic Church the previous winter when the Vatican Curia found Hans Küng to hold beliefs that were in conflict with the Catholic faith.⁵² The articles in this issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* are generally written in support of Küng and his ecumenical intentions.

⁵⁰ Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One* (New York: Burns & Oates, 2004), 1.

⁵¹ Hans Küng, "Preface," *The Future of Ecumenism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1969).

⁵² See *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Win. 1980).

One response to the lack of progress in ecumenism is to push harder for consensus. In that 1980 issue, editor Leonard Swidler urges ecumenists and churches to more dialogue. He believes that dialogue is the key to consensus, and he is critical of the Catholic Church for turning away from what he calls a “dialogic ‘search for truth’” exemplified in its censure of Küng.⁵³ According to Swidler, a “search for truth” on these terms means that churches and traditions might need to set aside some of their traditional theology in order to do the necessary work of renewal and reform. In his opinion, ecumenists must sit down with other Christians and search anew for God and his truth for the church today. In his appeal for a dialogical path toward consensus, Swidler admits that, “there is no prefabricated consensus here on consensus,” but he believes that through sustained and engaged ecumenical conversation, “eventually better, more helpful conceptualizations will slowly and continually emerge.”⁵⁴

Hans Küng agrees with this approach, and in this same volume is particularly specific about what he thinks is obstructing ecumenical progress. He advocates that contemporary theology adapt to a wider evangelical catholicity by rejecting what he calls a “totalitarian conception of truth.”⁵⁵ In its place, he promotes “an ecumenical vision that takes into consideration the world religions as well as contemporary ideologies: as much tolerance as possible.”⁵⁶ Küng believes that ecumenism would be best served by adopting a much broader understanding of church and of Christianity. Thus he specifically cautions against what he calls particularism, or theological provincialism,

⁵³ Leonard Swidler, “Dialogue: The Way Toward Consensus” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Win. 1980), v-vii.

⁵⁴ Swidler, “Dialogue: The Way Toward Consensus,” iv.

⁵⁵ Hans Küng, “Why I Remain a Catholic,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Win. 1980), 145.

⁵⁶ Hans Küng, “Toward a New Consensus in Catholic (and Ecumenical) Theology,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Win. 1980), 14.

that would limit one's concept of the church or theology. Overall, Küng says that in today's church, "We must avoid a confessionalist ghetto mentality."⁵⁷

Without necessarily accepting the ideas of Küng or Swidler, some ecumenists today would agree that the ecumenical movement ought to continue seeking consensus as a means to visible unity. They want the goal of visible unity to remain in front of the church as well as its call to be one. Fitzgerald says that in spite of the challenges, "the World Council must remain committed to the goal of the visible unity of the churches."⁵⁸ He adds a concern that the leadership in the WCC "has settled for an approach that stresses only cooperation and that has diminished the theological efforts to address historic church dividing issues."⁵⁹ He is dissatisfied with this approach. Cardinal Kasper in his 2004 book, *That They May All Be One* agrees, "This volume is founded on the conviction that the very shape of the future church depends to a significant degree on the ecumenical endeavor aimed at visible unity among divided churches."⁶⁰ Thus in spite of the challenges, many ecumenists remain committed to theological and ecclesial convergence as the goal for the ecumenical movement.

There is another response to the dissatisfaction with the progress of ecumenism within the church. It is not new *per se*, but it has gotten more explication as of late. In that same 1980 issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Avery Dulles gives account of a different perspective on ecumenism and on its possible future. He writes an article

⁵⁷ Küng, "Toward a New Consensus in Catholic (and Ecumenical) Theology" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Win. 1980), 14.

⁵⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Ecumenical Movement*, 120

⁵⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Ecumenical Movement*, 120.

⁶⁰ Kasper, *That They May All Be One*, 1.

entitled “Ecumenism and Theological Method,”⁶¹ where he is careful in his critique of Küng. One senses that he is not wanting to further offend or inflame, especially considering the censure controversy. Yet he does disagree with both Küng and Swidler. He says, “Without seeking to revive the authoritarian ghetto theology that Küng deplors, one may contend for the legitimacy of a dogmatic theology done within a specific ecclesial tradition. Christians who are seriously committed to a particular church or communion cannot be content with a confessionally neutral theological method.”⁶² Far from hindering one’s search for Christian truth, the theology and even the tradition of one’s church need inform the search for truth. Dulles believes that these considerations are especially weighty for Catholics:

Whatever may be the case with Christians of other affiliations, the Catholic is committed by the very fact of church membership to accept the teaching authority of the ecclesiastical magisterium, not out of “ecclesiastical opportunism,” nor out of subservience to the “ecclesiastical system” (Küng’s phrases), but precisely for the sake of better attaining the truth of revelation. To depart without solid reasons from the approved doctrinal norms of the ecclesial body to which one belongs, far from being scholarly and scientific, would be subjective, arbitrary, and even self-contradictory.⁶³

There is, according to Dulles, a role of authority in any quest for truth. This applies to all Christians, whether Catholic or non-Catholic. In the end, ecumenical theology cannot be theologically neutral. Rather, Dulles argues for a greater allowance of commitments to confessional traditions within ecumenical dialogue.

Oscar Cullmann raised similar thoughts in his 1988 book *Unity Through Diversity*.⁶⁴ Cullmann explicitly rejects the idea of ecumenism with the goal of ecclesial

⁶¹ Avery Dulles, “Ecumenism and Theological Method,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Win. 1980), 40-48.

⁶² Dulles, “Ecumenism and Theological Method,” 44.

⁶³ Dulles, “Ecumenism and Theological Method,” 44.

⁶⁴ Oscar Cullmann, *Unity Through Diversity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

merger; he strongly denounces this as “the false goal of homogenization.”⁶⁵ He boldly advocates for an understanding of a multiplicity of independent churches, each with their own charisma, given it by God.⁶⁶ Cullmann believes that there is a diversity of valid expressions of the Christian faith, where each church has its own gift to be expressed “for the sake of the community (*koinonia*) of all Christians willed by Christ.”⁶⁷ Some of these same ideas were picked up in Receptive Ecumenism, discussed below.

The state of ecumenism today is an open question. On the one hand, the ecumenical movement has made huge gains in encouraging Christians from different traditions and denominations to recognize each other as brethren in Christ. It has challenged every church’s assumptions that their church is the only true church, opening its eyes to the diversity of practice and expression within the Christian Church. This is true even for the Roman Catholic Church, which now recognizes saving graces in the Christian faith of non-Catholics, and demonstrates sincere commitment to ecumenism.⁶⁸

On the other hand, the goal of visible unity seems further away than ever. In some sectors, the idea of unity has taken on a different look. More specifically, some

⁶⁵ Cullmann, *Unity Through Diversity*, 33. Perhaps Cullmann's language here is too strong--convergence ecumenism does not necessarily imply that through merger churches will entirely lose their historic identities by being “homogenized.” There may be other ways of understanding convergence ecumenism, including a communion model where the different churches work toward greater visible unity, beginning with a mutual recognition of ministry and sacraments. Cullmann’s point, however, is that if ecumenism remains focused only on similarity with the goal of an undefined unity and the hope of an eventual ecclesial merger (something he calls “unrealistic and utopian”), then each Christian tradition would inevitably lose their unique spiritual gifts that actually could benefit the larger Christian Church. See his comments in chapter one.

⁶⁶ Cullmann, *Unity Through Diversity*, 18-22.

⁶⁷ Cullmann, *Unity Through Diversity*, 83-84.

⁶⁸ Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism states, “separated [non-Catholic] churches...have been by no means deprived...in the mystery of salvation.” See Vatican Council II, “Decree on Ecumenism” (21 November 1964), in *The Basic Sixteen Documents of the Vatican Council II*, edited by Austin Flannery, 499-523 (Northport, NY: Costello, 1996), §3. See also Vatican II, “*Lumen Gentium*” (21 Nov. 1964), in *The Christian Faith* (New York: Alba House, 2001), §8 and 15, and Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* (6 Aug. 2000), vatican.va, accessed January 2013, http://vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html, §17.

ecumenists advocating convergence now include interreligious dialogue. Their work explores the commonality of all religions.⁶⁹ One prominent example is long-time editor of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Leonard Swidler, who believes that interreligious dialogue is a natural extension of the unity that ecumenism promotes.⁷⁰ His recent article "Naming' Ultimate Reality" argues for the validity of multiple names and meanings of God.⁷¹ Swidler says that the time has come:

to recognize that these limitless alternative primal names coarise from the same infinite source and co-express the same universal origin, which, because it is seen from variant cultural perspectives, gives rise to the various names. This intuition follows immediately from rigorous reflection on the nature of the infinite ultimate principle. Such a principle must be infinitely unitive and also infinitely numerative.⁷²

While this bold approach has yet to be accepted by most Christian ecumenists--it should be said that most would much more clearly delineate ecumenism from interreligious dialogue-- it is sufficient to say that the goal of visible unity for the Christian church has proved difficult both to achieve and to define. Perhaps especially in our contemporary multicultural and multi-religious context, we are constantly presented with different opinions and ideas, religious and otherwise. In such a context, it seems apparent that commonality, mutuality, and similarity only go so far and that the question of Christian unity is as important as ever.

⁶⁹ One only has to glance at recent articles in the JES to see a turn to interreligious dialogue. For example, in the April 2010 issue titles of articles contain such phrases as "Catholic-Jewish Dialogue," "Multi-Faith Involvement," and "Culture and Interreligious Understanding." One article by Allen S. Maller is entitled "What a Reform Rabbi Learns from Prophet Mohammad."

⁷⁰ See Leonard Swidler, "Nobody Knows Everything about Anything!: The Cosmic Dance of Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 45.2 (Spring 2010): 175-177.

⁷¹ Leonard Swidler, "'Naming' Ultimate Reality," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48.1 (Win 2013): 1-4.

⁷² Swidler, "'Naming' Ultimate Reality," 2.

1.5 Reassessing Ecumenical Goals and Methodology: Receptive Ecumenism

In recent years understanding of ecumenism has changed, and a shift in methodology is taking place for some ecumenists. One newer proposal for ecumenism has been named Receptive Ecumenism. Paul Murray and others are advocating this perspective in Catholic circles in the 2008 book *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*.⁷³ The book has received some accolades; Nicholas Healey says, "this collection of 32 high-quality essays makes a good case for a bold new strategy,"⁷⁴ and Michael Fahey calls the book "a handsomely produced and hefty treasure trove of insights and information certain to provide hope to professional ecumenists."⁷⁵ The book is in part the result of an international colloquium held at Ushaw College near Durham in 2006, and in part from a larger research project of ecumenists developing and testing the idea of ecumenism done from a "receptive" perspective.⁷⁶ Cardinal Kasper speaks of the need for Receptive Ecumenism in his recommendation of the project in the foreword of the book:

Ecumenists tend to be utopian, and often the wish is the father of their thoughts. When reality does not correspond to their thoughts, they suddenly become typical German Hegelians and speak of 'bad' reality, of an ecumenical winter, or, even worse, of a glacial period. By contrast, the approach of the Durham colloquium, and of this collection of essays, fortunately seems to be less continental, less Germanic and more British—that is, more realistic. It takes what might be regarded as the specifically Anglican approach of *via media* and speaks of an

⁷³ *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁷⁴ Nicholas M. Healey, rev. of *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning* ed. by Paul Murray, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13.4 (2001): 480.

⁷⁵ Michael A. Fahey, rev. of *Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning* ed. by Paul Murray, in *Theological Studies* 17.1 (Mr 2010): 238.

⁷⁶ See Paul Murray, "Preface," in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ix-xi.

intermediary ecumenical situation. I welcome this assessment and I am grateful for it.⁷⁷

Kasper's words reflect both an honest assessment of the disappointment and frustration felt by many ecumenists over the continuing lack of visible unity in the church, but also a hopeful expectation that Receptive Ecumenism has something new to offer to the ecumenical enterprise. He concludes the foreword with a strong recommendation for the "initiative" of Receptive Ecumenism: "I am convinced that it will contribute to a new start and hopefully also a new spring within the ecumenical movement."⁷⁸

Receptive Ecumenism suggests that a better way forward is to more candidly acknowledge the diversity that exists within the Christian community. As shown above, traditional ecumenism emphasizes the unity of the faithful toward the final goal of theological and ecclesial convergence. Receptive Ecumenism instead accepts a greater degree of difference between Christians and their respective churches. Instead of focusing on areas of potential convergence between the churches, proponents of Receptive Ecumenism say that ecumenism now needs to focus on the individual growth and learning of each church tradition in dialogue with others. In this way, Paul Murray calls for an ecumenism of ecclesial learning and even conversion as each church seeks to learn "what is strong" from another church.⁷⁹ Receptive Ecumenism claims that the uniquenesses of each tradition have to be heard at the ecumenical table, and that these differences can help strengthen the church. Certainly this includes a deepening of mutual understanding and appreciation between the churches, but more fundamentally,

⁷⁷ Walter Kasper, "Foreword," in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), vii.

⁷⁸ Walter Kasper, "Foreword," viii.

⁷⁹ Paul Murray, "ARCIC III: Recognizing the Need for Ecumenical Gear-change," *One in Christ* 45 (2011), 209.

Receptive Ecumenism aims at the maturing and growth within each church in the process of real receptive learning between churches.⁸⁰

These ideas are by no means new. As shown above, Avery Dulles' article in that 1980 issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* already suggested making greater allowances for a diversity of theologies in ecumenism, because a "confessionally neutral theological method" for ecumenism is not satisfactory for Christians with definite ecclesial commitments.⁸¹ By 2007, Dulles had heard of the Durham colloquium on Receptive Ecumenism, and he wrote the article "Saving Ecumenism from Itself" in part as a response. The article is significant; it comes near the end of Dulles' long and productive career in ecumenism,⁸² and it reflects a mature sense both of his enduring hope for the ecumenical movement and a realistic acceptance of some of the remaining differences between the churches.

Dulles describes what he understands to be the colloquium's focus, saying, "the speakers were asked to discuss what they could find in their own traditions that might be acceptable to the Catholic Church without detriment to its identity."⁸³ He is drawn to such a perspective, and he contrasts it with convergence-style ecumenism:

For some years now, I have felt that the method of convergence, which seeks to harmonize the doctrines of each ecclesial tradition on the basis of shared sources and methods, has nearly exhausted its potential. It has served well in the past and may still be useful... But to surmount the remaining barriers we need a different method... I have therefore been urging an ecumenism of enrichment by means of testimony.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Murray makes this claim in his discussion of the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogues, saying that receptive ecclesial learning has transformative potential for ecumenism that is actually more important than "a theorized conclusion in a convergence statement." See Murray, "ARCIC III," 210.

⁸¹ See again Avery Dulles, "Ecumenism and Theological Method," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Win. 1980): 40-48.

⁸² See Patrick Carey's superb exposition of Dulles' ecumenical career in Patrick Carey, *Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ: A Model Theologian, 1918-2008* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), particularly 349-390.

⁸³ Dulles, "Saving Ecumenism," 26.

⁸⁴ Dulles, "Saving Ecumenism," 26.

Dulles is not repudiating the ecumenical work he had previously done from the perspective of the convergence model, but he came to a realization later in his life that there were lingering doctrinal differences that simply resisted such convergence. To “surmount the remaining barriers” he recommends Receptive Ecumenism, or what he calls testimonial ecumenism.⁸⁵ This new perspective is not an indictment that former ecumenical efforts were in vain or even ill-informed. However, he now agrees that remaining issues of difference and disunity might better be addressed today from a perspective of mutual enrichment, or what is now more commonly referred to as Receptive Ecumenism.

Dulles sees the potential of this ecumenical method, and perhaps especially for Catholics. He says that it has some Catholic support, particularly in Pope John Paul’s encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, which speaks of ecumenical dialogue as “an exchange of gifts between the churches.” First and foremost, the exchange of gifts must be an honest expression of each church. He writes:

Unlike some recent methods of dialogue, ecumenism of this style leaves the participants free to draw on their own normative sources and does not constrain them to bracket and minimize what is specific to themselves. Far from being embarrassed by their own distinctive doctrines and practices, each partner should feel privileged to be able to contribute something positive that the others still lack.⁸⁶

For Catholics, he says this includes “the full panoply of beliefs, sustained by our own methods of certifying the truth of revelation. We are not ashamed of our reliance on tradition, the liturgy, . . . our confidence in the judgment of the Magisterium . . . the primacy

⁸⁵ Dulles, “Saving Ecumenism,” 26.

⁸⁶ Dulles, “Saving Ecumenism,” 26.

of the pope...”⁸⁷ He further suggests that Catholics would want to hear from the Protestant churches about “the reasons they have for speaking as they do of Christ alone, Scripture alone, grace alone, and faith alone” amongst other distinctive doctrines of the Reformation.⁸⁸ The result, he hopes, would be true progress in ecumenism. Yet he acknowledges that the fullness of ecumenical growth may never reach a desired level visible unity with full theological and ecclesial convergence, or at least not on this side of glory. Perhaps speaking with decades of ecumenical experience behind him, he seems willing to think differently about the goal of ecumenism:

The process of growth through mutual attestation will probably never reach its final consummation within historical time, but it can bring palpable results. It can lead the churches to emerge progressively from their present isolation into something more like a harmonious chorus. Enriched by the gifts of others, they can hope to raise their voices together in a single hymn to the glory of the triune God. The result to be sought is unity in diversity.⁸⁹

Dulles is convinced that there are riches to be gained with the receptive model of ecumenism, perhaps even “a deeper share in the truth of Christ.”⁹⁰

Overall, Receptive Ecumenism suggests that the visible unity as favored by traditional ecumenism may be unrealistic, at least for now. As Dulles so aptly points out, the convergence model seems especially challenged by the weight of definite theological and ecclesial commitments. Taking this into account, Receptive Ecumenism advocates for a larger sense of unity within multiplicity, and a methodology of mutual enrichment. Therefore, the fundamental principle or question that Receptive Ecumenism asks is: “What can we learn, or receive, with integrity from our various others in order to

⁸⁷ Dulles, “Saving Ecumenism,” 26.

⁸⁸ Dulles, “Saving Ecumenism,” 26.

⁸⁹ Dulles, “Saving Ecumenism,” 27.

⁹⁰ Dulles, “Saving Ecumenism,” 27.

facilitate our own growth together into deepened communion in Christ and the Spirit?”⁹¹ Clearly this thinking recognizes differences between us and others, but the working assumption is that because of these differences everyone has something to learn from someone else.

While this is a much more modest approach to ecumenical work, it still calls the churches to an ecumenism of active listening to others and internal evaluation of themselves. As Murray explains, “Receptive Ecumenism seeks to bring to the forefront the only attitude that can enable long-term progress towards unity to occur, that of self-critical receptivity.”⁹² On the one hand, Receptive Ecumenism allows each church their commitment to their tradition, church, and theology in an ecumenical environment that is open to these differences. On the other hand, each church is still expected to critically engage with itself in the process of truly hearing other churches express their commitments.

Receptive Ecumenism also reflects a larger global cultural trend of valuing one another’s history, language, and perspective. Those of us raised in the Western world value multi-culturalism. Our education systems teach children to be accepting of difference, and modern media exposes everyone to different ideas, places, and people usually in an ethically neutral way. We have become much more comfortable with diversity, and many of us are embracing that which makes us different and unique. There is in some younger circles a desire to “return to one’s roots,” and affirm one’s cultural heritage in ways that one’s parent’s generation did not. But this must also be coupled with a new respect and interest in the “roots” of others. This larger milieu

⁹¹ Paul Murray, “Preface” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ix.

⁹² Paul Murray, “Faith and Order & Receptive Ecumenism,” *One in Christ* 43/2 (2009): 194.

affects churches and Christian spirituality. This is a day in which our Christian identities—both ecclesial and personal—are complex.

Within this context, Murray thinks that Receptive Ecumenism simply addresses that issue more honestly.⁹³ He speaks of a “committed pluralist position” in a “dual sense:”

first, in the sense that it evinces a commitment to acknowledging the pluralist reality of the world of difference in which we exist and the need to negotiate this appropriately; secondly, in the sense that it makes a claim precisely for the legitimacy and rationality of particular rooted commitment in this context and for the way which this might be appropriately lived.⁹⁴

We are people whose Christian identities are found both in our small individual locale and within the broader society and world. We belong both to the one and to the many. This is something that Catholic ecumenist Margaret O’Gara describes as particularly evident for those engaged in ecumenical work: “Colleagues involved in ecumenism share the same poignant experience of love for their own traditions and restlessness within them—a kind of cognitive and emotional dissonance peculiar to the ecumenical task.”⁹⁵ Ecumenist or not, Christians today self-identify as *both* Christian *and* Lutheran, Pentecostal, Catholic, Reformed, or whatever it may be. And while there does remain that dissonance that O’Gara speaks of, most western Christians have acquired a certain comfort level with it. Overall, proponents of Receptive Ecumenism believe that their ideas better express contemporary Christian identity.

⁹³ Paul Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning—Establishing the Agenda,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. P. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7-8.

⁹⁴ Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism,” 8.

⁹⁵ Margaret O’Gara, “Receiving Gifts in Ecumenical Dialogue,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 35.

Similarly, James Sweeney endorses Receptive Ecumenism, finding it more amenable to the present day.⁹⁶ He speaks candidly about what he believes is a general malaise of contemporary culture and religion. Amid global uncertainty and religious fanaticism, he thinks that many Christians are tempted to retreat back into their own “tribe.” Sweeney says, “As Catholics, we might be tempted to regroup behind the barricades.”⁹⁷ Some ecumenists speak of this negatively as an impulse toward “reconfessionalism.”⁹⁸

Sweeney disagrees that this is the best response. The answer comes in better understanding and articulating our “tribal identities,” including the particular and the universal. The ecumenical task is to both embrace our individual church identities and remain deeply committed to the one church of Christ. He writes, “Ecumenism is best served by openly acknowledging the depth of the differences. Far from being a misfortune, the current impasse could actually be the start of ‘real’ ecumenism.”⁹⁹ Receptive Ecumenism allows participants to treasure the uniqueness of their own perspective—something they already do--while still encouraging them to be open to learn from others from different perspectives.

Different perspectives do not necessarily threaten ecumenism. Quite to the contrary, Receptive Ecumenism claims that it furthers ecumenism by better balancing unity and diversity. Sweeney explains that, “Church communities, from parishes to whole denominations, are fiercely protective of their individuality... Yet, religious communities also have a generosity of spirit, and as long as their traditions and spiritual ways are

⁹⁶ James Sweeney, “Receptive Ecumenism, Ecclesial Learning, and the ‘Tribe,’” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 333-345.

⁹⁷ Sweeney, 334.

⁹⁸ Dulles notes this trend in “Saving Ecumenism,” 25.

⁹⁹ Sweeney, 339.

respected they are open to learning from others.”¹⁰⁰ Within the Christian tradition and its scriptures there is much teaching about kindness, hospitality, and respect. In that spirit each person ought to be able to come to the ecumenical table and expect to be heard; each person also ought expect to have to listen. Far from suppressing the unique voices from different corners of Christendom, ecumenical dialogue can offer a safe place for them to speak.

In her contribution to the book *Receptive Ecumenism*, Margaret O’Gara uses the image of a mosaic to describe her understanding of the visible unity of the Christian church. She explains:

Some people mistakenly think of ecumenical dialogue as a kind of melting pot which seeks the elimination of the distinctive gifts of the many churches. This would lead to a weakening of the distinctive traditions and emphases that each communion brings to the table of dialogue. It would be a loss of identity, not enrichment. But in fact I have found that the gifts exchanged in ecumenical dialogue are more like a mosaic, where every piece is valuable and every piece is needed for the full picture of the one church of Christ.¹⁰¹

O’Gara argues that ecumenism is best seen as an exchange of Christian gifts. This includes a conscious openness and receptivity to the differences of other Christians and Christian traditions. The end result is a beautiful mosaic of different pieces that together make up the visible unity of the Church. No part constitutes the whole, and the uniqueness of one piece only enhances the magnificence of the complete work. She believes that this type of thinking about ecumenism better describes actual ecumenical discussions and relationships. In the end, O’Gara believes that Receptive Ecumenism serves to sustain ecumenists and the Church “for the long journey ahead.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Sweeny, 343.

¹⁰¹ O’Gara, 27.

¹⁰² O’Gara, 36.

Another contributor to *Receptive Ecumenism* is Landislas Örsy who says that receptive learning is a vital part of the healing process that ecumenism seeks to do.¹⁰³ He says that Receptive Ecumenism facilitates this by focusing “on how the churches could enrich themselves by learning and receiving doctrinal insights and sound practices from each other.”¹⁰⁴ However, Örsy admits that being truly receptive to others is difficult. He raises a particularly pointed issue:

Learning and receiving are ultimately the acceptance of a gift—but how do we know the gift is genuine? How do we know that a new intelligence, or practice, of faith inspired by a sister communion is an authentic development of doctrine and not an abandonment of our tradition? How do we know that an attractive proposition is true or false?¹⁰⁵

In the end Örsy acknowledges that questions about truth and doctrine remain ecclesially conditioned.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps, then, a strength of Receptive Ecumenism is its allowing the different churches to answer those questions for themselves, in keeping with their own commitments and identities.

Finally, proponents of Receptive Ecumenism suggest that focusing first on individuality and then on similarity ecumenism could further ecumenism. This is the opposite of what traditional ecumenism has done, emphasizing similarity with the expectation that it would lead to convergence. Instead, Receptive Ecumenism wants participants to lead with their particular strengths and be willing to share those assets with others. It does admit that ecumenical work is a balancing act: “Very few, of course, espouse lowest common denominator ecumenism, but on the other hand robust declarations of individuality are discomfoting. To be too Catholic—or too Anglican or

¹⁰³ Landislas Örsy, “Authentic *Learning and Receiving*—A Search for Criteria,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 39-51.

¹⁰⁴ Örsy, 42.

¹⁰⁵ Örsy, 43.

¹⁰⁶ Örsy, 39 and 43-44.

Methodist—is seen as a problem. Here lies the challenge.”¹⁰⁷ But an ecumenism that allows for these differences, that does in fact encourage them, might have something new to offer to the Church universal.

The perspective of Receptive Ecumenism is only beginning to receive broader recognition amongst ecumenists, and to be applied to specific ecumenical dialogues and theological discussions. For our purposes, one example is a short article by Denis Edwards, a Catholic theologian on the Australian Lutheran-Catholic dialogue. Edwards endorses Receptive Ecumenism and applies it to the Catholic-Lutheran discussions on justification.¹⁰⁸ Edwards says that Receptive Ecumenism could be furthered by the idea of “institutional charisms” which help identify the unique gifts of grace that are embodied in the life and structure of the different churches in dialogue.¹⁰⁹ He suggests how the Catholic Church can receive the Lutheran charism “of a liberating theology of justification,”¹¹⁰ and he includes a homily in the article to help teach Catholic believers how to appropriate this charism.

A similar, but much more theological, attempt is made by Paul Murray in the article “St. Paul and Ecumenism: Justification and All That.”¹¹¹ He compares Catholic and Lutheran interpretation of Pauline soteriology with the insights of the Joint Declaration between the two churches. Using Receptive Ecumenism, he argues that “both Catholic and Lutheran readings of Paul and justification, regardless of their strict exegetical accuracy, serve to articulate key principles of Christian existence under grace

¹⁰⁷ Sweeny, 341.

¹⁰⁸ Denis Edwards, “Receptive Ecumenism and the Charism of a Partner Church: The Example of Justification,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 43.3 (Dec. 2009): 167-177.

¹⁰⁹ Edwards, 167.

¹¹⁰ Edwards, 168.

¹¹¹ Paul Murray, “St. Paul and Ecumenism: Justification and All That,” *New Blackfriars* 91 (2010): 142-170.

which need not only be conjoined or placed alongside each other but to be allowed to inform each other."¹¹² While mentioning other difficult issues such as merit and “the mediation of the church,”¹¹³ Murray focuses specifically on the notion of grace, and how the Lutheran and Catholic articulations of grace offer possibilities for “transformative ecclesial learning” in the two faith communities.¹¹⁴ While the overall success of these articles may be debatable, it is clear that the idea of using the perspective of Receptive Ecumenism to address issues such as justification has much potential.

We will next look more specifically at ecumenism in both the Catholic and Reformed traditions, including the ecumenical dialogues between them, and then finally identify justification as an issue that may benefit from the perspective of Receptive Ecumenism in the Catholic and Reformed traditions.

2. Roman Catholic and Reformed Ecumenism

Recent times have witnessed the beginnings of a good relationship between the Reformed and Catholic churches. One positive and tangible result of the ecumenical movement has been an admission of guilt by both sides for the actions and attitudes that led to the divided church during the Protestant Reformation.¹¹⁵ Both the Catholic Church and the Reformed tradition have been able to recognize that they have committed serious sins against each other, and both have expressed genuine remorse for the situation of the

¹¹² Murray "St. Paul and Ecumenism," 147.

¹¹³ Murray, "St. Paul and Ecumenism," 169.

¹¹⁴ Murray, "St. Paul and Ecumenism," 170.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Reformed-Roman Catholic International Dialogue, second phase (1984-1990), "Towards a Common Understanding of the Church" warc.jalb.de/, accessed January 2013, http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file32.pdf.

Church today. They have viewed both the history of their division and the magnitude of its consequences with new eyes.

Today's ecumenical context offers new possibilities for Catholic and Reformed Christians. There have been a number of official Catholic-Reformed dialogues and bi-laterals that have addressed issues of theological and pastoral importance. We will evaluate these dialogues, and see how they must be considered examples of what we have called Convergence Ecumenism. We will assess the long-term impact of the dialogues and suggest how Receptive Ecumenism may further add to the discussion. It will be argued that especially on issues of traditional difference, including justification, Receptive Ecumenism may better enable us to see what is good and true in each other's position.

2.1 History of Reformed-Catholic Divide

It is generally agreed that the Church of the 16th century was troubled and in need of serious reform. The Reformed-Roman Catholic dialogue document "Towards a Common Understanding of the Church" gives an unflattering account of the deficiencies in the pre-Reformation Church, and shows how Catholics in contemporary times have been able to articulate a need for serious reform in the church, even as they lament its consequences.¹¹⁶ Likewise, while the Protestant Reformers saw themselves as restoring the authentic gospel to the Church, their actions were often full of pride and vengeance. The churches they founded often struggled with the same sins that they had so vehemently condemned in the Catholic Church. This 1990 dialogue document nicely

¹¹⁶ Reformed-Roman Catholic International Dialogue, "Common Understanding of Church," 34.

balances responsibility for the division of the Church, finding neither side innocent. It is a difficult and complicated history in which both Protestants and Catholics share blame.

The issue of justification in particular was one of disagreement between Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation and beyond. Seen negatively, these differences have helped create a contentious gulf between the two which has had many negative consequences. Seen positively, these differences have also helped identify what it means to be a Catholic or a Reformed Christian.

The question of what constitutes a Reformed church is a valid one. The Reformed tradition today is a diverse, international group of many different Protestant churches and denominations. Historically, the Reformed tradition consisted of a number of Western European churches that opposed some of the theology and practices of the Catholic Church. Robert Johnson, former director of the Institute for Reformed Theology, defines the Reformed tradition as "originally characterized by a distinctively non-Lutheran, Augustinian sacramental theology with a high ecclesiology but little regard for ecclesiastical tradition that is not traceable to the Scriptures or the earliest church."¹¹⁷ Their leaders, including John Calvin, acquired the name "Reformed" because they understood themselves to be reforming what they thought was incorrect in the Catholic Church of their day. There are a number of prominent, historic Reformed confessions and catechisms that further defined Reformed theology, including the First and Second Helvetic Confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Catechism.

¹¹⁷ Robert Johnson, "What is Reformed Theology?" reformedtheology.org, accessed April 28, 2013, <http://reformedtheology.org/SiteFiles/WhatIsRT.html>.

For the purposes of this project, references to the Reformed tradition denote affinity with those Reformed confessions and catechisms, some of which are held to be authoritative documents in many Reformed churches today. This delimitation offers a more historical perspective on Reformed identity, and allows for the explication of the classic Reformed understanding of justification. Certainly, there are many Reformed communities who no longer understand their identity so confessionally. However, these parameters are not uncommon. For example, Joseph Burgess and Jeffery Gros, when introducing the Catholic-Reformed dialogues, describe participating Reformed churches similarly: “These represent the dominant Calvinist churches with Scottish, Puritan, and Dutch heritage...Their standards of faith are grounded in the Reformed confessions.”¹¹⁸ These confessions are unique to the Reformed tradition, and provide substantive content on the Reformed perspective.

2.2 The Reformed Tradition and Ecumenism

Christians and communities from the Reformed tradition have been involved in the ecumenical movement since its inception in modern times.¹¹⁹ In 1970 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) was established as the ecumenical body for churches of different Reformed churches, including Presbyterian, Congregational, and United church denominations. WARC works closely with the WCC, and has been involved in many prominent ecumenical discussions. One important example is the

¹¹⁸ Joseph Burgess and Jeffery Gros, “Introduction,” in *Building Unity: Ecumenical Dialogues with Roman Catholic Participation in the United States* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 373-374.

¹¹⁹ For example, the Presbyterian Alliance was formed in 1875; it was involved in the Faith and Order movement and in the eventual establishment of the World Council of Churches. See World Alliance of Reformed Churches, “History,” [warc.ch/](http://www.warc.ch/), accessed March 2012, <http://www.warc.ch/where/history.html>.

Leuenberg Agreement, a product of the European Lutheran and Reformed church discussions."¹²⁰

In 2010 WARC joined with the Reformed Ecumenical Council, another ecumenical body. The new organization is called the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). It has 230 member churches from 108 countries, representing about 80 million people from the Reformed tradition. WCRC is the largest ecumenical association of Reformed churches in the world and it is committed to facilitating and furthering the work of ecumenism.

Thus Christians from Reformed churches have offered leadership at many levels of the ecumenical movement. In fact, the first General Secretary of the WCC was Willem Visser 't Hoof, a member of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands. Participation in and commitment to ecumenism from individual Reformed churches does vary from church to church, but the general trend of the tradition is one that has embraced the ecumenical movement and its desire for the greater unification of the Church universal.

2.3 The Roman Catholic Tradition and Ecumenism

The Roman Catholic Church was not an official participant in the initial ecumenical activities that were taking place in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Fitzgerald comments, "The formal entry of the Roman Catholic Church into the contemporary ecumenical movement came only after 40 years of dialogue between

¹²⁰ The agreement remains in effect today and it includes pulpit exchange and Eucharistic sharing. See Leuenberg Church Fellowship, "Who Are We?" leuenberg.net, accessed March 2012, <http://www.leuenberg.net/node>.

Protestant, Anglican, Old Catholic and Orthodox churches in various settings.”¹²¹ This isolation was not to last. Many historians have noted the Catholic Church’s pronounced change in attitude about ecumenism and Christians of other traditions, especially following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Patrick Carey notes the change in the American context, calling the new relationships between the Catholic Church and other Christian traditions a "seismic shift" for the Catholic Church.¹²²

One reason for Catholic reluctance toward ecumenism—and one not insignificant for our purposes—is theology. Francis Sullivan traces the traditional Catholic understanding that there is no salvation outside the church, meaning the Catholic Church and its particular ecclesiological structure and sacramental nature.¹²³ He argues that this understanding was neither univocal throughout the history of the church, nor is it the official teaching of the Catholic Church today. Yet Sullivan explains that the idea of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* has a long and significant history in the Catholic Church. This understanding undermined interest and involvement in ecumenism, and Sullivan credits the rising influence of the ecumenical movement as one reason the Catholic Church began thinking differently about salvation and the Catholic Church.¹²⁴

Even before the Second Vatican Council, Catholics began to rethink their understanding of Protestants and of ecumenism. Jeffrey Gros notes that there were influential Catholic leaders whose “pioneering work” helped lay the groundwork that

¹²¹Fitzgerald, *The Ecumenical Movement*, 127.

¹²² Patrick Carey, "American Catholic Ecumenism on the Eve of the Vatican II, 1940-1962," in *U.S. Catholic Historian* 28.2 (Spring 2010), 1.

¹²³ See Francis Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992) for a detailed historical explanation of this statement.

¹²⁴ Sullivan, 202-203.

“bore fruit” at Vatican II as pertains to ecumenism.¹²⁵ Furthermore, there was what Gros calls “suggestions of change” in statements and publications from the Vatican in the years preceding the Council, including a friendliness toward Protestants and an acknowledgment of some of the positive aspects of the ecumenical movement.¹²⁶

Overall, the Catholic Church officially began to take a different approach to ecumenism:

“Within the strict conditions of Catholic ecclesiology, experts could participate in discussions of faith and morals with other Christians. The pursuit of ‘spiritual ecumenism’ and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity were encouraged.”¹²⁷

The difference in Catholic attitudes toward ecumenism was felt world-wide. Carey chronicles the change in American Catholic-Protestant relations that resulted in the American bishops at Vatican II voting “in overwhelming support”¹²⁸ of the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*.¹²⁹ The Roman Catholic Church formally entered the ecumenical movement in 1964 with that celebrated decree. The Decree on Ecumenism is an especially significant document, giving shape and foundation to Catholic ecumenism to come. It expresses grief over the divided church, calling Christians of other traditions “separated brethren.”¹³⁰ It also pronounces the irreversible commitment of the Roman Catholic Church to ecumenism.¹³¹

While the Catholic Church is committed to engaging in ecumenism, there are some non-negotiable understandings for Catholics that pose a challenge for relations with

¹²⁵ Jeffrey Gros, *Introduction to Ecumenism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 29.

¹²⁶ Gros, *Introduction to Ecumenism*, 29.

¹²⁷ Gros, *Introduction to Ecumenism*, 29.

¹²⁸ Carey, "American Catholic Ecumenism," 1-15.

¹²⁹ Vatican Council II, "Decree on Ecumenism" (21 November 1964), in *The Basic Sixteen Documents of the Vatican Council II*, edited by Austin Flannery, 499-523 (Northport, NY: Costello, 1996).

¹³⁰ Vatican Council II, "Decree on Ecumenism," §3.

¹³¹ Vatican Council II, "Decree on Ecumenism," §1.

Protestants. Already in 1964 Pope Paul VI in his encyclical "*Ecclesiam Suam*" speaks of ecumenical dialogue as a "complex and delicate matter."¹³² He recognizes that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, specifically the papacy, is problematic for non-Catholics. Yet he insists that the "authoritative pastoral office of Peter" is the true principle of unity established by Christ himself.¹³³ And while the Catholic Church eagerly anticipates its ecumenical reconciliation with non-Catholic brethren, it believes that the unity will be found in communion with the Bishop of Rome. These ideas were further articulated in "*Lumen Gentium*,"¹³⁴ another conciliar text from Vatican II, and affirmed again in the year 2000 with the declaration from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*.¹³⁵

These issues of ecclesiology remain important in Catholic-Protestant ecumenism, and do create a certain tension between the two traditions.¹³⁶ However, the Roman Catholic Church has been heavily involved in ecumenical work since Vatican II, and its commitment to ecumenism is unquestionable. Another highly significant example of the Catholic Church's dedication to ecumenism is the establishment of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, which has been very active in the work of ecumenism. One obvious result of the Catholic Church joining the ecumenical table has been markedly improved relationships amongst different Christian traditions with Catholics.

¹³² Paul IV, "*Ecclesiam Suam*" (6 Aug. 1964) in *The Christian Faith* (New York: Alba House, 2001), 109.

¹³³ Paul IV, "*Ecclesiam Suam*" (6 Aug. 1964), 110.

¹³⁴ Vatican Council II, "*Lumen Gentium*" (21 Nov. 1964).

¹³⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* (6 Aug. 2000), vatican.va, accessed January 2013, http://vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

¹³⁶ For example, see Richard McBrien's account of the Reformed disappointment and dismay over the publication of *Dominus Iesus* in Richard McBrien, "*Dominus Iesus: An Ecclesiological Critique*," lecture given at the Centro Pro Unione, Thursday, 11 January 2001, sedos.org, accessed February 1013, <http://sedomission.org/old/eng/McBrien.htm>.

2.4 Reformed and Catholic Traditions in Dialogue

Tension notwithstanding, since 1965 there have been bi-lateral ecumenical dialogues between member churches of WARC (now WCRC) and the Roman Catholic Church. John Bush and Patrick Cooney marked forty years of these conversations with an article published on the website of the U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops.¹³⁷ They comment that, "The conversation has ranged from the heady days of an optimistic ecumenical movement, through what some considered a near-death experience at the end of the twentieth century and into what now seems to be an era of maturing accomplishment."¹³⁸ Participation in the international dialogues has included official delegates of the Catholic Church (the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity) and members of WCRC, such as the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church of America.¹³⁹ More recently the Christian Reformed Church, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and the Hungarian Reformed Church have joined the conversation in the American Catholic-Reformed discussions.¹⁴⁰ These discussions are ongoing, and the American dialogue group has been especially active.¹⁴¹

The first phase of the formal international dialogues resulted in the 1977 document "The Presence of Christ in the Church and World."¹⁴² This document

¹³⁷ John Bush and Patrick Cooney, "Journey in Faith: Forty Years of Reformed-Catholic Dialogue: 1965-2005," [usccb.org](http://old.usccb.org/seia/journey.shtml), accessed April 29, 2013, <http://old.usccb.org/seia/journey.shtml>.

¹³⁸ Bush and Cooney, 1.

¹³⁹ Bush and Cooney, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Bush and Cooney, 1.

¹⁴¹ See Bush and Cooney, 5 and 10-17.

¹⁴² Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue, "The Presence of Christ in Church and World," [warc.jalb.de](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file/31.pdf), accessed April 29, 2013, http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file/31.pdf.

summarizes discussions that occurred on five occasions from 1970-1975. The conversations were centered around what it calls "three traditional problems:" Christology, ecclesiology, and "the attitude of the Christian in the world."¹⁴³ Five meetings were held with topics assigned, "Christ's relationship to the Church," "The Teaching Authority of the Church," "The Presence of Christ in the World," "The Eucharist," and "The Ministry." Perhaps exemplary of the "heady days" of the early ecumenism that Bush and Wood refer to above, "The Presence of Christ in the Church and World" is a highly positive document. While it claims to make no attempt to produce a synthesis in theology,¹⁴⁴ it does creatively highlight what it believes to be a growing convergence on the topics surveyed.

The second phase of the international WARC-Catholic dialogue occurred from 1984-1990. The resulting document is entitled "Towards a Common Understanding of the Church,"¹⁴⁵ and its focus is on similarities and differences between Catholic and Reformed theology on the doctrine of the church. Background to the document is a 1977 dialogue paper from the American Catholic-Reformed consultation entitled "The Unity We Seek,"¹⁴⁶ and taken together the documents work at finding avenues for visible unity with future convergence as the stated goal. "Towards a Common Understanding" speaks of working together "toward future reconciliation" and that, "we are moving closer to

¹⁴³ Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue, "The Presence of Christ," 2.

¹⁴⁴ Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue, "The Presence of Christ," 3.

¹⁴⁵ Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue, "Towards a Common Understanding of the Church," [warc.jalb.de](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file32.pdf). Accessed January 2013. http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file32.pdf.

¹⁴⁶ Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue (North America), "The Unity We Seek," in *Building Unity: Ecumenical Dialogues with Roman Catholic Participation in the United States*, ed. by Joseph Burgess and Jeffrey Gros (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 387-417.

being able to write our histories together.”¹⁴⁷ The “Unity We Seek” document states more clearly, “ecclesiastical unity is possible.”¹⁴⁸

Both documents give expression to the unity in Christian faith, which enables a “wider horizon of reconciliation”¹⁴⁹ between Catholic and Reformed churches. “The Unity We Seek” calls more specifically for a period of gradual transition, reflection, and shared experience at all levels.¹⁵⁰ Both documents discuss Eucharistic sharing between Catholic and Reformed Christians, with the “Unity We Seek” suggesting some specific occasions for intercommunion.¹⁵¹ “Towards a Common Understanding” is more descriptive of the challenges to intercommunion, concluding that, “we are not yet in a position to celebrate the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper together.”¹⁵² In the end, the issue of Eucharistic sharing shows how ecclesiology has proved to be an area of remaining and significant difference between the Catholic and Reformed traditions.

Taken overall, it is difficult to gauge the long-term effects of these international ecumenical dialogues. The documents were given to the churches to discuss internally, and the conversations continue. The Catholic Church has acknowledged and endorsed the dialogues at the highest level,¹⁵³ but acknowledgment and interest among various Reformed churches varies. It is fair to say that in the decades since the dialogues began, there has also been no gradual transition toward ecclesiastical unity between the two, and

¹⁴⁷ Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue, “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church,” §6-7.

¹⁴⁸ Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue (North America), “Unity We Seek,” 385.

¹⁴⁹ Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue, “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church,” §31.

¹⁵⁰ Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue (North America), “Unity We Seek,” 395.

¹⁵¹ Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue (North America), “Unity We Seek,” 399.

¹⁵² Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue, “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church,” §152.

¹⁵³ For example, John Paul II personally endorsed beginning of the third phase of the WARC-Catholic dialogue. See John Paul II, “Greetings of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Participants of the Third Phase of the International Dialogue between the “World Alliance of Reformed Churches” and the Catholic Church” (18 Sept. 2000), va.org, accessed January 1013, http://vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2000/jul-sep/documents.

in some instances the obstacles to that unity seem even greater today.¹⁵⁴ Perhaps, then, the dialogue documents reflect an overly-optimistic ecumenical spirit. While differences are mentioned, the stress always remains on similarity and mutuality. From a contemporary perspective, it would be hard not to conclude that the documents do not adequately acknowledge or realistically address stubborn areas of remaining difference between the Catholic and Reformed traditions.

At the very least, however, the discussions prove a warming relationship between Christians from the Catholic and Reformed traditions. They have also paved the way for other ecumenical activities, including friendly addresses by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI in word or letter to Reformed churches or WCRC,¹⁵⁵ and attendance at significant events in each other's respective churches.¹⁵⁶ Again, there is a new friendliness to Reformed and Catholic interactions. Officially, both traditions have committed themselves to the work of reconciliation between them. Bilateral discussions have at least broached subjects of traditional disagreements. Each has been willing to offer hospitality to the other, and attitudes of contention have been replaced with welcome.

¹⁵⁴ Again, note the controversy in Reformed circles about the publication of *Dominus Iesus* in Richard McBrien, "Dominus Iesus: An Ecclesiological Critique," lecture given at the Centro Pro Unione, Thursday, 11 January 2001, sedos.org, accessed February 1013, <http://sedomission.org/old/eng/McBrien.htm>.

¹⁵⁵ For example, see Pope John Paul's welcome to the representatives of the Dutch Reformed Church to Rome in John Paul II, "Address of John Paul II to the Representatives of the Dutch Reformed Church" (21 March 1986), va.org, accessed January 2013, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1986/march/documents. See also Pope Benedict XVI's 2006 address to members of WARC in Benedict XVI, "Address to WARC," in Benedict XVI. "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Leaders of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches." (7 Jan. 2006). vatican.va. Accessed January 2013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/january/documents.

¹⁵⁶ This includes WARC accepting the invitation to send observers to Vatican II. For a comparative example see Charles Hodge's letter from 1869 declining an invitation from Pius IX for the Presbyterian Church U.S. to attend Vatican I in *The Banner of Truth* 415 (April 1998), 22-25. It also includes WARC presence at the funeral of John Paul II and the inauguration of Benedict XVI, as well as the Catholic Church sending high-level observers to meetings of WARC, including Cardinal Cassidy.

3. Justification in Protestant-Catholic Ecumenism

Justification is usually understood to be the most important traditional issue of contention between Catholics and Protestants. Most Protestants believe it to be the most significant theological issue of the Protestant Reformation. Through the centuries, one's beliefs regarding justification became the theological litmus test as to whether one was Protestant or Catholic. Thus it ought be no surprise that the issue of justification was a topic of major concern for ecumenically-minded Protestants and Catholics, even in the early days of the ecumenical movement. Richard White says that "a new perspective on justification--that justification does not and should not divide the churches--began to emerge as early as the 1940's."¹⁵⁷

There were a number of ways in which justification underwent reassessment. White cites a change in the Catholic interpretation of Martin Luther as one factor that raised Catholic interest in the topic of justification. Ecumenically-minded theologians and historians such as Joseph Lortz, Heinrich Fries, and Otto Pesch challenged the Catholic Church to take a more positive view of Martin Luther and his doctrine of justification.¹⁵⁸ They tended to be optimistic about the possibility of ecumenical agreement about justification. Lortz—already in 1949—could say that Luther's articulation of justification by faith alone "is a good Catholic formula."¹⁵⁹

With these discussions already underway, Hans Küng published his groundbreaking *Justification* in 1957. In this dissertation he compares Karl Barth's theology of

¹⁵⁷ Richard White, *Justification in Ecumenical Dialogue: An Assessment of the Catholic Contribution*, (dissertation, Marquette University 1995), 3.

¹⁵⁸ White, *Justification in Ecumenical Dialogue*, 6-11.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in White, *Justification in Ecumenical Dialogue*, 7.

justification with Catholic doctrine on the topic. He concludes that "there is fundamental agreement between Karl Barth's position and that of the Catholic Church in regards to the theology of justification seen in its totality."¹⁶⁰ It is widely acknowledged that Küng's work did more to propel the ecumenical study of this issue than any other. Anthony Lane calls the dissertation "epoch-making."¹⁶¹ Above all, Küng worked to show convergence between Catholic and Protestant theology on the issue of justification.

Küng's *Justification* was not without controversy, and controversy continues to this day. Anthony Malloy argues in his 2005 book, *Engrafted into Christ*, that Küng is intentionally ambiguous about what Malloy considers to be the heart of the dispute between Protestants and Catholics, that of the formal cause of justification.¹⁶² In short, not everyone became convinced of fundamental agreement between Catholics and Protestants on the doctrine of justification.

Another example of Catholic and Protestant reappraisal of justification is the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*,¹⁶³ involving the Catholic Church and churches of the Lutheran World Federation. While this important document will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter, its historical significance needs to be noted. This document records a considerable level of agreement between the Catholic and Lutheran traditions on aspects of the theological issue that was at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. The JDDJ claims to be "a decisive step forward on the way to

¹⁶⁰ Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*, trans. Thomas Collins, Edmund Tolk, and David Granskou (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 277-8.

¹⁶¹ Anthony Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (New York: T&T Clark, 2002), 87.

¹⁶² Christopher Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ: A Critique of the Joint Declaration* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), chap. 3.

¹⁶³ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," vatican.va, accessed January 2013, http://vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html.

overcoming the division of the church.”¹⁶⁴ It can fairly be said to be an example of convergence-style ecumenism because above all, it seeks to articulate a common understanding of justification between Catholics and Lutherans.¹⁶⁵

It should be noted that there is no parallel document in Catholic-Reformed communities. While the Catholic-Reformed dialogues have focused on similarities in Christian faith, Christology, and ecclesiology, they have only very briefly broached the subject of justification.¹⁶⁶ And even though WARC was invited to consider signing on to the JDDJ, it chose not to pursue it.¹⁶⁷ According to John Radano, part of the challenge to such consideration is the diversity of the Reformed churches represented by WARC.¹⁶⁸ Thus, he recommends a bilateral approach where the Catholic Church would engage Reformed churches to consider the JDDJ individually. However, there seems to be no evidence of that happening in the years since the publishing of the JDDJ. Another issue that may impede Reformed signature of the JDDJ is that it, quite obviously, is not a Reformed document and thus does not reflect some of the unique emphases of Reformed theology about justification. Reformed theologian Anna Case-Winters agrees, and in a short essay suggests ways in which the JDDJ could be added onto so that it might

¹⁶⁴ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §44.

¹⁶⁵ Note especially section 3 which is entitled, “The Common Understanding of Justification,” in Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration*.

¹⁶⁶ “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church” includes three paragraphs on justification in §77-79, and it is debatable whether these paragraphs can be said to sufficiently speak for Catholic theology.

¹⁶⁷ The reasons for this are unclear. See World Methodist Council, “The World Methodist Council and the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” worldmethodistcouncil.org, accessed May 2, 2013, http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/justificationworld_methodist_council_and_the_jddj.pdf for the November 2001 consultation where the Pontifical Council invited both the Methodist Church and WARC to consider signing the JDDJ. The Methodist Church eventually did do so in 2006, but WARC has remained reticent. Jared Wicks also mentions this consultation, but he does not speak about the results of that consultation. See Wicks, “Justification in Broader Horizon,” *Pro Ecclesia* XII.4 (Fall 2003), 473.

¹⁶⁸ John Radano, “Report on World Alliance of Reformed Churches-Catholic Church Relations,” *L'Osservatore Romano* (Rome, Italy), 31 March 2004.

manifest the perspective and insights of the Reformed tradition.¹⁶⁹ She includes a more nuanced understanding of sanctification,¹⁷⁰ disagreements with both the Catholic and the Lutheran idea of the law of God,¹⁷¹ and a stronger statement about the assurance of salvation.¹⁷² While potentially a helpful idea, there is again no evidence of discussions to lengthen the JDDJ in order to include Reformed thought on justification.

Therefore, while justification is an issue of traditional division, it has not been reconsidered in Reformed-Catholic ecumenism in any official or ecclesially sanctioned way. Reformed churches have not embraced the Joint Declaration individually, nor has WARC engaged the Catholic Church about the JDDJ on a corporate level. There simply is not the same excitement about the JDDJ in Reformed circles, and instead there seems to be a hesitancy to engage the Catholic Church on issues as large as justification.¹⁷³ Whether the issues are ecclesial or theological, it seems fair to say that justification remains an area of difference between the two traditions that has not been addressed ecumenically.

In response to this situation, this dissertation will identify the distinctive features of both the Roman Catholic and the Reformed tradition's understanding of justification by using the perspective of Receptive Ecumenism. We will compare and contrast the

¹⁶⁹ Anna Case-Winters, "Joint Declaration on Justification: Reformed Comments," in *Concord Makes Strength: Essays in Reformed Ecumenism* ed. by John Coakley, 88-98 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

¹⁷⁰ Case-Winters, "Joint Declaration on Justification," 91-94.

¹⁷¹ Case-Winters, "Joint Declaration on Justification," 94-95.

¹⁷² Case-Winters, "Joint Declaration on Justification," 95-96.

¹⁷³ For a comparative example consider the Christian Reformed Church (CRCNA)'s recent willingness to engage official representatives of the Catholic Church on a much more specific confessional issue, that of Heidelberg Catechism's Q&A 80. The issue itself was significant--the Catholic mass—but the confessional context and its limitations made the discussion (and eventual bracketing of the material in the catechism!) feasible. See Bert Witvoet, "Synod 2006: CRC ends Condemnation of Roman Catholic Mass," [thebanner.org](http://www.thebanner.org/news/2011/01/synod-2006-crc-ends-condemnation-of-roman-catholic-mass), accessed June 2013, <http://www.thebanner.org/news/2011/01/synod-2006-crc-ends-condemnation-of-roman-catholic-mass> and the comments in the CRC's updated version of the Heidelberg Catechism (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2006), Question 80.

doctrines, identifying what the 'non-negotiables' are for each ecclesial community on the doctrine of justification. In particular, the historical and theological foundations of the doctrine will be explored. These foundations give rise to the differences between the traditions, and speak to unique facets of the identity and perspective of each church. In the end, understanding these differences, and respecting them, could enable Catholic and Reformed Christians to enter into ecumenical dialogue with new energy.

Overall, the purpose of this project is not to analyze the rightness or wrongness of the different positions, but to understand them in the contemporary ecumenical milieu. There may indeed be right or wrong views, or even better or worse ones, but these decisions are not properly the work of ecumenism done from a receptive position. If Catholic and Reformed Christians can see that their differences result from different histories, philosophical commitments, Biblical interpretations, and ecclesial traditions, they will be better able to discuss these issues with humility and respect. They may even have something to learn from each other to enhance their own understanding of the doctrine of justification.

Receptive Ecumenism points to a more modest approach when considering topics of traditional difference and disunity. In the end, ecumenists might envision genuine reconciliation as less about creating a great, future convergence of the churches, and more about enabling deeper understanding and self-examination amongst the churches. Even on issues as difficult as justification, Receptive Ecumenism may enable each church to be enriched by another as they all grow into deeper Christian faith together.

Chapter 2: The Catholic-Lutheran Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

Surely one must consider the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation in any investigation on justification and ecumenism. This historic agreement was signed on Reformation Day, October 31, 1999 at Augsburg, Germany. In July of 2006, the World Methodist Council also signed on to the agreement. The Joint Declaration is an example of convergence-style ecumenism; its stated intent is to attest to a new level of agreement on the doctrine. Indeed, the Joint Declaration is clear from the onset that its express purpose is to state areas of basic theological consensus and thus overcome some historical divisions. In its own words, the Joint Declaration says that subscribing churches “are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification” and that the agreement, “does encompass a consensus on the basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that remaining differences are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.”¹⁷⁴ The agreement articulates shared belief, and while there is some structural allowance of remaining difference, the content of the agreement is focused on consensus and commonality between Catholics and Lutherans—and subsequently Methodists—on the doctrine of justification.

This chapter introduces the Joint Declaration and its importance. It will briefly survey the history of the document and its success before examining key points of its theology of justification in more detail. Next, some theological challenges coming from both Catholic and Lutherans will be identified. It is fair to say that there are some

¹⁷⁴ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §5. See also §40-44 for additional statements on the consensus achieved.

lingering questions as to whether the Joint Declaration adequately represents the traditional thought of Lutherans and Catholics. Finally, this chapter will suggest that for ecumenism going forward, a helpful approach would be one that offers a more balanced articulation of similarity and difference. This would be especially valuable on issues of traditional theological difference and disunity, like justification, where articulations of doctrine do say something about the identity and self-understanding of that tradition. Receptive Ecumenism is one possibility that sees remaining differences less as areas of disunity between the churches and more as things that express the unique identity and perspective of the churches.

1. History and Significance of the Joint Declaration

Since the dawn of the ecumenical age, divided Christians have been keenly aware of their historical disagreements over the doctrine of justification. Edward Cassidy points to the Second Vatican Council as the impetus for the Catholic Church to begin officially engaging Christians from churches issuing from the Reformation in discussions on issues including justification.¹⁷⁵ John Radano agrees, calling the JDDJ “one of the best results” of the dialogues resulting from Vatican II’s express ecumenical concern in its Decree on Ecumenism.¹⁷⁶ He states that, “From the perspective of the Catholic Church’s participation, the Joint Declaration was, in a particular way, the fruit of the Second Vatican Council.”¹⁷⁷ From the Lutheran perspective, Ishmael Noko points to

¹⁷⁵ Edward Cassidy, “Forward” in *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation on Justification* by John Radano (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), xiv.

¹⁷⁶ John Radano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation on Justification: A Chronology of the Holy See’s Contributions, 1961-1999, to a New Relationship between Lutherans & Catholics and to Steps Leading to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), xxi.

¹⁷⁷ Radano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation*, xxvi.

heightened ecumenical interest and increased church fellowship that led to the ecumenical achievement of the signing of the JDDJ.¹⁷⁸

In some sense, the risks of ecumenical involvement in issues as significant as justification were higher for the Catholic Church due to its particular ecclesial self-understanding, as discussed earlier. David Truemper comments that after Vatican II:

The readiness to speak of non-Roman Catholic Christianity as in some sense deserving the label of “ecclesial communities” (though nevertheless allegedly deficient in matters of orders, authority, and sacramentality) opened the door to the participation of the Roman Catholic communion... The consequences would be staggering, as Rome took the risk of sitting down at the dialogue table without specifying in advance the nature of its role or the shape of the table. To be sure, Rome’s position was clear: we are the church, and we’ll decide what criteria will be used to grant that title to the rest of you. Of course, that is precisely the position that all the rest had assumed as well... The ecumenical movement is a voyage of discovery in the quest to recover unity. Any participation in ecumenical conversation has meant a willingness on the part of the participating church (body) to put its exclusiveness on the line and to declare its readiness to discover that the “other” might also, in fact and in truth, be the church as well.¹⁷⁹

Certainly the willingness of the Catholic Church to engage and sign the Joint Declaration is monumental, and proves its commitment to the unity of the larger Christian church in the face of serious historical and theological disagreements. Above all, the signing of the Joint Declaration indicates a new willingness on the part of Lutherans and Catholics to speak together about divisive issues, and to do so in an official, ecclesially-sanctioned manner. Susan Wood notes that “This text is the first joint declaration that the Roman Catholic Church has made with any church of the Reformation and represents official

¹⁷⁸ Ishmael Noko, “Forward” in *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation on Justification* by John Radano (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), xvi.

¹⁷⁹ David Truemper, “Introduction to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” in *Rereading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification*, ed. by David Aune (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) 31.

ecclesial reception of the results of dialogue on justification with member churches of the Lutheran World Federation.”¹⁸⁰

This accomplishment was precipitated by thirty years of official dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans. Radano describes a growing partnership between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation in the years immediately following Vatican II, including Catholic-Lutheran working groups, high-level exchanges of correspondence and observers, and an official visit to the Vatican by a Lutheran World Federation delegation in 1969.¹⁸¹

There were a number of ecumenical discussions and reports that laid the foundation for the Joint Declaration and its success. One example is the 1972 “Malta Report,” which is the result of the first phase of the Catholic-Lutheran dialogues.¹⁸² Minna Hietamäki says, “The Malta Report can in retrospect be described more as a survey of current theological positions than as an attempt to produce common theological statements.”¹⁸³ It is important to note that the document contains a significant section on justification, including comments that “a far-reaching consensus is developing in the interpretation of the doctrine,”¹⁸⁴ and that although some questions remain, “a far-reaching agreement in the understanding of the doctrine of justification appears possible.”¹⁸⁵ Radano says that these comments in the “Malta Report” encouraged more

¹⁸⁰ Susan Wood, “Catholic Reception of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” in *Rereading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification*, ed. by David Aune (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 43.

¹⁸¹ Radano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation*, 31-34.

¹⁸² “Malta Report,” in *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, eds. Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 168-189.

¹⁸³ Minna Hietamäki, *Agreeable Agreement: An Examination of the Quest for Consensus in Ecumenical Dialogue* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 21-22.

¹⁸⁴ “Malta Report,” §26.

¹⁸⁵ “Malta Report,” §28.

dialogue on the issue of justification in the following two decades, and helped create the environment for the JDDJ.¹⁸⁶

Other important sources include *Justification by Faith*, the 1985 report of the U. S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue which took up the issue of justification in detail.¹⁸⁷ Anthony Lane has high praise for this report, saying “This has generally, and rightly, been regarded as the most satisfactory of our documents on justification.”¹⁸⁸ *Justification by Faith* articulated a simple yet substantial unity statement about justification: “Our entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Christ Jesus and on the gospel whereby the good news of God’s merciful action in Christ is made known; we do not place our ultimate trust in anything other than God’s promise and saving work in Christ.”¹⁸⁹ Part of the strength of this document, according to Lane, is an open acknowledgement of remaining theological differences and difficulties. He says, “There is no pretence that differences do not remain. Some of the historic differences are seen as misunderstandings, some are seen as complimentary understandings but some are acknowledged to be irreconcilable differences.”¹⁹⁰ Some of these differences include explanation of the Lutheran ideas of forensic justification¹⁹¹ and the remaining sinfulness of the justified.¹⁹² From the Catholic side, the document includes articulation of merit¹⁹³

¹⁸⁶ Radano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation*, 42.

¹⁸⁷ *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, ed. by H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985). The volume also contains a background paper from Avery Dulles entitled “Justification in Contemporary Catholic Theology,” 256-277.

¹⁸⁸ Anthony Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (New York: T&T Clark, 2002), 97.

¹⁸⁹ *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, §4.

¹⁹⁰ Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 99.

¹⁹¹ *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, §98.

¹⁹² *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, §102.

¹⁹³ *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, §109 and 111.

and of satisfaction.¹⁹⁴ All of these significant differences, however, are evaluated from the perspective of shared concerns,¹⁹⁵ and care is given to show how these—perhaps even “irreconcilable”¹⁹⁶—differences still demonstrate the main affirmation of the ecumenical document. Hietamäki agrees with Lane’s estimation of *Justification by Faith*. She writes that the document “provides a common description of the fundamental meaning of both the Catholic and the Reformation’s teaching on justification. The description is not identical with either church’s teaching, but shows what they attempt to communicate in different ways.”¹⁹⁷ Radano comments that *Justification by Faith* “became one of several basic studies that would contribute to formulations in the Joint Declaration a decade later.”¹⁹⁸

One significant challenge that had to be faced in these Catholic-Lutheran discussions was the mutual condemnation each church community had against the other on the justification issue. The anathemas pronounced in the 16th century still applied to both the Catholic Church and the churches of the LWF, yet there was a new openness for ways to interpret them in a more limited and historically-conditioned light. This occurred even at high levels; Pope John Paul II, for example, spoke about the need for Lutherans and Catholics to continue dialogue about “the anathemas pronounced in the sixteenth century,”¹⁹⁹ and at one point held a positive discussion with the Lutheran bishops of Denmark on the complex historical circumstances that led to the excommunication of

¹⁹⁴ *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, §114 and 116.

¹⁹⁵ See summary in *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, §120-121.

¹⁹⁶ *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, §121.

¹⁹⁷ Hietamäki, *Agreeable Agreement*, 181-182.

¹⁹⁸ Radano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation*, 62.

¹⁹⁹ Quoted in Radano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation*, 115. Radano recounts the Pope’s personal interest and involvement in ecumenical activities between Catholics and Lutherans in years leading up to the publication of the JDDJ, including these comments where the Pope refers to the historical *sitz im leben* of the mutual theological condemnations.

Martin Luther.²⁰⁰ The reality of anathemas and excommunications over the justification issue posed threats over any ecumenical progress, and it was a reality that had to be addressed before the beginning of any bilateral statement about justification.

The 1986 German report *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?*²⁰¹ was helpful in suggesting how contemporary churches could move beyond the anathemas. Justification was one of three topics that the report specifically addressed. It nicely summarizes what it calls “distinguishing doctrines”²⁰² of the Catholic and Protestant positions on justification, including different understandings of sin, concupiscence, human agency, faith, and grace.²⁰³ The report identifies varying concerns and emphases that reflect different structures of thinking and modes of expression. Similarly, Pieter De Witte believes that the *Condemnations* report identifies a crucial idea: “that different legitimate theological ‘concerns’ underlie differing and even contradictory theological and doctrinal positions.”²⁰⁴ The report thus states that differences in theology—resulting from those differences in concerns and structures—do not necessarily imply incompatibility, nor do they require mutual condemnations. It concludes that:

Catholic doctrine does not overlook what Protestant theology stresses: the personal character of grace, and its link with the Word; nor does it maintain what Protestant theology is afraid of: grace as an objective “possession” (even if a conferred possession) on the part of the human being—something over which he can dispose.

²⁰⁰ See Radano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation*, 117.

²⁰¹ *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?*, ed. Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

²⁰² *Condemnations of Reformation Era*, 30.

²⁰³ *Condemnations of Reformation Era*, 30-36.

²⁰⁴ Pieter De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference: To the Heart of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Differentiated Consensus on Justification* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 109.

Protestant theology does not overlook what Catholic doctrine stresses: the creative and renewing character of God's love; nor does it maintain what Catholic theology is afraid of: 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.

This means that the mutual rejections applied even in the sixteenth century only to indistinct and misleading formulations. They certainly no longer apply to the partner's actual views.²⁰⁵

The report did generate some controversy; Avery Dulles, for instance, stated that while he was in favor of some future joint statement on justification, he disagreed with the idea of that statement including what he calls the "lifting" of the condemnations.²⁰⁶ Generally speaking, however, the idea that doctrinal condemnations of the past may not necessarily apply in the contemporary context was becoming more popular. Furthermore, *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era* is prominently noted at the beginning of the Joint Declaration as a report of "special attention" to the agreement.²⁰⁷

Radano also notes the importance of both a 1991 Lutheran World Federation (LFD) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Church Unity (PCPCU) working paper,

²⁰⁵ *Condemnations of Reformation Era*, 49.

²⁰⁶ Avery Dulles, "On Lifting the Condemnations," *Dialog* 35.3 (Sum 1996), 219-220. It is important to note that language of "lifting" theological condemnations is not found in either *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era* or in the Joint Declaration. These documents demonstrate how the historical condemnations can be considered "non applicable" to their ecumenical partner in contemporary dialogue. The JDDJ states specifically that the condemnations "do not apply" to the consensus on justification as articulated in the agreement. See Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration," §41. Dulles' language, then, may be too strong. His concern at the time was that a declaration of non applicability to the 16th century condemnations would be to prematurely declare the process of theological reconciliation already accomplished. See "On Lifting the Condemnations," 220. Not everyone agrees with Dulles' caution, however. William Peterson believes that language of non applicability in the JDDJ does not go far enough, calling the agreement "so timid" in its conclusions. He desires a more visible renunciation of the condemnations to demonstrate self-examination, repentance, and reconciliation. See Peterson, "The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: Soteriological and Ecclesiological Implications from an Anglican Perspective," In *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38.1 (Winter 2001), 62.

²⁰⁷ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration," §3.

Strategies for Reception.²⁰⁸ and a 1992 unpublished—though widely circulated—report by the international Catholic commission (PCPCU-sponsored).²⁰⁹ These documents proposed that any agreements reached on justification should state that the doctrinal condemnations of the past no longer ought to apply to the contemporary positions of their partners in dialogue.²¹⁰ De Witte also attributes the willingness to question the applicability of the condemnations to a growing sense of the legitimacy of a differentiated consensus on these issues.²¹¹ Regardless, it is fair to say that amongst a growing number of Lutherans and Catholics, justification was beginning to be discussed in ways that made it no longer a church-dividing issue.

With all of this as background, the impetus and support for a joint statement on justification became a reality. The draft of such a document began in 1994 by a LWF-PCPCU task force, and the work lasted until 1997 when the finished Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was given to the partner churches for their responses.

²⁰⁸ See Radano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation*, 119-128. This appears to be an unpublished document, although Pieter De Witte gives the reference as “Strategies for Reception: Perspectives on the Reception of Documents Emerging from the Lutheran-Catholic International Dialogue,” *The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity – Information Service* 80 (1992), 42-45. Pieter De Witte also discusses the significance of this paper in *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 158-159 and 166-167.

²⁰⁹ See Radano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation*, 129-130.

²¹⁰ Radano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation*, 121-129. He quotes directly from *Strategies for Reception*, no. 31, which makes the same point.

²¹¹ De Witte traces the development of this concept in both Catholic and Lutheran circles. On the Catholic side, he focuses on the thought of Otto Pesch, saying “Otto Pesch offered a crucial contribution to ecumenical hermeneutics by his specific interpretation of the remaining differences between Luther and Aquinas, thus paving the way for what was later called the method of the ‘differentiated consensus.’” De Witte believes that Pesch’s contribution became important for the understanding of the JDDJ later. See De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 36-60. On the Lutheran side, he identifies the Finnish School of Luther interpretation, which finds in Luther some ontological aspects of his understanding of justification. This can be interpreted to suggest similarities between Luther and the traditional Catholic view of justification, or that “the extrinsic and the transformational approach to justification can be seen as two legitimate perspectives.” See De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 60-95. De Witte is not defending the theology of Pesch or the Finnish School, but instead suggesting how growing awareness of the differing perspectives and approaches that underlie the theology of justifications and the condemnations helped inform the environment that led up to the JDDJ.

Despite the preceding years of dialogue and discussion, acceptance and signing of the JDDJ was by no means a given. Suffice it to say that considerable debate and controversy arose, and that further clarifications and responses ensued.²¹² In June of 1998, the LWF was able to affirm the JDDJ as written. However, in that same month the Catholic Church responded with a document entitled, “Response of the Catholic Church to the Joint Declaration,”²¹³ expressing serious concern over several issues in the JDDJ. It became clear that a clarifying or supplementary statement was necessary, and in the spring of 1999 the “Official Common Statement”²¹⁴ was written to summarize the key point of agreement and its consequences. The “Official Common Statement” could be jointly signed, and was central to the agreement. Furthermore, a brief “Annex to the Official Common Statement”²¹⁵ was also put forward to further explicate some continuing questions. With these additions, both parties then agreed upon a date for the signing.

Amidst much celebration, the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation officially signed the document on October 31 of 1999. Since then many Christians have embraced the JDDJ and its conclusion that both Lutheran and Catholic explications on the basic truths of justification are not contrary to one another, and the agreement has received phenomenal acclaim. John Paul II spoke on numerous occasions,

²¹² For summaries of the discussions, see David Truemper “Introduction to the JDDJ,” 30-34, Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 121-122 and De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 160-164. Radano provides more detail in *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation*, 148-164.

²¹³ “Response of the Catholic Church to the Joint Declaration,” vatican.va, accessed October 2013, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_01081998_off-answer-catholic_en.html.

²¹⁴ “Official Common Statement,” vatican.va, accessed October 2013, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-official-statement_en.html.

²¹⁵ “Annex to the Official Common Statement,” vatican.va, accessed October 2013, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-annex_en.html.

affirming the achievement of the agreement.²¹⁶ Walter Kasper speaks of a “very broad consensus” on the issue of justification resulting from the JDDJ: “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.”²¹⁷ John Paul II and Kasper, along with many other Catholic theologians and laypersons alike, count the Joint Declaration a monumental success. The Lutheran World Federation calls the JDDJ as an “ecumenical milestone” on its webpage.²¹⁸ Lutheran theologian David Yeago agrees, noting the historical significance of the Joint Declaration, “for the first time since the Reformation schism, it is possible to say that Lutherans (at least those who belong to LWF) and Roman Catholics have *corporately acknowledged shared teaching* on the doctrine of justification.”²¹⁹

An important development occurred in July of 2006 when the World Methodist Council signed on to the JDDJ agreement.²²⁰ The council welcomed the agreement with “great joy” and declared that “the common understanding of justification as it is outlined in the Joint Declaration on Justification (JDDJ 15-17) corresponds to Methodist doctrine.”²²¹ The Methodist document specifically quotes these paragraphs at length in

²¹⁶ See Radano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation*, 180-182.

²¹⁷ Walter Kasper “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: A Roman Catholic Perspective,” in *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration*, ed. William G. Rusch (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 17.

²¹⁸ Lutheran World Federation, “Ecumenical Relations,” [lutheranworldfederation.org](http://www.lutheranworldfederation.org), accessed December 2013, <http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/ecumenical-relations>.

²¹⁹ David Yeago, “Lutheran-Roman Catholic Consensus on Justification: The Theological Achievement of the Joint Declaration,” *Pro Ecclesia* 6.4 (Fall 1998), 449-450.

²²⁰ For some history and exposition of the Methodist perspective on the JDDJ, see Geoffrey Wainright, “The Lutheran-Catholic Agreement on Justification: Its Ecumenical Significance and Scope from a Methodist Point of View” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38.1 (Winter 2001), 20-42. This informative article was written before the Methodist signing, and presents a strong case for such action.

²²¹ The World Methodist Council, “The World Methodist Council and the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” worldmethodistcouncil.org, accessed May 2, 2013,

its affirmation of them, and Methodist theologian Geoffrey Wainright comments that this passage “is not merely compatible with the Wesleyan and Methodist doctrine of salvation but constitutes a concise statement of its gist.”²²²

The Methodist statement also describes the Methodist tradition as having its own “distinctive profile” on the doctrine of justification.²²³ According to the document, this unique perspective result from an indebtedness to both “the biblical teaching on justification as it was interpreted by Luther and the other reformers and then again by the Wesleys,” and some elements “which belong to the Catholic tradition of the early church both East and West.”²²⁴ In this way, Methodist theology can be said to include facets of both traditional Catholicism and Protestantism, thus making it particularly amenable to the JDDJ. Some points from the Methodist “distinctive profile” on justification include the importance of John Wesley’s thought to the Methodist understanding of sin,²²⁵ the distinction between sanctification and justification as the “two-fold action of God’s grace” in salvation,²²⁶ the idea of the law as “an indispensable guide to God’s will,”²²⁷ and the assurance of faith and salvation which “belongs to the core of Methodist

http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/justificationworld_methodist_council_and_the_jddj.pdf, §2.

²²² Wainright, “The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Agreement,” 24.

²²³ Ted Dorman offers a good article on the unique perspective of John Wesley on justification in light of the Joint Declaration. Dorman points out some interesting examples of how Wesley, who could endorse the more characteristically Protestant understanding of the distinction between justification and sanctification, and use the term “imputed righteousness” (though not consistently), feared that such things could impede the pursuit of godliness and lead to antinomianism. Wesley’s passion for holiness of life, as well as his heated disagreements with Reformed theologians over the idea of limited atonement, may make his theology of justification more similar to the Catholic view. Dorman concludes, “What may be less clear to many of Wesley’s spiritual heirs in the Wesleyan-Methodist tradition...is how close to the mark Albert Outler was in likening (though not identifying) Wesley’s perspectives on justification and sanctification to those of what James Hervey called “the popish party.” See Dorman, “Forgiveness of Past Sins: John Wesley on Justification,” in *Pro Ecclesia* 10.3 (2001), 275-294.

²²⁴ The World Methodist Council, “The World Methodist Council and the JDDJ,” §4.

²²⁵ The World Methodist Council, “The World Methodist Council and the JDDJ,” §4.1.

²²⁶ The World Methodist Council, “The World Methodist Council and the JDDJ,” §4.2.

²²⁷ The World Methodist Council, “The World Methodist Council and the JDDJ,” §4.5.

preaching.”²²⁸ The document insists that these Methodist uniquenesses “are not reckoned to impair the consensus.”²²⁹ With the signing of the World Methodist Council, the Joint Declaration has been official endorsed by almost a hundred different Methodist and United or Uniting church denominations, as represented by the Methodist World Council.²³⁰

It is clear that the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification is a historically significant example of modern ecumenism. It is fair to call the JDDJ the most important example of a consensus document on a controversial and historically divisive theological topic such as justification. Certainly the agreement was the fruit of the Second Vatican Council, as well as years of ecumenical discussions and documents such as the 1985 U. S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue document *Justification by Faith*. Yet even with all that went before it, the signing of the JDDJ is an unprecedented ecumenical achievement that records a new level of theological agreement between divided churches. We turn next to examine the doctrine of justification in the document.

2. Theology of Justification and the Joint Declaration

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification is a relatively short document; it is divided up into five sections and consists of forty-four paragraphs. There are brief historical and biblical explanations of the justification issue²³¹, and a brief statement of the significance of justification to ecumenical relationships, both historic and

²²⁸ The World Methodist Council, “The World Methodist Council and the JDDJ,” §4.6.

²²⁹ The World Methodist Council, “The World Methodist Council and the JDDJ,” §4.

²³⁰ See “Who We Are,” worldmethodistcouncil.org, accessed December 9, 2013, <http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/about/>.

²³¹ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §1-12.

current.²³² The majority of the theology of document is found in sections three and four, and these sections elaborate the main consensus reached on the doctrine.

It is important to notice the methodology of the JDDJ in the paragraphs articulating the consensus reached. Each subsection begins with one paragraph stating a common statement of agreement. Immediately following the common paragraph are two paragraphs of individual statements on that particular topic, expressing individual points of the Catholic or Lutheran view. In this way, the differences are set within the larger framework of agreement. Specifically, section four is composed of seven mutual affirmations on different aspects of the doctrine of justification. These seven statement paragraphs express what the Catholics and Lutherans together believe. But each of those seven common paragraphs are immediately followed by paragraphs explaining uniquenesses of the Lutheran and Catholic understanding of that issue. The Catholic perspective gets a paragraph, and the Lutheran perspective gets a paragraph. Wood explains:

Each positive statement of common confession is followed by a paragraph clarifying the Catholic understanding and another clarifying the Lutheran understanding. These two paragraphs allow the differences within the two traditions to stand, but they are subsumed under a broader agreement. This document represents a differentiated consensus rather than uniformity in concept and expression.²³³

This structural allowance of unity amongst some remaining difference is noteworthy.

The JDDJ does not claim that Catholic and Lutheran theology on the issue of justification is now identical. De Witt believes that this methodology exemplifies what has been

²³² Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration," §13.

²³³ Susan Wood, "Catholic Reception of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," 47.

called a differentiated consensus.²³⁴ That terminology is not found in the Joint Declaration,²³⁵ but it is clear that in the format of the JDDJ there are intentional allowances for difference within the broader, overarching context of agreement—a differentiated consensus. Hietamäki also believes that the structure of the JDDJ reflects what she calls, “a necessary element of ‘differentiated consensus.’”²³⁶ In other words, she says that the “fundamental consensus” on the common understanding of justification is crucial in that it then allows for differences on “other individual points of doctrine.”²³⁷

A final section speaks about the meaning of the consensus reached in “the basic truths” of the doctrine of justification.²³⁸ It explains that in light of the consensus, the remaining differences “of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis” are “acceptable” to one another, and are “in their difference open to one another.”²³⁹ The issue of the condemnations is addressed, stating that the teaching of the Lutherans and the Catholics in the JDDJ does not fall under the condemnations of each community. By and large, the Joint Declaration establishes that the agreement “does encompass a consensus on the basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.”²⁴⁰

We will now focus more specifically on the theology of justification as it is explained in the third and fourth section of the Joint Declaration, entitled “The Common

²³⁴ See De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 169-217 for his analysis of the text of the JDDJ in light of this concept.

²³⁵ As mentioned in an earlier footnote, De Witte traces the history of the idea of a differentiated consensus in Catholic and Lutheran theology leading up to the writing of the JDDJ. While the term may not have been “coined” before the JDDJ, he makes a good argument that the idea of it is reflected in the document.

²³⁶ Hietamäki, *Agreeable Agreement*, 186.

²³⁷ Hietamäki, *Agreeable Agreement*, 186.

²³⁸ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §40.

²³⁹ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §40.

²⁴⁰ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §5.

Understanding of Justification” and “Explicating the Common Understanding of Justification.” Three issues in particular will be examined: justification as forgiveness and renewal, justification and sin, and justification, faith, and grace.

2.1 Justification as Forgiveness and Renewal

First, the Joint Declaration defines justification as something that entails both the forgiveness of sin and the subsequent renewal of the believer. The agreement’s most significant statement of common belief on justification is found in paragraph 15.²⁴¹ It reads, “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.”²⁴² It further declares that “Christ himself is our righteousness.”²⁴³ These statements highlight the absolute necessity of divine grace in justification, as well as the renewal of the justified person by the Holy Spirit. It is fair to say that paragraph 15 constitutes the heart of the agreement.

Yeago picks up on the Trinitarian nature of that common statement, noticing how both Catholic and Lutheran theologies are represented. He states:

This Trinitarian formulation addresses both Lutheran and Catholic fears and concerns with precise economy...The Joint Declaration places acceptance by God firmly at the foundation of the Christian life, joined inseparably with faith in Christ, as the relation to the Father into which we enter insofar as we are joined by faith to the Son...The same differentiated Trinitarian act which, joining us to

²⁴¹ Yeago states, “The central theological move...is made in par. 15.” See Yeago, “Lutheran-Roman Catholic Consensus,” 455. Edward Cassidy says much the same in “The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*: A Significant Ecumenical Achievement,” in *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration on Doctrine of Justification*, ed. William G. Rusch (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 91.

²⁴² Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §15.

²⁴³ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §15.

Christ the Son as our righteousness, brings us into the Father's favor, also involves us in the Spirit-impelled struggle to live a new life and do good works.²⁴⁴

The Joint Declaration states that justification includes the primary, grace-full decision of the Father to accept believers on behalf of the Son's saving work (Lutheran emphasis), and the subsequent reception of the Holy Spirit, who equips believers to do good works (Catholic emphasis). In this way both perspectives are included and affirmed.

Much has been said in appreciation of the JDDJ's explanation of the Trinitarian nature of justification. The Methodist statement of association with the Joint Declaration expresses special gratitude "for the Trinitarian approach by which God's work of salvation is explained,"²⁴⁵ and the response document from Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod—which finds little else to its liking in the JDDJ—has high praise for what it calls, "this wonderful truth."²⁴⁶ Ralph Del Colle comments on the importance of the "Trinitarian approach" exemplified in the JDDJ. He writes, "Effective for our salvation and transformation, it also anchors the faith in a basic orthodoxy that was the mark of the undivided church in antiquity and, therefore, sets and frames the agenda for any significant ecumenical process."²⁴⁷ The Joint Declaration speaks of a justification where all three persons of the godhead have a role, and this understanding is a basic and fundamental Christian truth.

Some of these same ideas are reaffirmed in paragraphs 22-24, entitled "Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous." Here the forgiveness of sin

²⁴⁴ Yeago, "Lutheran-Roman Catholic Consensus," 456-457.

²⁴⁵ The World Methodist Council, "The World Methodist Council and the JDDJ," §2.

²⁴⁶ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, "The Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective," *lms.org*, accessed November 2013, <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=339>, 10.

²⁴⁷ Ralph Del Colle, "Ecumenical Dialogues: State of the Question" in *Liturgical Ministry* 19 (Summer 2010), 107.

is paired with the impartation of active love by the Holy Spirit; together they are called the “two aspects of God’s gracious action” which “are not to be separated.”²⁴⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg includes this as one of the great “theses” of the Joint Declaration, specifically that, “The work of justification is rightly seen both in forgiveness of sin and in the ‘gift of new life.’”²⁴⁹

Edward Cassidy agrees, calling this one the JDDJ’s basic truths on the doctrine of justification. He summarizes, “justification is a free gift bestowed by the Trinitarian God and centers on the person of Christ...In being related to the person of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, we enter into the condition of righteousness. This is not something that we merit, but is freely bestowed.”²⁵⁰ Justification is both a declaring of righteousness in the work of Christ’s atonement, and a becoming of righteousness through the empowering action of the Holy Spirit. The justified person is forgiven and renewed, and this constitutes the key concept of justification in the JDDJ.

It should be noted that not everyone has agreed with JDDJ that justification incorporates both forgiveness and renewal. The Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod response to the Joint Declaration took issue with this definition of justification. The idea of justification including that element of interior renewal is what it calls “the chief defect” of the JDDJ, and something that the LCMS believes cannot be considered Lutheran.²⁵¹ Another criticism comes from the Catholic perspective in Christopher

²⁴⁸ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §22.

²⁴⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Theses to the ‘Joint Declaration’ About Justification,” *Pro Ecclesia* 7.2 (Spring 1998), 136.

²⁵⁰ Cassidy, “The Joint Declaration,” 91.

²⁵¹ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective,” *lms.org*, accessed November 2013, <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=339>, 8 and 17-19.

Malloy's lengthy book, *Engrafted Into Christ*.²⁵² Malloy raises concerns that the incorporation of both forgiveness and renewal doesn't adequately represent Catholic teaching about the formal cause of justification where the believer's justification is due to an inhering righteousness ("God's radical communion of grace") which enables the believer to grow in justice.²⁵³ Because of the seriousness of these challenges to the heart of the agreement, this chapter will examine them at length in a following section.

De Witte offers a less serious criticism; he finds the treatment of justification as forgiveness and renewal to be "somewhat superficial."²⁵⁴ He suggests that a fuller discussion of how these two aspects relate to each other would be helpful, because in both traditions there is some awareness that the connection between forgiveness and renewal is more than causal, but also intrinsic and relational when one considers how the believer is united to Christ and gifted by the Holy Spirit.²⁵⁵ However, De Witt believes that a more detailed discussion of forgiveness and renewal would immediately highlight the troublesome issues of human freedom and cooperation, and that this is perhaps why the JDDJ chooses not to discuss them at more length.²⁵⁶

Regardless of these objections and limitations, the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (and later the Methodist World Council) were willing to agree on a definition of justification that brings together both the traditionally Protestant idea of justification being about a divine declaration of the forgiveness of sin and the

²⁵² Christopher Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ: A Critique of the Joint Declaration* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

²⁵³ This is one of Malloy's main arguments throughout the book. See Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 74-84, 226-234, 267-272, and 306. More specifically, Malloy identifies unresolved questions about the nature of justifying grace, and he believes that the emphasis in the JDDJ of the unity between the two aspects of forgiveness and renewal confuses the matter.

²⁵⁴ De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 179.

²⁵⁵ De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 178.

²⁵⁶ De Witte's discussion is insightful; see *Dynamic, and Difference*, 175-179.

traditionally Catholic idea of justification being about an interior renewal or growing righteousness. All of this is done by grace and in Christ's saving work. Again, the JDDJ affirms that justification is a work of the triune God: "Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father."²⁵⁷ With the gifts of Christ and the Spirit, the believer is cleansed from sin and empowered to do good works.²⁵⁸ All of this the Joint Declaration calls "justification."

2.2 Justification and Sin

The Joint Declaration speaks in a number of places about sin and justification. As shown above, it first specifies that justification includes the forgiveness of one's sin. It further states that because of sin, people 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."²⁵⁹ Thus, human sin means that justification comes to the sinner only by an act of God, or "solely by God's grace."²⁶⁰

However, within that framework of agreement, some differences are explained. While Catholics understand the human person as made able to cooperate and consent to God's justifying action,²⁶¹ Lutherans believe instead that because the human person is a sinner, he or she remains incapable of cooperating with God in their salvation.²⁶² In traditional Lutheran teaching, the reality of sin renders the justification of believers to be

²⁵⁷ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration," §15.

²⁵⁸ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration," §15.

²⁵⁹ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration," §19.

²⁶⁰ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration," §22.

²⁶¹ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration," §20.

²⁶² Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration," §21.

something entirely “passive,”²⁶³ something they only receive and do not participate in, as in the Catholic conception.

Similarly, the relationship between sin and the justified person is explained from different perspectives. The differences are affirmed, but put within the larger context of agreement. Thus, the Lutheran expression of the believer being “at the same time righteous and sinner”²⁶⁴ is difficult to square with the Catholic idea that sin “in the proper sense”²⁶⁵ is no longer a reality for the justified believer. The JDDJ speaks of the Catholic understanding of an inclination toward sin (concupiscence), which is something the justified do have to resist.²⁶⁶ And the Lutheran paragraph explains that “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.”²⁶⁷ Overall, the JDDJ concludes that, “In these affirmations, they are in agreement with Roman Catholics, despite the difference in understanding sin in the justified.”²⁶⁸

The issue of sin remaining in the justified returns again in the initial response of the Catholic Church to the JDDJ. This response expresses concern that the JDDJ has not adequately presented the Catholic teaching about “the renewal and sanctification of the interior man of which the Council of Trent speaks” in the JDDJ statement about the justified person still being a sinner.²⁶⁹ Wood clarifies that, “the issue is whether the

²⁶³ The (Lutheran) phrase is “a person can only receive (mere passive) justification.” Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §21.

²⁶⁴ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §29.

²⁶⁵ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §30.

²⁶⁶ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §30.

²⁶⁷ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §29.

²⁶⁸ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §29.

²⁶⁹ “Response of the Catholic Church to the Joint Declaration of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on the Doctrine of Justification,” §1.

Lutheran understanding of the justified person as sinful can be compatible with the Catholic doctrine of personal renewal through the sacraments of baptism and penance in which all that can properly be called sin is taken away.”²⁷⁰ Wood, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and David Yeago count this issue as the most major difficulty raised in the official Catholic response,²⁷¹ one that caused Robert Jensen to wonder if the future success of the Joint Declaration was jeopardized.²⁷²

To alleviate some of these concerns, the Annex to the Official Common Statement was created and added to the agreement. This document reaffirms the idea that justification includes both a forgiveness of sins and a “being made righteous.”²⁷³ It restates the JDDJ’s teaching on the relationship between the justified person and sin, specifically saying that, “God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from sin’s enslaving power.”²⁷⁴ From this perspective, the Annex asserts “The justified do not remain sinners in this sense.”²⁷⁵ However, the document next states how in another sense, the justified believer can be understood as a sinner. Indeed, “we would be wrong to say that we are without sin...[and] this is expressed in many ways in our liturgies.”²⁷⁶ De Witte believes that the specific mention of liturgies here was helpful in

²⁷⁰ Wood, “Observations on Official Response,” 421.

²⁷¹ See Susan Wood, “Observations on Official Catholic Response to Joint Declaration,” *Pro Ecclesia* 7.4 (Fall 1998), 421, Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Theses to the ‘Joint Declaration,’” 137, and David Yeago, “Interpreting the Roman Response to the Joint Declaration on Justification,” *Pro Ecclesia* 7.4 (Fall 1998), 405.

²⁷² See Robert Jensen, “On the Vatican’s ‘Official Response’ to the Joint Declaration on Justification,” *Pro Ecclesia* 7.4 (Fall 1998), 402-403.

²⁷³ “Annex to the Official Common Statement,” vatican.va, accessed October 2013, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101_999_cath-luth-annex_en.html, §A.

²⁷⁴ “Annex,” §A.

²⁷⁵ “Annex,” §A.

²⁷⁶ “Annex,” §A.

furthering Catholic approval.²⁷⁷ After including some relevant Scripture passages, the Annex concludes that “To this extent, Lutherans and Catholics can together understand the Christian as *simul justus et peccator*, despite their different approaches to this subject as expressed in JD 29-30.”²⁷⁸ The Annex seems to have helpfully clarified the issue of sin and the justified, as the Catholic Church was able to move forward with the eventual signing of the Joint Declaration.

Perhaps the difficulty over the issue of sin remaining in the justified ought not to have been surprising, as Lane says, “It is not coincidental that this was one of the last issues to be resolved in the Joint Declaration.”²⁷⁹ Lane comments on the significance of the issue, both historically and theologically²⁸⁰—something this dissertation will explore in depth in subsequent chapters—but in the end Lane is satisfied with the compromise made in the JDDJ. He calls the issue, “an area of disagreement,”²⁸¹ but says that, “This issue can serve to illustrate the point that reality is often more complex than precise theological formulations suggest.”²⁸² The Joint Declaration affirms both the traditional Catholic and the Lutheran positions; they are different, yet they are set together as two parts of a whole. Lane believes that the statements made in the JDDJ and the Annex reflect what he calls, “the tension that we find in the New Testament.”²⁸³ He explains:

On the one hand it is true that we are all sinners, all in need of God’s mercy. But if that is all we can say we end up with moral relativism... Either statement without the other is only half of the truth. Here is a classic example of how

²⁷⁷ De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 201.

²⁷⁸ “Annex,” §A.

²⁷⁹ Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 167.

²⁸⁰ Lane concisely explains the context for this issue, even citing some instances where modern and contemporary theologians have not been consistent with the positions of their own traditions. See Lane, “Justification by Faith,” 167-174.

²⁸¹ Lane, “Justification by Faith,” 175.

²⁸² Lane, “Justification by Faith,” 174.

²⁸³ Lane, “Justification by Faith,” 175-176.

dialogue can bring each side to affirm a truth that was already in their tradition but that they might otherwise have played down.²⁸⁴

In the end, the compromise reached in the Joint Declaration on the issue of sin is fundamentally about both sides being able to accept the point of truth in the other side without categorically insisting that their perspective disqualifies the perspective of the other. By defining and clarifying both understandings of sin and the justified person, the Joint Declaration and the Annex move the agreement forward.

For our purposes in this dissertation, it should be noted that this more candid acceptance of difference, though still set within the framework of similarity, is an example of the methodology of Receptive Ecumenism. There is a balancing of difference on the issue of sin and the justified, and it is done without a diluting of the perspectives of either the Lutherans or the Catholics. De Witte offers a further consideration when commenting on the particular success of the Annex on the issue of sin and the justified. He believes that both partners have learned something from each other. He writes:

The Lutheran and the Roman Catholic positions are not merely juxtaposed. Rather they have influenced each other in the way they were formulated. The emergence of the *partim-partim* interpretation of the *simil iustus et peccator* in the Lutheran paragraph and of a commonly articulated broader view on the personal nature of sin in the *Annex* allowed for a stronger mutual appreciation for the respective doctrinal positions of both dialogue partners.²⁸⁵

The Annex seems to express a genuine appreciation for each partner's perspective on the idea of sin in the life of the justified believer. This issue is one example of how a more open acknowledgement of difference can be very effective in ecumenical discussion, and this includes enabling greater understanding and respect.

²⁸⁴ Lane, "Justification by Faith," 176.

²⁸⁵ De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 202.

2.3 Justification, Faith, and Grace

The Joint Declaration speaks of faith and grace in a number of places, including that important paragraph 15: “By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work...we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit.”²⁸⁶ The JDDJ addresses the roles of faith and grace in the believer’s justification at more length in section 4.3, entitled “Justification by Faith and through Grace.” It states that sinners are justified “by faith” and thus “are granted the gift of salvation which lays the basis for the whole Christian life.”²⁸⁷ The JDDJ states further that this justifying faith is a “free gift” that “includes hope in God and love for him.”²⁸⁸

What follows is a paragraph each of further articulation of the Lutheran and Catholic perspectives on faith and grace in justification. It seems that the issue of grace in justification is not so much an issue of controversy, but that the role of faith in justification is more so. The Lutheran paragraph speaks of justification being “in faith alone” or the *sola fide* of the Protestant Reformation. Interestingly, however, is that the Lutheran paragraph does not clearly explain how the *sola fide* slogan was intended to distinguish Protestant teaching from the Catholic idea of cooperation, or merit, which the Reformers adamantly denied.²⁸⁹ Instead, the Lutheran paragraph states:

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.

²⁸⁶ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §15.

²⁸⁷ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §25.

²⁸⁸ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §25.

²⁸⁹ This will be discussed in detail in a later chapter. The document from the Missouri Synod Lutherans also makes this point about traditional differences implied by the *sola fide* formulation, which the JDDJ—even in the Lutheran paragraphs—does not articulate. See below and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 24-26 and 43-44.

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.²⁹⁰

In this way, the Lutheran paragraph reflects and responds to some Catholic fears that “faith alone” renders Christian faith extrinsic to the person and unrelated to Christ’s call to obedience in all of life.

Similarly, the Catholic paragraph is written to reflect and respond to some Lutheran views, mainly the primary importance of faith and the disagreement over human contribution toward justification. It insists that faith is “fundamental” in justification.²⁹¹ It states more fully:

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. This new personal relation to God is grounded totally on God’s graciousness... While Catholic teaching emphasizes the renewal of life by justifying grace, this renewal in faith, hope, and love is always dependent upon God’s unfathomable grace and contributes nothing to justification.²⁹²

In this way, the Catholic paragraph is able to affirm the importance of faith as a divine gift, while still pairing it with hope and love. The comment that the renewal of faith, hope, and love “contributes nothing to justification” seems to downplay the idea of human cooperation in justification; the emphasis instead remains on the absolute preeminence of God’s grace in justification.

Cassidy likes how the idea of faith is expressed in the Joint Declaration. He summarizes its teaching, saying that, “we receive this salvation in faith” and that “faith is itself God’s gift through the Holy Spirit.”²⁹³ Overall, Cassidy says that Christian faith

²⁹⁰ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §26.

²⁹¹ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §27.

²⁹² Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §27.

²⁹³ Cassidy, “The Joint Declaration,” 91.

allows the believer “to give himself or herself over to Christ in the renewal of life.”²⁹⁴ All of this is entirely consistent with the main teachings of the JDDJ on justification: that justification is both free forgiveness and renewal of life. While these paragraphs do not explicate the Reformation’s idea of *sola fide* or Trent’s idea of grace-enabled cooperation, it does speak of faith on a very basic level, this time working at consensus on this important concept.

The Annex also brings up the idea of faith, offering further clarification. In a significant paragraph that quotes from a number of different sources, it states that (references removed):

Justification takes place “by grace alone,” by faith alone, the person is justified “apart from works”...The working of God’s grace does not exclude human action...“As soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us...it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit.”²⁹⁵

Noteworthy is the reference to “faith alone,” something Lane calls “a significant addition”²⁹⁶ and a “truly historic step”²⁹⁷ that some Lutherans had felt was a troubling omission in the text of the JDDJ.²⁹⁸ Also noteworthy is the cooperation that necessarily flows from the gift of grace in justification, something that speaks to Catholic concerns. The two concepts of faith alone and human cooperation are put together as consensus is sought. The focus is on how faith functions instead of what it is. By grace, God grants faith to the believer and that faith enables the person to please God in an active life of obedience to God. According to the JDDJ, justification is about a faith that is both

²⁹⁴ Cassidy, “The Joint Declaration,” 91.

²⁹⁵ “Annex,” §2C.

²⁹⁶ Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 184.

²⁹⁷ Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 185.

²⁹⁸ De Witte notes that this addition caused some initial Lutheran critics to the JDDJ to change their opinion of it. See De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 190-191.

passive and active. This teaching on faith is, once again, entirely consistent with the overall teaching about justification in the Joint Declaration as being both forgiveness of sins and renewal of life.

There have been some criticisms made to this approach to faith. The official response of the Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod (LCMS) to the Joint Declaration argues that the confessional Lutheran understanding of faith and grace (the *sola fide* and *sola gratia* of the Protestant Reformation) is not properly expressed in the agreement. It accuses the JDDJ of “imprecise theological language” on these issues.²⁹⁹ According to the LCMS document, Lutheran teaching insists on the passivity of faith and grace in God’s work of justification, saying, “It [the JDDJ] does not clearly state that faith’s role in justification is exclusively to *receive* Christ’s benefits given to sinner by God in His grace.”³⁰⁰ *Sola fide* means that the human person is incapable of cooperating with God in justification, much less contributing to justification, even if with a help of grace. The LCMS response argues that these differences were not adequately explained, and it criticizes the Joint Declaration for using language that it finds theologically “ambiguous.”³⁰¹

De Witte agrees that there is some theological ambiguity here. He finds a lack of clarity in the JDDJ and the Annex on the subjects of faith and *sola fide*, but thinks that some of this may be due to differing Lutheran interpretations of *sola fide*:

As the tension in the Lutheran paragraph in this subsection demonstrates, there are probably different ways in which this element of *fiducia* can determine the overall Lutheran concept of justification. It is plausible that the more fiducial concept of faith is stated as the *sole* central truth of justification from which all other aspects emanate, the more one is included to reject any ‘transcendental’

²⁹⁹ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 43.

³⁰⁰ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 8.

³⁰¹ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 44.

view on grace, which emphasized the non-exclusivity of grace and human action. Or, to state what is clearly apparent: if the highest manifestation of God's grace can only be well understood in terms of the destruction of human effort, then a defense of a transcendental view is likely to appear as a grace-resisting self-assertion of the human being. It is precisely such a transcendental view on grace that is defended in the chapter of the Annex, which also contains the commonly asserted *sola fide*.³⁰²

This suggests that within Lutheranism there may be different ways to understand the “faith” of the “faith alone.” Is *sola fide* about the absolute inability of the human person to become righteous through their actions, even with the help of God's grace? Or is *sola fide* about an unconditional trust in a merciful God who will work out one's eternal salvation by his grace? The Joint Declaration does not specify, but De Witte is right to point out that the teaching in the JDDJ and the Annex seem to imply the latter understanding.³⁰³

Regardless, the Joint Declaration teaches that justification is by grace alone and—in the Annex, at least—by faith alone. While these terms are not expressly defined, they are affirmed in ways that the Lutherans and Catholics in the discussion find amenable. The consensus on this topic is that “sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ,”³⁰⁴ and that faith is “fundamental” in justification.³⁰⁵ This constitutes a basic truth of the Joint Declaration.

2.4 Justification, Merit, and Reward

A final major topic to be discussed is the relationship between justification and merit or reward, so significant in the great debates over justification during the Protestant

³⁰² De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 192-193.

³⁰³ De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 193.

³⁰⁴ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §25.

³⁰⁵ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §27.

Reformation.³⁰⁶ Merit is specifically mentioned in paragraphs 15, 17, 25, 38, and 39 of the Joint Declaration, and is alluded to in paragraphs 24 and 27. Certainly the number of references ought to indicate the importance of this topic to both Catholics and Lutherans.

In its discussion of merit and reward, the JDDJ consistently emphasizes the primary gift of divine grace—something always unearned, and the renewal of life that follows that gift of grace. Good works are described as the fruits of justification; they result only from God’s grace and the empowering of the Holy Spirit within believers. Notice again that important paragraph 15’s “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.” Catholic teaching carefully distinguishes between the first grace of justification that is never merited (prevenient grace),³⁰⁷ and subsequent grace that does enable believers to contribute to or merit justification (habitual grace).³⁰⁸ The “not because of any merit on our part” is not nuanced to reflect this distinction, and seems to deny the possibility of merit before God in justification. Similarly, paragraph 17 states, “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.” Even more specifically, paragraph 38 states that “justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace.” This last statement has caused some concern; Dulles comments that it “seems to fall short of what Catholics believe and

³⁰⁶ The idea of merit is a highly nuanced concept in Catholic thought, and something that Lane believes Protestants have often misunderstood. Lane offers a good, concise explanation of some of the details from a Protestant perspective in *Justification by Faith*, 198-210.

³⁰⁷ See Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Sixth Session, 13 January 1547, Chapter V, in *The Christian Faith* (New York: Alba House, 2001). The Catholic understandings of grace and merit will be discussed in the next chapter.

³⁰⁸ See Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XVI.

what Trent teaches under anathema.”³⁰⁹ Regardless, it seems fair to say that the JDDJ’s teaching on merit denies the idea of the believer meriting his or her justification; instead, it emphasizes both that divine activity alone enacts one’s justification, and that human activity is the response that follows God’s action.

De Witte comments that while the emphasis in the JDDJ is on the idea of good works as the fruit in the life of a believer, the JDDJ also speaks of the obligation of the believer to fulfill these works:

On the basis of ecumenical dialogues on justification, one might point out the importance of distinguishing between works done prior to justification and works as fruits of justification...At the same time, the common [JDDJ] paragraph of this subsection claims that these works are for believers also ‘an obligation they must fulfill.’ The history of the text shows that this double perspective on the good works of the believer as fruits of justification and as obligation is a problem both dialogue partners are concerned about.³¹⁰

There is still some obvious tension over the issue of good works and obligation, but the idea of reward is used to show how both Catholics and Lutherans agree on the biblical teaching that there will be heavenly rewards for the good works done by believers on this earth. The Catholic paragraph explains that, “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.”³¹¹ The following Lutheran paragraph, while admitting a difference in the appropriateness of the term “merit,” says much the same:

When they [Lutherans] 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.³¹²

³⁰⁹ Avery Dulles, “Two Languages of Salvation,” 28.

³¹⁰ De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 211.

³¹¹ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §38.

³¹² Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §39.

In this way, human merit is explained more along the lines of a future heavenly reward, promised to believers for their good works done on this earth, and in accordance with the renewal of their lives through the work of the Holy Spirit within them. De Witte believes that interpreting the concept of merit “from the perspective of the biblical idea of reward and its eschatological horizon”³¹³ was effective; he concludes that, “there seems to be a strong convergence, facilitated by joint reference to the biblical concept of reward.”³¹⁴

The topic of merit and reward is brought up again in the Response of the Catholic Church to the Joint Declaration. This document further articulates the Catholic understanding of merit in relation to the attainment of eternal life, adding some clarifications to statements made in the JDDJ. Specifically, the Response reaffirms Catholic teaching that only prevenient grace enables the believer to respond to and cooperate with God, but that this response and cooperation is necessary for salvation. Comments in the JDDJ about the believer being “passive” in regards to their salvation or salvation as “independent” of human cooperation³¹⁵ result in a nuanced reply. Citing Trent, the Response states that the justified person has “a new capacity to adhere to the divine will, a capacity rightly called ‘*cooperatio*.’ This new capacity... does not allow us to use in this context the expression ‘mere passive.’ On the other hand... this capacity has the character of a gift.”³¹⁶ Similarly, the Response asserts:

The Catholic Church maintains, moreover, that the good works of the justified are always the fruit of grace. But at the same time, and without in any way diminishing the totally divine initiative, they are also the fruit of man, justified

³¹³ De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 214. He is quoting from ‘Stellugnahme VELD & DNK-LWB,’ a response to an earlier draft version of the Joint Declaration.

³¹⁴ De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 214.

³¹⁵ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §21 and 24.

³¹⁶ “Response of the Catholic Church to the Joint Declaration of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on the Doctrine of Justification,” §3.

and interiorly transformed. We can therefore say that eternal life is, at one and the same time, grace and the reward given by God for good works and merits.³¹⁷

These comments remind readers of Tridentine teaching that merit can appropriately be said to have a role in one's salvation. In sum, the Response seems simply to be desirous of some nuancing or clarification in the paragraphs that speak of the passivity of the believer in his or her justification. Wood comments that the need for clarification, "does not affect the fundamental affirmation in #19: 'We confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation.'"³¹⁸

The Annex does respond to this issue, but only briefly. It states, "The working of God's grace does not exclude human action: God effects everything, the willing and the achievement, therefore, we are called to strive."³¹⁹ Again consistent with the JDDJ's definition of justification as both forgiveness and renewal, the believer is granted salvation by grace, and with grace is then also enabled to cooperate toward eternal rewards. Lane finds the Annex's summary comment that "Any reward is a reward of grace, on which we have no claim"³²⁰ to be evident of some movement on this issue. If both Lutherans and Catholics can agree on that statement, Lane believes the two positions about merit "are no longer so far apart."³²¹ Dulles is less satisfied, saying, "The Annex...purports to give further clarifications, but I personally do not find it helpful. It simply piles up more quotations from Scripture and from the sixteenth-century documents that were presumably familiar to the authors of the Catholic response."³²² He

³¹⁷ "Response of the Catholic Church to the Joint Declaration of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on the Doctrine of Justification," §3.

³¹⁸ Wood, "Observations on Official Catholic Response," 425.

³¹⁹ "Annex," §2C.

³²⁰ "Annex," §2E.

³²¹ Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 210.

³²² Dulles, "Two Languages of Salvation," 28.

is disappointed that the Catholic teaching about merit is not more fully articulated in the JDDJ or the Annex, and suggests that this is problematic.³²³ De Witte also expresses some dissatisfaction with the general discussion on merit and reward in the JDDJ, the Catholic Response, and the Annex.³²⁴ However, he yet finds some positive signs of rapprochement going forward, particularly “the eschatological significance of our works here and now.”³²⁵ He comments:

If this idea [“the eschatological significance of our works here and now”] is viewed in connection with the responsibility of human beings for their own actions, which is affirmed by both Lutherans and Catholics, then the concept of merit, pastorally inappropriate as it may be, at least becomes more intelligible. It expresses the conviction that concrete choices of the believer on this side of the *eschaton* can be themselves eschatological realities.³²⁶

De Witte’s comments are perhaps helpful for reframing what has been a difficult difference in Catholic and Lutheran theologies of justification.

Regardless, it can be said that at the very least, the JDDJ clearly teaches that one’s justification is not merited by human efforts, but is a gift of divine grace. Once justified, both Catholics and Lutherans agree that the human person is empowered by grace to work towards eternal rewards. The ideas of reward and/or merit underscore the point that believers are called to be active in their salvation.³²⁷ Relying upon God’s grace, the Annex further teaches that they can and must cooperate with God in his work of renewal and regeneration,³²⁸ and that these efforts will be rewarded now and in eternity.³²⁹

³²³ Dulles, “Two Languages of Salvation,” 28. Anthony Malloy makes this same argument, but in stronger terms, as shown below.

³²⁴ See De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 214-215.

³²⁵ See De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 215.

³²⁶ See De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 215-216.

³²⁷ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §37-39.

³²⁸ “Annex,” §2C.

³²⁹ “Annex,” §2E.

3. Substantial Critique at the Heart of the Agreement

As noted above, some of the most serious theological criticism of the Joint Declaration is about its chief definition of justification including both forgiveness and renewal, or perhaps more specifically, about the nature of justifying grace. Simply put, some Catholics and Lutherans have raised questions about the meaning of justification, saying that the JDDJ does not do justice to either the traditional Catholic or the traditional Lutheran understanding of the nature of justification. Here we will examine two such critiques of the Joint Declaration.

3.1 Catholic Concerns over the Joint Declaration: Anthony Malloy and Avery Dulles

While Catholic response to the JDDJ has largely been positive, there have been a few Catholic theologians who have raised questions about whether the document accurately speaks for Catholic doctrine on the issue of justification. Perhaps the most comprehensive evaluation from this perspective comes from Christopher Malloy in *Engrafted into Christ: A Critique of the Joint Declaration*.³³⁰

Another theologian who has expressed concern with the JDDJ is Avery Dulles. In the article "The Two Languages of Salvation: The Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration," Dulles finds the JDDJ guilty of oversimplifying some basic differences in theology.³³¹ Both Malloy and Dulles raise some significant concerns over the heart of the agreement, and we will here attempt to highlight the main thrust of their arguments.

³³⁰ Christopher Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ: A Critique of the Joint Declaration* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

³³¹ Avery Dulles, "The Two Languages of Salvation: The Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration," in *First Things* (Dec 1999), 25-30.

Malloy's book has received some accolades, including a lengthy review from Charles Morerod who calls Malloy's criticisms of the JDDJ "deep" and "honest."³³² He says further that the book "is probably the most considerable work of a Catholic theologian in that line until now."³³³ In another review of Malloy, De Witte offers more balanced comments, praising Malloy's "often convincing" argumentation, but criticizing Malloy's overly negative assessment of the JDDJ and of the ecumenical process in general.³³⁴

The most significant issue that Malloy raises in opposition to the JDDJ is that of the formal cause of justification, something he argues has been overlooked or ignored. First, Malloy defines the authoritative Tridentine and Catholic doctrine of justification. He refers in great detail to chapter seven of Trent's Declaration on Justification, which articulates that the single formal cause of one's justification is the justice of God by which he makes us just.³³⁵ He explains that from the Catholic perspective, justifying grace can also be called "created grace," or the grace which renews the person inwardly by the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit.³³⁶ Because of this, there can be no sense of "double justice," or the idea that human justification is the result of both imputed and infused righteousness.³³⁷ While the idea of double justice was being discussed ecumenically by

³³² Charles Morerod, rev. of *Engrafted into Christ: A Critique of the Joint Declaration* by Christopher Malloy, *Thomist*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (July 2007), 500.

³³³ Morerod, 503.

³³⁴ See Pieter De Witte, rev. of *Engrafted into Christ: A Critique of the Joint Declaration* by Christopher Malloy, *Louvain Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (2010), 414-416. His later book also briefly discusses Malloy's book, saying that Malloy's defense of Trent is "clearly apologetic" and that there "is not the slightest hint...that the Roman Catholic Church could learn something in the dialogue." See De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 227-229.

³³⁵ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 74-78.

³³⁶ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 76.

³³⁷ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 60.

Catholics before Trent,³³⁸ Malloy shows how the Council effectively rejected the idea.³³⁹ Trent's definition, in particular, is not compatible with the notion of double justice, because justification is not the justice of Christ—God's own justice—imputed or granted to the believer. Instead, Trent teaches that human justification is the result of an inhering justice—God's justice communicated to the believer—which truly causes one to become just, and even to increase in justice and become more justified.³⁴⁰ Malloy gets very specific on this point, explaining that the justice that justifies is technically not God's justice at all--"Not the justice of the Incarnate Son, not the justice of the triune God," but instead is a justice imparted to the believer that makes him or her truly just.³⁴¹ It is a justice that "is infused into and inheres in the human person," and this is "the only formal cause of justification."³⁴² After offering additional lengthy historical and theological support, Malloy concludes:

The forgoing arguments show that the Council of Trent defined the formal cause [of justification] to be the justice of God that inheres in the human soul as a participation in the divine justice, diffused through the Holy Spirit, and taken from the side of Jesus Christ into whom the justified are engrafted.³⁴³

³³⁸ Malloy shows how the 1541 Colloquy of Regensburg, an ecumenical discussion between Catholics and Lutherans, affirmed the idea of double justice. While he calls their compromise a "noble attempt," he points out the fact that the agreement was never endorsed by either church community. See *Engrafted into Christ*, 59-63. Interestingly, Anthony Lane says that Regensburg did not affirm the idea of double justice, but his argumentation is weaker. See *Justification by Faith*, 58-59. Lane has a more positive assessment of the Regensburg agreement, believing it shows how justification is an issue where Catholics and Protestants could be brought closer together. However, he agrees with Malloy that an "anti-Protestant direction" of the teaching at Trent makes that possibility more difficult. See *Justification by Faith*, 4-5 and 67.

³³⁹ Malloy delves into the history of the discussion and eventual rejection of double justice at Trent. See Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 63-78.

³⁴⁰ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 90.

³⁴¹ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 75.

³⁴² Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 75.

³⁴³ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 95.

This is, according to Malloy, the correct and official teaching of the Catholic Church. Moreover, Malloy insists that this definition remains authoritative for Catholics.³⁴⁴

Second, Malloy argues that this key Catholic teaching about the formal cause of justification is not adequately expressed in the Joint Declaration. He calls this “the principle weakness” of the Joint Declaration.³⁴⁵ His main argument is that the JDDJ can be shown to consistently endorse the idea of imputed righteousness as the formal cause of justification. While admitting some ambiguity—something he repeatedly cites as a problem in the JDDJ—he states, “It would appear that the JD specifies the essence of justifying grace as Christ’s own righteousness. The affirmation is repeated several times, in quite fundamental paragraphs.”³⁴⁶ Most clearly in that key paragraph 15 is the statement that, “Christ himself is our righteousness,” and the statement is repeated in paragraphs 22 and 23. He asks, “Does the JD therefore affirm that Christ’s own righteousness is the righteousness by which the human person stands before God? A large number of respectable interpreters think this is the case.”³⁴⁷ Malloy then gives four pages of comments from a diverse group of interpreters who give this very interpretation of the JDDJ. They and Malloy agree that in the Joint Declaration, believers are considered justified fundamentally because they stand in Christ’s righteousness and not because they are made righteous themselves.³⁴⁸ All of this is problematic for Catholicism, according to Malloy. It would be hard to find him incorrect in his assessment, as he supports this argument with a very detailed and lengthy discussion of

³⁴⁴ Malloy strongly states the continuing authority of Trent’s decisions about justification, something reaffirmed in modern days. See *Engrafted into Christ*, 77-78.

³⁴⁵ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 234.

³⁴⁶ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 229.

³⁴⁷ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 230.

³⁴⁸ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 230-234.

the JDDJ, delving into the drafts and revisions as well as the final document. He concludes that the common and Lutheran paragraphs “do not admit of an authentically Catholic interpretation,”³⁴⁹ and that the specifically Catholic paragraphs are “ambiguous...[and] leave unstated the crux of the tridentine teaching.”³⁵⁰

Malloy believes that the ambiguity on the issue of the formal cause of justification leads to other problems with the JDDJ. He mentions both the idea of sin remaining in the justified and what he sees as a minimization of the Catholic understanding of merit. In short, Malloy says that speaking about justified persons as "totally sinners" in the JDDJ is simply "discordant with the Catholic faith."³⁵¹ Malloy also argues that the JDDJ does not adequately explain merit, specifically meritorious cooperation toward an increase of justifying grace after baptism.³⁵² With ample support, he says, "Trent is clear: The just can merit an increase in justifying grace, the attainment of eternal life, and an increase in eternal glory," and he concludes that, "The Joint Declaration and the Annex stand opposed to this Catholic teaching on meritorious cooperation."³⁵³ According to Malloy, these important and uniquely Catholic teachings were minimized or intentionally overlooked in the making of the declaration. Clearly Malloy is unsatisfied with the main teaching about justification in the JDDJ, and he argues convincingly that key Tridentine doctrine is not adequately expressed in the agreement.

While Avery Dulles does not criticize the Joint Declaration nearly to the extent of Malloy, he does express some of the same concerns. Dulles believes that the JDDJ does

³⁴⁹ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 257.

³⁵⁰ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 272.

³⁵¹ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 276. The “totally sinners” occurs in paragraph 29 of the JDDJ, a paragraph that explains the Lutheran understanding of how believers are both “totally righteous” and “totally sinners.”

³⁵² Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 285-289 and 293-307.

³⁵³ Malloy, *Engrafted into Christ*, 306.

not sufficiently address some remaining areas of significant difference between the traditions, and that it “exaggerated the agreements.”³⁵⁴ Some of these unresolved differences include the basic, but central, question of whether justification consists of a divine decree of Christ’s alien righteousness, or whether it is more accurately an interior sanctification dependent upon the transformative effects of God’s grace.³⁵⁵ He says that this issue “goes right to the heart of the matter.”³⁵⁶ The Joint Declaration, by defining justification as something that includes both forgiveness and renewal “seeks to achieve consensus”³⁵⁷ and to “bridge the gap between the two positions,”³⁵⁸ but Dulles is not convinced of its success at doing so. He concludes, “So far as I can see, the Lutheran position in the Joint Declaration favors the theory of alien righteousness that was rejected at Trent... This was and is contrary to Catholic teaching.”³⁵⁹

Other issues that Dulles raises are related to this basic one. From his Catholic viewpoint, he identifies a number of issues that were not given adequate space or voice in the Joint Declaration, including human cooperation toward justification, human struggle with concupiscence as opposed to sin, and the ability of the justified to merit the increase of grace and reward of eternal life³⁶⁰ He believes that Catholic theology on these issues was minimized or nuanced in ways that made it not fully amenable to the Catholic position. Overall, Dulles thinks that Tridentine teaching was not adequately attended to in the JDDJ.³⁶¹

³⁵⁴ Dulles, “Saving Ecumenism from Itself,” in *First Things* 178 (Dec 2007), 25.

³⁵⁵ Dulles, “The Two Languages,” 27-28.

³⁵⁶ Dulles, “The Two Languages,” 27.

³⁵⁷ Dulles, “The Two Languages,” 27.

³⁵⁸ Dulles, “The Two Languages,” 28.

³⁵⁹ Dulles, “The Two Languages,” 28.

³⁶⁰ Dulles lists these issues and others as questions in both “The Two Languages,” 27 and “Saving Ecumenism from Itself,” 25.

³⁶¹ Dulles, “The Two Languages,” 28.

Importantly, Dulles specifically questions the statement in paragraph forty of the Joint Declaration that the remaining differences between the traditions are "differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis" which are found to be "acceptable" to one another. Instead, Dulles believes that these remaining unresolved differences "are more correctly classified as matters of doctrine" to which "Lutherans and Catholics seem to give incompatible answers."³⁶² He concludes that, "Nothing in the Joint Declaration persuades me that such differences are mere matters of theological speculation or linguistic formulation."³⁶³ Dulles makes the significant point that differences in doctrine are about more than wording or emphasis. They reflect deeper foundational differences between the two traditions; these are stubborn differences that may be incompatible.

However, Dulles is not entirely negative about the JDDJ; he believes that a great deal of good came from the agreement. He says that the real achievement is not that some new consensus on doctrine was created, but rather that there is a new recognition that the two traditions have different languages of salvation which derive from the same gospel. He writes, "What seems to be surfacing is a willingness to acknowledge that we have here two systems that have to be taken holistically. Both take their departure from Scriptures, the creeds, and early tradition. But they filter the data through different thought-forms or languages."³⁶⁴ This idea is not new,³⁶⁵ but was not fully embraced in the JDDJ, which focuses more consistently on similarity and consensus. This dissertation

³⁶² Dulles, "Saving Ecumenism from Itself," 25.

³⁶³ Dulles, "Saving Ecumenism from Itself," 25.

³⁶⁴ Dulles, "The Two Languages," 29.

³⁶⁵ We saw above that both the 1985 American Catholic-Lutheran dialogue document *Justification by Faith* and the 1986 German report *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era* discuss differences and similarities with this approach. They consider the concerns of each side, and showing how some remaining differences can be complimentary. According to De Witt's book *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, this is also consistent with the development of the idea of a differentiated consensus, which he traces in Catholic and Lutheran thought up to and into the JDDJ.

will argue that ecumenism from a receptive perspective could address these issues with a more balanced understanding of theological similarity and difference.

Overall, both Malloy and Dulles raise important issues of critique concerning the heart of the agreement on justification. Malloy's use of formal cause highlights the fact that when Catholics speak of justification, they speak differently than do Lutherans, and they do so with different assumptions and expectations. This leads to different answers to questions pertaining to the doctrine of justification; for example, of whether sin can remain in the justified, or whether the believer can contribute meritoriously toward justification with the help of grace. As Dulles points out, these differences reflect more than simple differences in linguistic explanation or emphasis. They are, rather, doctrinal differences that say something about the historical identity and self-understanding of the Catholic Church. In the end, Malloy and Dulles make a strong argument that the JDDJ does not adequately represent Catholicism's unique understanding of justification.

3.2 Lutheran Concerns over the Joint Declaration: The Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod

Similar to the concerns of Malloy and Dulles above, some Lutherans have also argued that the main agreement on justification in the Joint Declaration is unconvincing.³⁶⁶ The document "The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

³⁶⁶ This section focuses on one contributor to the Lutheran debate over the Joint Declaration. There were many other Lutherans raising concerns about the JDDJ, including what Margaret Hampson calls the "unholy row" that broke out in Germany after the JDDJ was circulated. See Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (New York: Cambridge, 2001), 179-181 and 212-216. This controversy included a short published letter signed by 150 theologians in January of 1998, stating that they did not agree that the JDDJ "represents a consensus in the basic truths of the doctrine of justification." The German statement is published in English by Gerhard Forde, "The Critical Response of German Theological Professors to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," *Dialog* 38.1 (Winter 1999), 70-71. The issues raised in the German debate are the same as in the LCMS

in Confessional Lutheran Perspective³⁶⁷ is the official response to the JDDJ by the Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod (LCMS). The document includes two evaluations of the JDDJ from the professors at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne and in Saint Louis, as well as a summary and “study” of those seminary evaluations. The text of the Joint Declaration is also included, and the entire document was published by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Because of the various parts of this response, the document feels piecemeal. However, the argumentation is consistent throughout. The conclusion is that the Joint Declaration does not adequately represent either Lutheran or Catholic theology, stating, “It is especially troubling to note that the ‘Joint Declaration’ does not take the history of the theological differences with the Roman Catholics seriously enough. It does not sufficiently honor the integrity of either side.”³⁶⁸ At heart is a disagreement about the nature of justification, more specifically about whether justification can be said to include both forgiveness of sins and the renewal of the inner person.

The LCMS document distinguishes between forensic justification—what it calls the confessional Lutheran view, and transformational justification—the Catholic view.³⁶⁹ According to this document, confessional Lutheran teaching insists upon the distinction

debate, particularly that the JDDJ does not adequately express Lutheran teaching about justification by faith alone nor justification as *the* criterion for the doctrine and life of the church. Lane comments that the German controversy was exacerbated in the media through publications including the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *epd-Dokumentation*, the latter publishing a series of 21 issues entitled *Rechtfertigung* (1) – *Rechtfertigung* (21). See Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 121. Both Lane and John Radano say that although this controversy over the JDDJ was intense, official responses by the Lutheran churches in Germany to the document were overwhelmingly positive. See Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 121-122 and Radano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation*, 148.

³⁶⁷ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective,” [lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org), accessed November 2013, <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcms&id=339>.

³⁶⁸ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 45.

³⁶⁹ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 17-18.

between justification as the “essentially forensic” decision where God declares the sinner to be righteous and sanctification as the process of internal transformation.³⁷⁰ From this perspective, the distinction between forensic and transformative justice is not about different emphases within the doctrine of justification, but rather is about a difference in the very definition of justification. Referring to an important Lutheran confession, it states, “the Formula of Concord expressly rejects the view that justifying righteousness ‘consists in two pieces or parts, namely, the gracious forgiveness of sins and, as a second element, renewal or sanctification.’”³⁷¹ The reference is to a summary in the Formula of Concord of the “false contrary doctrines” about justification, including the idea that “two things or parts belong to the righteousness of faith before God in which it consists, namely, the gracious forgiveness of sins, and then, secondly, also renewal or sanctification.”³⁷²

This crucial point causes the writers of the LCMS response to conclude that the Lutheran representatives who wrote and authorized the Joint Declaration had accepted the Catholic understanding of justification.³⁷³ The document argues that if justification is about both forgiveness and the renewal of life that necessarily follows, justification then becomes more about the process of becoming increasingly transformed and renewed. The forgiveness of sins is only the starting point for justification, as the first part of one’s justification. The LCMS document argues that this is ultimately the traditional Catholic

³⁷⁰ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 17.

³⁷¹ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 18.

³⁷² Formula of Concord (1517), bookofconcord.org, accessed February 2014, <http://bookofconcord.org/sd-righteousness.php>, III, 48. The Formula includes much lengthier discussion on the teaching that justification does not include any sense of renewal in II, .17-43, particularly paragraphs 17-19, 24-25, 28, and 39.

³⁷³ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 18-19.

view, and that it does not represent confessional Lutheran theology.³⁷⁴ Quoting other concerned theologians, it states:

The fundamental problem with the JDDJ is that it seems to subsume the Lutheran understanding of justification under a Roman Catholic understanding of justification as a process whereby the soul is progressively transformed through “grace.”... [The JDDJ] never refers in a vital or critical way to the Lutheran insistence upon justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) in God’s Word of promise, no doubt because such insistence would undermine the entire structure of the doctrine of justification proposed by the JDDJ.³⁷⁵

These are strong words that challenge the heart of the agreement in the Joint Declaration, and they are hard to dismiss. The Joint Declaration, in its very definition of justification, affirms both the traditional Lutheran and Catholic views, and this is exactly what the Missouri-Synod Lutherans protest. They object that in the JDDJ the “two theologies” of justification are described as “merely complimentary” instead of being “contradictory.”³⁷⁶

We noted above how the response of the LCMS also expressed dissatisfaction with the way that the characteristically Lutheran understanding faith and the *sola fide* formula were not fully expressed or explained in the Joint Declaration. It seems fair to say that the lack of discussion around the *sola fide* formula—so crucial to the traditional Lutheran definition of justification as forensic —causes legitimate concerns for confessional Lutherans like those in the LCMS. Furthermore, connected to the *sola fide* is the insistence that for Lutheran theology, justification functions as the central criterion of all doctrine and practice.³⁷⁷ This is different from Catholic theology, which sees justification as one of several central criteria. While this difference is stated in paragraph

³⁷⁴ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 18-19 and 23-26.

³⁷⁵ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 18.

³⁷⁶ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 29.

³⁷⁷ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Joint Declaration,” 20-21.

18 of the JDDJ, the LCMS response finds it very inadequate.³⁷⁸ One senses the personal significance of their disappointment over the JDDJ's treatment of this issue when the response states, "Without justification [as central criterion], Lutherans lose the distinctive character of their theology and the reason for their existence."³⁷⁹ Margaret Hampson suggests that this is an example of how Catholics have often underestimated and misunderstood how important this idea of justification (by faith alone) is to Lutherans.³⁸⁰ It is fair to say that *sola fide* and the related idea of justification as central criterion are significant issues when one is considering the Lutheran understanding of justification. They also say something about the particular identity of the Lutheran tradition. In the end, the Lutheran Missouri Synod document makes some significant arguments that the JDDJ does not adequately represent the unique understanding of justification from the Lutheran tradition.

4. Conclusions

The success of the Joint Declaration is hard to gauge. Ecumenically, one would have to find the JDDJ a document of monumental significance. The JDDJ records historic agreement between Catholics, Lutherans, and Methodists; this is certainly to be praised. Christians in great numbers have applauded the agreement and noted with appreciation that the time of mutual church condemnations and anathemas is over. The JDDJ represents an honest attempt to explain what the Catholic and Lutheran traditions

³⁷⁸ The letter from the German professors also expresses specific dissatisfaction with paragraph 18, stating that "no consensus has been reached" on this topic, and that "these statements [from the Catholic and Lutheran perspectives] are mutually exclusive." See Forde, "The Critical Response," 71. De Witte notes that this paragraph "has been the object of strong Lutheran criticism." See De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 232.

³⁷⁹ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, "The Joint Declaration," 20.

³⁸⁰ Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 177-180.

can and do hold in common when the issue is justification. Both sides are willing to soften the rigidness of their positions relative to the concerns of the other side, and they work to accept the most positive reading of their partner's theology. There is a generosity extended which is appropriate and necessary for the ecumenical enterprise. Furthermore, the document has ecclesial support and authority in the churches that have signed on to the agreement. This binding agreement establishes a stronger relationship between the churches, and enables more fruitful work between them. For all of these reasons, the Joint Declaration is a highly significant and very successful document.

However, theologically speaking, one might question the strength of the document. The issue of whether the Joint Declaration adequately expresses authoritative, confessional theology of either the Catholic or Lutheran tradition is an important one. Malloy and Dulles raise significant concerns that the heart of Tridentine teaching about justification is not included or affirmed in the Joint Declaration. Similarly, the Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod argues that the core of Lutheran belief about justification is minimized and reinterpreted to such an extent that it can no longer be considered authentically Lutheran. These arguments are well-substantiated and speak to real issues of theological identity for both Catholics and Lutherans.

It is important to notice, however, that there is room, at least structurally, within the agreement to allow such discussion and differentiation. The Joint Declaration, with its inclusion of specifically Catholic and Lutheran paragraphs, does make an attempt at allowing the unique perspectives of each to be shared. As we saw above, this has led some scholars to see the agreement in the JDDJ to be reflective of a differentiated consensus. Perhaps the greatest failure of the JDDJ is that it does not take the

opportunity to express this more fully. For example, when the Joint Declaration does not explain the Lutheran concept of *sola fide*, or when it does not articulate the Catholic concept of grace-enabled cooperation toward justification, it is least successful. However, the document is more successful when it does articulate those differences at more length, for example on the possibility of sin remaining in the justified—*sola justus et peccator*. On this issue the Annex in particular gives greater expression of remaining differences, and this is genuinely helpful.³⁸¹

In conclusion, the Joint Declaration represents what we have been calling Convergence Ecumenism. Its focus is on similarity and consensus; differences are minimized and explained in ways that are mutually affirming. This is problematic when it overlooks traditional teaching that may not be amenable to one's dialogue partner. For ecumenism going forward, this dissertation proposes that Receptive Ecumenism is a better method that more candidly balances difference and similarity. By more fully articulating even those differences that may be incompatible, traditional identity is carefully attended to, and this is essential both to foster deeper understanding between the individual churches involved in ecumenism and to the long-term success of any documents that result from the discussion. The remainder of this dissertation will give an example of how this can be done on the issue of justification between the Catholic and Reformed traditions.

³⁸¹ In support of this, it is interesting to notice that the Missouri Synod document does not identify the *simil justus et peccator* as one of its major difficulties with the JDDJ. The LCMS document does include some critique of the Catholic view of original sin as well as a short comment on concupiscence, but these are not major points in the document. I believe this shows how a more detailed expression of difference on the issue of sin remaining in the justified enabled opportunities for consensus, and (on this issue at least) quieted the critics.

Chapter 3: The Catholic Doctrine of Justification

1. History of the Catholic Paradigm of Justification

The Catholic doctrine of justification, developed over centuries through the work of numerous different theologians and under varied circumstances and challenges, is both complex and coherent. Certainly one such circumstance that caused the Catholic Church to solidify its teaching on justification was the Protestant Reformation. Therefore, at the Council of Trent, the Church clearly defined Catholic orthodoxy concerning justification. Yet even before the Reformation and Trent, the philosophical foundations of soteriology and justification were laid by the Church Fathers and Thomas Aquinas for what became the uniquely Catholic understanding of these theological issues.

This chapter will identify the main characteristics of the Catholic doctrine of justification. Key concepts from the Church Fathers and from Thomas Aquinas, the most significant Latin theologian of the medieval era, will be discussed. These include the idea of grace as infused and transformative, as well as the notions of merit and beatitude, all of which are formative for the doctrine of justification in the Catholic Church. These notions will be traced in the declarations from the Council of Trent and the more recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Overall, we will see how Catholic soteriology has an ontological dimension that emphasizes the process and increase of Christ's applied grace in the life of the Christian. Justification in this setting means to become just, and grow in righteousness as the believer is united ever more closely to God.

This chapter will use the perspective of Receptive Ecumenism to identify the distinctive features of the Catholic Church's doctrine of justification. The goal is to positively and truthfully set forth the Catholic doctrine of justification and to explain it within the larger context of its history and development. These background details are important because they give rise to the particularity and uniqueness of the Catholic articulation of this doctrine. Receptive Ecumenism allows participants to affirm similarity and difference, and this is especially important for doctrines that are closely related to identity and self-understanding, such as the doctrine of justification. In the end, the purpose is to present the doctrine in such a way that its particular strengths be seen as potential gifts to the broader Christian church.

1.1 Early Understandings of Justification

The great debates about justification need to be placed in a historical and philosophical framework that began long before the sixteenth century. Even the Church Fathers discussed justification, but they lacked clarity on its meaning. Nick Needham in the article “Justification in the Early Church Fathers” says that the topic of justification occurs reasonably often in the writings of the Patristic era,³⁸² yet could refer to different things. He argues that the word usually had “a basically forensic meaning,”³⁸³ and he cites Chrysostom, Cyprian, Athanasius, Antony, and Ambrose as examples of those who used it this way. But he also says that others, including Clement of Alexandria, seemed

³⁸² Nick Needham, “Justification in the Early Church Fathers,” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 27.

³⁸³ Needham, “Justification in Early Church Fathers,” 28.

to use the word to mean “sanctify.”³⁸⁴ Alister McGrath agrees that justification had different uses, but he disagrees with Needham as to the general thrust of the meaning. McGrath believes instead that justification more often had a transformative meaning, that through justification one becomes righteous.³⁸⁵

One can already sense the weight of the controversy to come. The transformative interpretation of justification, present amongst the Church Fathers and especially in Augustine, was developed by Aquinas and eventually constituted the trajectory chosen by the Council of Trent to be the position of the Catholic Church on justification. The forensic or declarative interpretation of justification, also present in the Church Fathers and Augustine, was reclaimed and developed by the Protestant Reformers and became the traditionally understood Protestant understanding of justification.

Augustine of Hippo has had an immense impact upon western Christian thought. His understanding of justification is complicated, as it developed over the span of his long lifetime. Put simply, the corpus of his work allows for different interpretations of justification. We will briefly focus here in this first section on the Augustinian tendencies that were picked up by Aquinas and became the more distinctively Roman Catholic understanding of justification.

McGrath, who investigates the theology of justification in the work of Augustine, believes that there is development in Augustine’s thought, especially concerning grace. McGrath writes, "Prior to 396, Augustine appears to have seen the spiritual life in Platonic terms as an ascent to perfection."³⁸⁶ According to McGrath, the early Augustine

³⁸⁴ Needham, “Justification in Early Church Fathers,” 37.

³⁸⁵ Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 18-23.

³⁸⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 25.

believed that humanity had the ability to "take the initiative in this spiritual ascent to the divine by believing on him, and calling upon God to save him."³⁸⁷ McGrath's references to this in Augustine's work are perhaps not as clear or abundant as they ought to be,³⁸⁸ but he does note Augustine's commentary "On the Sermon on the Mount" as an example in which Augustine does call upon the human person to seek after God's help in one's labors toward obtaining the kingdom of heaven.³⁸⁹ Augustine writes, "when any one encounters difficulty in these toils, and advancing through hardships and...temptations...[and he] becomes afraid lest he should not be able to carry through what he has undertaken, let him eagerly avail himself of the counsel that he may obtain assistance."³⁹⁰ The human person must pursue God's help in order to receive the eternal reward. He or she cannot be saved without God's assistance, but neither ought that person sit back and do nothing.

Another text in Augustine's commentary "On the Sermon on the Mount" speaks of human effort toward becoming a son of God:

We, by receiving power, are made sons, in as far as we perform those things which are commanded us by Him...His having adopted us, so that, as being sons, we might enjoy along with Him eternal life for our participation. Therefore He does not say, Do those things, because ye are sons; but, Do those things, that ye may be sons.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 25.

³⁸⁸ See McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 25 and 197. McGrath's referencing of Augustine's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount and on Romans is too vague to adequately support his argument for development. In particular, the Sermon on the Mount reference needs to be interpreted in its context, and McGrath does not do this.

³⁸⁹ Augustine, "On the Sermon on the Mount," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff. trans. William Findley, newadvent.org, accessed October 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/16011.htm>, I.xviii.54-55.

³⁹⁰ Augustine, "On the Sermon on the Mount," I.xviii.55.

³⁹¹ Augustine, "On the Sermon on the Mount," I.xxiii.78.

While it ought to be recognized that Augustine's comments about doing things in order to be sons of God may simply reflect the context of Jesus' hard sayings in the Sermon on the Mount,³⁹² it is also important to notice that here Augustine speaks of the human person "receiving power" in order to achieve this sonship. Although not altogether obvious, it seems fair to say that although Augustine stresses the necessity of human initiative and effort, these actions still seem to result from God's initial activity upon the human person.

McGrath argues that an older Augustine emphasizes God's initiative with humanity instead of humanity's initiative with God. According to McGrath, Augustine becomes increasingly clear that any moving of the human toward the divine would require God's initial gift of grace.³⁹³ This need is due to sin, or more specifically to a person's free will being taken captive by sin.³⁹⁴ Only God could restore that in the human being and enable him or her to once again choose God. Regardless of whether or not there is clear development in Augustine's thought,³⁹⁵ it is at least fair to say that Augustine does assume the idea of some necessary human initiative and action, though always aided by divine grace.

It is within these parameters that Augustine discusses justification. But as David Wright warns, he does not do so in a precise or systematized way. He never develops a whole treatise, sermon, or letter specifically on the topic of justification.³⁹⁶ Again, one can identify different strands in Augustine's thought on justification, as Wright says:

³⁹² Certainly some of the seeming emphasis on human initiative in this quote can be attributed to the biblical text (Matthew 5:43-48) on which Augustine is commenting.

³⁹³ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 25.

³⁹⁴ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 26-28.

³⁹⁵ Again, McGrath does not prove this conclusively.

³⁹⁶ David Wright, "Justification in Augustine," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 55.

“one strand in Augustine’s teaching on *justificatio*...[is justification as] a declarative event that warrants a perfect passive verb.”³⁹⁷ By grace, God has declared human persons just. Another strand quite differently understands justification as a “more inclusive doctrine” with the emphasis on God making one just or righteous.³⁹⁸ According to McGrath:

Augustine has an all-embracing transformative understanding of justification, which includes both the event of justification (brought about by operative grace) and the process of justification (brought about by co-operative grace.) Augustine himself does not, in fact, see any need to distinguish between these two aspects of justification; the distinction dates from the sixteenth century.³⁹⁹

It was indeed the sixteenth century that forced those aspects of justification apart, with each side emphasizing one over the other.

One final note of importance is that Augustine did speak of the ability of Christians to grow in their justification, and he did accept the idea of merit having a part in one’s justification. Augustine’s “Letter to Sixtus” is a good, concise example of this.⁴⁰⁰ In this letter, Augustine insists that God’s grace is not awarded to believers because of any antecedent merit of theirs. Grace is an “underserved honor” and “bestowed as a pure act of bounty.”⁴⁰¹ Yet believers do accrue merit; he clarifies in a question: “But, have the just no merits at all? Certainly they have, since they are just; only there were not previous merits to make them just. They became just when they were justified.”⁴⁰² He speaks further of merit in terms of Christian faith and in what he calls “the merit of prayer;” however, he remains clear that the merits of the justified are

³⁹⁷ Wright, “Justification in Augustine,” 71.

³⁹⁸ Wright, “Justification in Augustine,” 72.

³⁹⁹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 47.

⁴⁰⁰ Augustine, “St. Augustine to St. Sixtus, Letter 194),” trans. Wilfred Parsons, romancatholicism.org, accessed June 2013, <http://www.romancatholicism.org/jansenism/augustine-194.htm>.

⁴⁰¹ Augustine, “St. Augustine to St. Sixtus.”

⁴⁰² Augustine, “St. Augustine to St. Sixtus.”

themselves the result of grace: “nothing but grace produces good merit in us; and what else but His gifts does God crown when He crowns our merits?”⁴⁰³ Generally speaking, Augustine believed that the justification can only be a result of God’s grace and mercy in Christ. Yet Augustine also believed that once justified, God enables the just person to accrue merit through his grace. These concepts become important to Catholic soteriology and in the justification debate to come.

St. Thomas Aquinas, like Augustine, has the rare honor of being named a Doctor of the Church. He is of particular importance because the Catholic Church officially adopted much of his thought. His method and work dominated Catholic theology for centuries.⁴⁰⁴ The Thomistic tradition—although certainly not the only influence—is perhaps the major one that contributed to the development of the Catholic doctrine of justification. Aquinas is a major figure when delineating the differences that have become either Catholic or Protestant. The Protestant Reformers rejected some of Aquinas’ theology, designating it unbiblical and based on a non-Christian philosophical tradition.⁴⁰⁵ One pointed example is a quote from Martin Luther that, in his opinion, “Thomas wrote a great deal of heresy.”⁴⁰⁶ Calvin, too, vigorously distinguished his

⁴⁰³ Augustine, “St. Augustine to St. Sixtus.”

⁴⁰⁴ See Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, 12 Aug 1950, In *The Christian Faith* (New York: Alba House, 2001), §31.

⁴⁰⁵ Arvin Vos makes this same point and its consequences when discussing the idea of faith, saying “The sixteenth-century Reformers were highly critical of the doctrine of faith espoused by their Catholic contemporaries, the Schoolmen (the Catholic theologians at the various universities). By and large, later generations of Protestants seem simply to have taken the criticisms of the Reformers as the final word and assumed that they would not be likely to find anything of permanent worth in the Schoolmen’s teaching on faith—including the teaching of Aquinas. And so today Aquinas’ views on faith are practically unknown among Protestants.” See Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views on the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 1-2. One of Vos’ main arguments in the book is that the Reformer’s highly negative assessment of Aquinas may be due in part to their polemical context instead of on a careful exposition of Aquinas’ works.

⁴⁰⁶ From Luther’s *Against Latomus 1521*, and quoted in James Payton, *Getting the Reformation Wrong: Correcting Some Misunderstandings* (Downer’s Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 196.

teaching from the teaching of those he calls “the Schoolmen,” or Catholic theologians who he understood to be relying upon the Thomistic tradition.⁴⁰⁷ In the confessional controversies between Catholics and Protestants, Aquinas became a point of division already in the sixteenth century.

The legacy of Catholics embracing Aquinas and that of Protestants rejecting him continues today. In a 2005 *Christian Century* publication, Timothy Renick reviews two recent books about Aquinas. He says that while “Aquinas has remained quintessentially Catholic,” there is some contemporary interest by evangelicals to reconsider Aquinas.⁴⁰⁸ One example of a Protestant reassessment of Aquinas comes from Arvin Voss, who argues that Protestants have long misinterpreted Aquinas on a number of significant issues and that Aquinas deserves a second look.⁴⁰⁹ Perhaps so, but Michael Root comments that even today antagonism remains within Lutheranism against Thomas Aquinas,⁴¹⁰ and it is fair to say that a general antagonism against the Thomistic tradition is found in many parts of Protestantism.⁴¹¹ D. Stephen Long believes that Catholic

⁴⁰⁷ See Vos for some pointed examples of Calvin’s negative assessment of the teaching of the Schoolmen in *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views on the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 2. Voss makes the helpful point, however, that on some issues Calvin was clearly arguing more against his Catholic contemporaries than against Aquinas, and even suggests that Calvin may not even have had a “firsthand acquaintance” with Aquinas. See Vos, 37-40. Vos also argues that readers of Calvin’s works have too quickly read Aquinas into Calvin’s arguments. He writes, “When reading Calvin’s exposition today, one is naturally inclined to assume that what he wrote about the Schoolmen can without qualification be applied to Aquinas” (2). Vos shows how this is not the case in every issue.

⁴⁰⁸ Timothy Renick, “Second Chance for Thomas,” *The Christian Century* (Aug. 23, 2005), 22.

⁴⁰⁹ Vos’ book, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought* investigates some Protestant assumptions about Aquinas, and concludes that there are actually some surprising similarities between Calvin and Aquinas. He makes a strong argument for a reassessment of Aquinas, believing that for too long Protestants have been content with a cursory rejection of Aquinas, and their reasons have too often been based on misunderstandings and misreadings of Aquinas’ actual thought.

⁴¹⁰ Michael Root, “Aquinas, Merit, and Reformation Theology after the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” *Modern Theology* 20:1 (Jan 2004): 5-7.

⁴¹¹ While this is true, it is also true that some significant Protestant theologians have been influenced by Aquinas, and even adopted some of Aquinas’ views. For example, David Sytsma identifies how Herman Bavinck relied upon a Thomistic understanding of epistemology, including a positive understanding of the

theologians have also accepted this as a difference between themselves and Protestants, commenting that, “many contemporary Catholic theologians use the work of Aquinas to differentiate their understanding of the relation between nature (or reason) and grace (or faith) from Protestantism...Some Catholic thinkers find this an advantage over Protestantism because it offers criteria external to the Christian tradition...”⁴¹² Overall, it is fair to say that Aquinas remains influential in Catholicism and its articulation of soteriology, while this is not the case for Protestantism.

More specifically, Aquinas provides an essential philosophical background to Catholic soteriology, especially its ontological presuppositions. Questions of being and substance are crucial to understanding the framework of justification in Catholic thought. Carl Trueman says that for Catholic theology, “justification was rooted in an understanding of human nature that took very seriously ontological questions of substance, process, and being as the starting point for individual salvation.”⁴¹³ This emphasis comes from Aristotle and was mediated to the church via Aquinas. Overall, as Trueman summarizes, “the primary accent in the discussion of salvation was on a change in being, with a change in status being defined in light of this.”⁴¹⁴ This change in being is mediated by infused grace, and this remains an important aspect of the Catholic doctrine of justification.

role of philosophy and science in the work of theology. See David Sytsma, “Herman Bavinck’s Thomistic Epistemology: The Argument and Sources of His *Principia* of Science,” in *Five Studies in the Thought of Herman Bavinck, A Creator of Modern Dutch Theology*, ed. John Bolt (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon Press, 2011).

⁴¹² D. Stephen Long, “The Way of Aquinas: Its Importance for Moral Theology,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 19.3 (2006), 339. Long argues that a proper understanding of Aquinas’ Christology makes this difference between Catholics and Protestants smaller.

⁴¹³ Carl Trueman, “*Simul peccator et justus*: Martin Luther and Justification,” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 86.

⁴¹⁴ Trueman, 86.

Another foundational concept for Catholic soteriology is Aquinas' understanding of nature and grace. The concept helped answer questions of what it means to be human, what happens to the human person in the Fall, and how grace functions in the life of believers. While Protestants have perhaps been too quick to use Aquinas' understanding of nature and grace as a dividing line between themselves and Catholics,⁴¹⁵ the concept underlies Catholic thought on justification. In particular, Catholic theology has adopted a more positive understanding of postlapsarian human nature, as well as the idea of grace as empowering and transformative.

After sketching some Thomistic characteristics, we will use declarations from the Council of Trent⁴¹⁶ and teaching from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*⁴¹⁷ to identify a fuller understanding of doctrine of justification in the Catholic tradition. Trent is particularly significant, for although it did not give a comprehensive account of Catholic theology, it defined a number of important and disputed doctrines, including justification. The Catechism also includes official teaching about justification, although, as Alister McGrath notes, justification is not a major subject covered in the catechism.⁴¹⁸ Using these two authoritative sources, the doctrine of justification in the Catholic Church becomes clear.

⁴¹⁵ See Voss, *Aquinas, Calvin and Contemporary Protestant Thought*, chapter 6.

⁴¹⁶ See all the decrees from the Council of Trent in *Cannons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. Rev. H. J. Schroeder (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1941). For a more edited and updated version, see *The Christian Faith*, ed. Jacques DuPuis (New York: Alba House, 2001). The documents are also online at the Vatican's website, www.vatican.va.

⁴¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994). The catechism is also online at the Vatican's website, www.vatican.va.

⁴¹⁸ Alister McGrath states, "Perhaps the most striking thing about the catechism's discussion of justification is the remarkable lack of attention that is paid to the concept."⁴¹⁸ McGrath suggests that for the CCC, "the question of how individuals are reconciled to God is framed primarily in terms other than justification." This is significant, for while Protestant theology generally remains focused upon justification as an essential part of soteriology, Catholic theology has not adopted that approach even in the light of today's ecumenical milieu. See McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 357.

After identifying the doctrine, this chapter will focus more specifically on some of the main issues that have historically differentiated the Catholic doctrine from that of the Reformed. These issues include the Catholic articulation of sin, the notion of faith, the role of grace, the possibility of human merit, and the particular ecclesiological or sacramental setting to justification in Catholic theology. These issues provide a fuller picture of the unique and distinctive voice that is the doctrine of justification in the Catholic tradition.

1.2 Thomas Aquinas and the Background of Catholic Soteriology

It may be difficult for contemporary readers to understand the nuances of Aquinas' theological anthropology and soteriology. This is especially true for Protestants who have been taught a different paradigm about human nature, sin, grace, and the idea of the beatific vision. Overall, Catholic soteriology is indebted to Aquinas for establishing these categories. While much of Aquinas' work never became official doctrine for the Catholic Church, it provides an important framework for the justification question.

Aquinas adopts a particular understanding of the human person that remains influential in Catholic thought. In short, the human is a finite rational being, quite different in essence and ability from the divine being. More specifically, Aquinas' thought reflects an Aristotelian ontology in which the highest intuition that a finite mind can achieve is immediate awareness of itself. The finite cannot comprehend the divine, because the human intellect is limited to the particular substance that it is, and knowledge

of other things is simply beyond its nature.⁴¹⁹ All of this may not be different than much Protestant thought, but it is in how Aquinas develops these ideas that do become distinctively Catholic.

Albeit finite and different from the divine, Aquinas also plainly affirms the biblical teaching that the human person is created in the image of God. He primarily places the *imago dei* in the rational capacities of humanity that set it apart from the animal world, saying that, "The image of God, in its principal signification, namely the intellectual nature, is found both in man and in woman."⁴²⁰ More specifically, he believes that humans most closely image the uncreated Trinity of persons in their powers of intellect and will.⁴²¹

According to Aquinas, God can be apprehended by the human he created, but only mediately, inferentially, or indirectly. More specifically, natural man or woman can know that God exists, but only as the ground of being or the evidence of causality.⁴²² If he or she is to know God personally or salvifically, this knowledge must come from God specially, and Aquinas teaches that this is the role of divine grace. Through grace, God gives the human being the super-human ability to do more, or know more, than he or she could naturally.⁴²³ Stephen Duffy explains that for Aquinas, "The categories of the human mind are too fragile to hold the weight of God's mysterious grace, for the experiential source of such categories is in created realities, not in the reality of God."⁴²⁴

⁴¹⁹ See Aquinas' discussion of the intellect, in which he quotes Aristotle liberally, in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of English Dominican Province, 2nd edition (online 2008), <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>, 1, Qu. 79.

⁴²⁰ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1, Q. 93, Art. 2.

⁴²¹ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1, Q. 93, Art. 6.

⁴²² Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st part, Q. 2.

⁴²³ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 109, Art. 4.

⁴²⁴ Stephen Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 125.

In other words, we human beings have a “poverty of our being.”⁴²⁵ We cannot know God directly from ourselves; instead we are essentially limited and confined to what is properly created.

However, humanity in that finitude and poverty has some natural capacity for good. This good is both contained in human nature, and results from God’s action. Part of what it means to be a human person is a certain dependence upon the divine to steer him or her toward what is good. Aquinas writes, “Man in a state of perfect nature, could by his natural power, do the good natural to him without the addition of any gratuitous gift, though not without the help of God moving him.”⁴²⁶ This exemplifies the interplay between what good humanity might have been capable of resulting from his or her own action, and how God still needed to uphold and preserve them in order to do that action.

The idea of pure nature is a theoretical construct in Catholic thought; it is something that does not necessarily exist in the concrete. Thomas Aquinas used the concept of pure nature to defend the idea that human beings could avoid sin and do good, provided that God preserve them in it. In this prelapsarian state, Aquinas says that human reason had “perfect hold” over the “lower parts of the soul” and the soul was naturally directed toward virtue.⁴²⁷ People did good works that flowed out of their virtuous orientation, and this was natural to them. Notably, Aquinas explains this as a state of original justice.⁴²⁸

Even in this state of original integrity and justice, humanity was called by God for more. God gave people a desire for Godself and a greater good. For these things, they

⁴²⁵ Stephen Duffy, *The Graced Horizon* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 14.

⁴²⁶ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 109, Art. 3.

⁴²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 109, Art. 3.

⁴²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 85, Art. 3.

needed an endowment of grace: “And thus in the state of perfect nature man needs a gratuitous strength superadded to natural strength...in order to do and wish supernatural good.”⁴²⁹ God directs humanity not simply toward what is good, but also toward Godself--toward what is truly more than what the human naturally is. Duffy explains that this is grace, and he explains that grace is “extrinsic” and “superadded” to human nature. Grace offers people the means to transcend their finite abilities, supplementing their nature, and providing them the ability to achieve a level of activity that transcends the natural.⁴³⁰ And importantly, this divine grace is always free and gratuitous. God does not owe anyone grace, before or after the fall into sin. Thus the idea of pure nature demonstrates that God gives grace freely.

Aquinas often calls God the First Mover,⁴³¹ which describes what God’s action is toward humanity and all rational creatures. God’s divine agency is the primary cause of human action and being. God moves the human from potentiality to actuality, and with God’s moving, men and women are able to do and become what is otherwise impossible for them. God must move in them first; God initiates. This idea of God as Prime Mover and granter of an initial grace or help becomes a mainstay in Catholic theology. God always begins with grace, supplementing human ability and creating the possibility of a future for the human person that is truly beyond itself.

Ultimately, transcending the natural leads one to union with God. Here Aquinas speaks of what is known in Catholic thought as the beatific vision or the *visio Dei*. This concept is certainly not unique to Aquinas. Kenneth Kirk traces the history of

⁴²⁹ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 109, Art. 2.

⁴³⁰ Duffy, *Graced Horizon*, 14.

⁴³¹ Language of First Mover is today usually associated with deism. Since that is not what Aquinas means by the term, some theologians today prefer to use the term Prime Mover.

interpretation of the beatific vision; he identifies both Jewish and pagan roots to the idea, but finds it a fundamentally biblical concept that was given greater attention in monasticism, the Middle Ages, and in the work of significant Church Fathers including Aquinas.⁴³² Amidst this context, Aquinas speaks eloquently about the *visio Dei*. He believes that all creatures with intellects—both humans and angels—desire to see God as he is.⁴³³ The *visio Dei*, then, is exactly that—seeing God as he is in eternity, and that vision provides the fulfillment and perfection of human life. Thus, for Aquinas there is an innate teleological dimension of human nature, which draws it ever closer to the divine above. Long comments that for Aquinas, “Everything, including humanity, has an end toward which it naturally moves, and this end will be its perfection... This last end is the motive force that draws creation into the Image of the Triune God.”⁴³⁴

This destiny is far beyond one’s natural capabilities. Long states, “The attainment of our perfection does not come about naturally, for our true end, the vision of the Triune God, transcends our nature.”⁴³⁵ Human fulfillment and ultimate happiness is the result of divine activity and power, guiding the human being toward perfection in Godself. Aquinas says, “the rational creature cannot of its own power attain its beatitude, which consists in the vision of God... it needs to be moved by God toward its beatitude.”⁴³⁶ God moves humanity toward increasing enjoyment of himself; his grace inclines the human away from the lower order of nature and toward the supernatural, higher realm of the

⁴³² Kenneth Kirk gives a detailed historical exposition of the *visio Dei* as well as a plea for modern readers to reconsider what he believes is an essential Christian concept in *The Vision of God: The Christian Doctrine of the Summum Bonum* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966). Also, *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* gives a helpful exposition of the idea of the beatific vision in Catholic thought and its scriptural-historical development. See M. J. Rede, “Beatific Vision,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2003), 168-177.

⁴³³ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1 of 2, Q. 3, Art. 7.

⁴³⁴ Long, “Way of Aquinas,” 354.

⁴³⁵ Long, “Way of Aquinas,” 354-355.

⁴³⁶ Aquinas, *Summa*, I, Q. 69, Art. 9.

divine.⁴³⁷ Duffy explains that, “To achieve beatitude, humans need divine assistance (*divinum auxilium*.)”⁴³⁸ God grants them his supernatural grace to transform them into something better, into a state of glory. Humanity is ordered to this glory; a person is oriented toward it and finds perfect happiness in it.⁴³⁹ True human fulfillment is in the expanding transcendence of the natural toward a union with the divine essence, and it comes by God’s gift of supernatural grace.

Sin is an added difficulty for humanity. Sin wounds human nature and disrupts its basic orientation toward virtue. Aquinas writes, “Now this same original justice is forfeited through the sin of our first parents...so that all the powers of the soul are left, as it were, destitute of their proper order, whereby they are naturally directed to virtue, which destitution is called a wounding of nature.”⁴⁴⁰ After the fall into sin, a person’s natural inclination toward God is obscured or diminished, and his or her heart is hardened so that good works are more difficult for him or her to achieve. Sometimes Aquinas speaks of this as humanity being in the state of a “corrupt nature,”⁴⁴¹ meaning that humanity is now so disordered that people seek after their own good instead of the love of God. Thus supernatural grace has an additional purpose after the fall—it heals people of this tendency toward selfishness as it redirects them back toward Godself.

Importantly, however, Aquinas insists that “sin does not diminish nature.”⁴⁴² He understands that human reason, in particular, is integral to a person, and cannot be

⁴³⁷ For a helpful Reformed explanation and critique, see Michael Horton’s comments in Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 421-423.

⁴³⁸ Duffy, *Dynamics of Grace*, 132.

⁴³⁹ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1 of 2, Q. 3, Art. 8.

⁴⁴⁰ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 85, Art. 3.

⁴⁴¹ See Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 109, Art. 3 for example.

⁴⁴² Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 85, Art. 2.

affected in its essence. While sin creates an obstacle in reason “attaining its term,” people remain fundamentally what they were before sin.⁴⁴³ Sin neither destroys nor diminishes the core identity of human nature. From Aquinas’ perspective, sin could have no such effect, because then human beings would cease to be human.⁴⁴⁴

Thus, even in a state of sin, Aquinas believes that people are still able to do some things that are truly good. Human nature is such that natural good is still natural to it, if even made more difficult by sin. He writes:

In the state of integrity...man by his natural endowments could wish and do the good proportionate to his nature...But in the state of corrupt nature, man falls short of what he could do by his nature...Yet because human nature is not altogether corrupted by sin, so as to be shorn of every natural good, even in the state of corrupted nature it can, by virtue of its natural endowment, work some particular good...just as a sick man can of himself make some movements, yet cannot be perfectly moved with the movements of one in health, unless by the help of medicine be cured.⁴⁴⁵

Aquinas’ insistence of some good remaining in fallen humanity becomes influential for Catholic theology, which retained a more positive view of the human person than does Reformed theology. Regardless, in the thinking of Aquinas, the sinner is sick but not dead. Men and women need grace to heal them and to restore in them the ability to do greater works of good, like those of acquired virtue. Divine grace also aids the human person on the journey towards his or her fulfillment and perfect happiness in the sight of God.

It should be clear that, according to Aquinas, what changes the most after the entrance of sin is not so much humanity, but rather the degree to which humanity needs grace to reorient them back toward God. Yet men and women always needed

⁴⁴³ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 85, Art. 2.

⁴⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 85, Art. 1.

⁴⁴⁵ Aquinas, 1st of 2nd, Q. 109, Art. 2.

supernatural grace to acquire their supernatural end. After the fall into sin, this is made more complicated and difficult for them. They lose their original justice. Indeed, Aquinas says that this gift is “entirely destroyed” by sin.⁴⁴⁶ The loss of original justice disrupts the human person and corrupts his or her powers. Again Duffy explains, “In its proper formality, original sin consists in the privation in us of original justice, of habitual grace. Those who die in this state are deprived of the vision of God.”⁴⁴⁷ Ultimately the fall into sin creates an additional purpose for divine grace in one who is to attain his or her end. Supernatural grace restores the person, instilling in him or her the virtue to seek God above all: “For the greater the charity whence our actions proceed, the more perfectly shall we enjoy God.”⁴⁴⁸

In a specific discussion about justification, Aquinas says that justification entails a state of justice in the human person: “justice is so-called inasmuch as it implies a certain rectitude of order in the interior disposition of a man...justification implies a transmutation from the state of injustice to the aforesaid state of justice.”⁴⁴⁹ It includes the remission of sin and guilt, but it also incorporates the growing state of justice in the believer as God moves him or her to justice.⁴⁵⁰ Notably, Aquinas further explains that for this to occur, grace is “infused” to the human person by God.⁴⁵¹

Overall, then, the human person is understood by Aquinas as a rational creature made in God's image, and drawn by God into greater and perfect communion with Godself. In this the human being will find perfect happiness and his or her proper end,

⁴⁴⁶ Aquinas, 1st of 2nd, Q. 85, Art. 1.

⁴⁴⁷ Duffy, *Dynamics of Grace*, 136.

⁴⁴⁸ Aquinas, I, Q. 95, Art. 4.

⁴⁴⁹ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 113, Art. 1.

⁴⁵⁰ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 113, Art. 3.

⁴⁵¹ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1st of 2nd, Q. 113, Art. 2.

even though everyone is entirely incapable of achieving it in his or her own power. If a person is to attain it, he or she must be moved by God toward that destiny. God's grace always constitutes the first action in human salvation. But Aquinas also understands grace to function continually; it constantly supplements natural human ability and enables the human person to seek after God. With the help of supernatural grace, the person becomes increasingly perfected and is justified. As we shall see, the Catholic doctrine of justification is framed along this general paradigm: grace that begins, supplements, and completes human ability to live eternally in the presence of God.

2. The Catholic Doctrine of Justification

Most significantly, the Council of Trent in its "Decree on Justification,"⁴⁵² defines justification as a process. In its own words, justification is "a transition from the state in which one is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace and adoption as children of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ our Saviour."⁴⁵³ In Catholic thought, justification is centered on the idea of the human person becoming just. It always includes what Trent calls the "renewal of the interior person," and this happens "through the voluntary reception of grace and of the gifts, whereby from unjust the person becomes just and from enemy a friend, that one may be 'an heir in hope of eternal life.'"⁴⁵⁴ The word "sanctification" is specifically used to describe what takes place in one's justification.⁴⁵⁵ Thus from the Catholic perspective, justification always incorporates sanctification. As justified, believers become increasingly holy, and

⁴⁵² Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," sixth Session, 13 January 1547, in *The Christian Faith* (New York: Alba House, 2001).

⁴⁵³ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter IV.

⁴⁵⁴ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter VII.

⁴⁵⁵ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter VII.

increasingly united to God.⁴⁵⁶ The end and goal of justification is for the believer to glorify God and experience eternal life with God.⁴⁵⁷

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) also speaks of this understanding of justification. It identifies justification as a process that includes the sanctification of the human person. Quoting from Trent, the CCC states, “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.”⁴⁵⁸ In this process, divine grace moves people to turn toward God and away from sin. When justified, a person is both detached from sin and conformed to the righteousness of Christ.⁴⁵⁹

The CCC’s teaching on justification also connects the work of the Holy Spirit to the believer’s increased union with God. It quotes from St. Athanasius: “By participation of the Spirit, we become communicants in the divine nature... For this reason, those in whom the Spirit dwells are divinized.”⁴⁶⁰ Overall, it is fair to say that Catholic thought on justification is rooted in the teleological conviction that humanity’s ultimate destiny is to become changed, augmented, or elevated toward the goal of perfect union with God. Believers are progressively made into new creations; they are transformed into the image of Christ and experience the divine life within them.

Justification, then, is a life-long process, yet Catholic teaching insists that God must begin it. Trent says that God begins human justification with his gift of prevenient grace.⁴⁶¹ God’s action always remains primary. With prevenient grace, God’s justifies

⁴⁵⁶ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter X and Canons 24 and 32.

⁴⁵⁷ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter VII, XIII, and XVI.

⁴⁵⁸ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1989.

⁴⁵⁹ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1990-1991.

⁴⁶⁰ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1988.

⁴⁶¹ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter V.

the believer “without any previous merits of theirs.”⁴⁶² Specifically, a person undergoes a certain preparation for God’s justification before he can be considered just. The person first needs to be “disposed for that justice,”⁴⁶³ where God works in the person to change his disposition back toward Godself. Again the prevenient grace of God activates the human heart, illuminating it with the Holy Spirit. It awakens believers and assists them in the process of turning toward God. The catechism states, “Moved by grace, man turns toward God and away from sin.”⁴⁶⁴

With God’s action always primary, Trent is yet clear that believers have a secondary role in their justification. They must respond by “freely assenting and cooperating with that grace” if they are to be justified.⁴⁶⁵ The justified person is one who continues on the path of justification, and with the help of habitual grace, cooperates with God toward an increasing level of his or her union with Christ. Therefore, “one is not inactive”⁴⁶⁶ in his or her justification. God gracefully begins this change in the believer, and then God grants further grace enabling that believer to continue working towards improvement. The CCC upholds the traditional Catholic teaching about the divine-human collaboration of justification, stating that, “Justification establishes cooperation between God’s grace and man’s freedom.”⁴⁶⁷

Also in line with Trent, the catechism expressly teaches that justification is merited only by the atonement of Jesus Christ.⁴⁶⁸ His sacrificial death is the only way that humanity can be forgiven of its sins and become obedient to the divine will. Yet,

⁴⁶² Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter V.

⁴⁶³ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter VI.

⁴⁶⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1989.

⁴⁶⁵ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter V.

⁴⁶⁶ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter V.

⁴⁶⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1993.

⁴⁶⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2020.

again, there remains an element of cooperation necessary between God and the human person for justification. Catholic thought carefully protects human free will in the arena of justification, but free will is always influenced by prevenient grace. Christians do have to do something in justification—they must assent to God in Christ and yield themselves as a vehicle of God’s grace. In doing so they conform themselves to God’s outpouring of faith, hope, and love into his or her heart, becoming “the rectitude of God’s love.”⁴⁶⁹

Finally, Trent's “Decree on Justification” identifies the causes of justification. Briefly, the final cause is God’s glory, the efficient cause is God’s mercy, the meritorious cause is Christ’s death of atonement, the instrumental cause is baptism, and the formal cause is God’s justice imparted to the believer.⁴⁷⁰ The latter two causes are quintessentially Catholic. The last one, the formal cause, is especially significant in the great debates with Protestants over justification. With its definition of formal cause the Council sets forth the Catholic belief that justification constitutes an interior state of justice in the human person. The decree reads:

Thus, not only are we considered just, but we are truly called just and we are just, each one receiving within oneself one’s own justice, according to the measure which “the Holy Spirit apportions to each one individually as he wills,” and according to each one’s personal disposition and cooperation.⁴⁷¹

God’s justice becomes a part of the inner life of believers as grace is infused to them. They are made just and cooperate with grace towards an increasing level of justice in themselves.

Overall, the Catholic understanding of justification is centered on the idea of the believer becoming just. It is a transition that God begins, awakening the individual to the

⁴⁶⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1991.

⁴⁷⁰ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter VII.

⁴⁷¹ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter VII.

reality of God. God moves in the human person by his grace, and enables him or her to respond with faithful obedience to God's commands. The believer assents to God's justifying grace, cooperates with God in this process, and is increasingly sanctified. Ultimately, the believer is made able to enjoy eternal life in the vision of God.

3. Important Aspects of Justification

As we shall see in a following chapter, the Protestant Reformers took issue with this understanding of justification. To make sense of their challenges, we will examine some aspects of the Catholic doctrine of justification in greater detail. These are sin, faith, grace, merit, and some ecclesiastical issues that pertain to justification. These topics constitute essential points of the Catholic perspective on soteriology. They are also important for understanding remaining differences between Catholic and Reformed believers on the doctrine of justification.

3.1 Human Sin

The Council of Trent gave the reality of human sin special attention in its fifth session, which dealt specifically with the topic of original sin.⁴⁷² The notion of sin was a divisive issue with the Protestants, who were defining sin more extensively⁴⁷³ and had assumed a different understanding concerning the role of the church in the expiation of sin.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷² Council of Trent, "Decree on Original Sin," Fifth Session, 17 June 1546, in *The Christian Faith* (New York: Alba House, 2001).

⁴⁷³ For example, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), III.3.10.

⁴⁷⁴ For example, Calvin vehemently opposes the idea of the Mass as a sacrificial offering "to obtain forgiveness of sins." See Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.18.1.

However, the Reformers themselves would agree with much of the teaching about sin in Trent's "Decree on Original Sin." For example, they would agree that with the entrance of sin, the human person lost the "holiness and justice received from God."⁴⁷⁵ Furthermore, they also taught that Adam's sin harmed not only him, but also all of his descendants.⁴⁷⁶ And having lost that holiness and justice, both the Reformers and Trent insist that the human person is stained by the sin of disobedience and receives the penalty of suffering and death.⁴⁷⁷

Most notably, and in agreement with the Reformers, Trent clearly says that human sin cannot be taken away "by the powers of human nature."⁴⁷⁸ The Council makes very obvious the Catholic Church's belief that the only solution for human sin is in the sacrificial work of Jesus. In its own words, it states that the remedy for original sin is "the merits of the one mediator our Lord Jesus Christ who reconciled us with God by his blood."⁴⁷⁹

Nonetheless, differences emerge as to the questions of what constitutes human sin and what the believer is able to achieve after the Fall. First, Catholic teaching carefully distinguishes between what can be truly considered sin and what is instead to be considered concupiscence. A similar distinction is made in the catechism between mortal and venial sin. In general, Catholic thought emphasizes the growing holiness of the believer, and teaches that after justification, sin—in a proper sense—is no longer a reality in the life of those united to Christ.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁵ Council of Trent, "Decree on Original Sin," §2.

⁴⁷⁶ Council of Trent, "Decree on Original Sin," §2 and 3.

⁴⁷⁷ Council of Trent, "Decree on Original Sin," §1 and 2.

⁴⁷⁸ Council of Trent, "Decree on Original Sin," §3.

⁴⁷⁹ Council of Trent, "Decree on Original Sin," §3.

⁴⁸⁰ Council of Trent, "Decree on Original Sin," §5.

Thus Trent distinguishes sin from concupiscence. Concupiscence is not sin, but rather an inclination toward sin that a believer must wrestle with in his or her earthly life.⁴⁸¹ Trent teaches that the Church does not consider concupiscence the same as sin because it does not engage the will.⁴⁸² Concupiscence is that postlapsarian pull towards the flesh; it is an inclination towards the unregenerate self and away from God. Only if someone assents to concupiscence, does he or she sin.

The “Decree on Justification” further distinguishes concupiscence and sin in a mention of venial sins.⁴⁸³ The Council recognizes that believers will still fall short in their pursuit of holiness. They might give way to concupiscence in big or in small ways. Trent identifies venial sins to be those small, insignificant, and even daily sins.⁴⁸⁴ The humble plea “forgive us our debts” is adequate to remedy them,⁴⁸⁵ and after this remedy, “the just should feel all the more obliged to walk in the way of justice.”⁴⁸⁶ These venial sins do not disqualify one from the grace of justification; they are not sin in the full or real sense, and do not threaten one’s salvation.⁴⁸⁷

The catechism gives a fuller definition of the difference between mortal and venial sins. It quotes from Aquinas to describe venial sin as “something that of its nature involves a disorder, but is not opposed to the love of God and neighbor,” and mortal sin as “something that is of its nature incompatible with the charity that orients man toward his ultimate end.”⁴⁸⁸ The CCC further states that for a sin to be mortal its object must be

⁴⁸¹ Council of Trent, “Decree on Original Sin,” §5.

⁴⁸² Council of Trent, “Decree on Original Sin,” §5.

⁴⁸³ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XI.

⁴⁸⁴ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XI.

⁴⁸⁵ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XI.

⁴⁸⁶ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XI.

⁴⁸⁷ On account of venial sins, believers “do not on that account cease to be just.” See Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XI.

⁴⁸⁸ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1856.

of grave matter, and it requires the full knowledge and complete consent of the doer.⁴⁸⁹ It also is a "privation of sanctifying grace," and will result in God's eternal judgment, if it is not repented of.⁴⁹⁰ Venial sin is much less serious, and while "it impedes the soul's progress in the exercise of the virtues," it does not set one up in opposition to God, nor deprive one of sanctifying grace.⁴⁹¹

A second point to notice is Trent's insistence that with the grace of Christ, the baptized person can refrain from sin. Sin need not be a remaining part of the believer's life, and the believer is not to be considered a sinner in a true and proper sense.⁴⁹² Believers are instead reborn of God, and who, "putting off the old person and putting on the new, created after the likeness of God, innocent, unstained, pure and guiltless, have become the beloved children of God."⁴⁹³ Internal justice and sin are mutually exclusive and cannot both exist in the believer's heart. Thus, either one is in a state of sin, as in the case of the unregenerate, or one is in a state of justice as a child of God.

The "Decree on Justification" further supports this teaching with a discussion on the observance of God's commandments for those who are justified. Can the human, justified in Christ, fulfill God's law? Trent answers with a firm yes: "No one should say that the observance of God's commandments is impossible for the person justified."⁴⁹⁴ This is because God would not command that which was unachievable for a person to do.⁴⁹⁵ Yet the decree is careful to explain that only "with God's help"⁴⁹⁶ can the

⁴⁸⁹ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1857-1861.

⁴⁹⁰ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1861.

⁴⁹¹ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1962-1863.

⁴⁹² Council of Trent, "Decree on Original Sin," §5.

⁴⁹³ Council of Trent, "Decree on Original Sin," §5.

⁴⁹⁴ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter XI.

⁴⁹⁵ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter XI.

⁴⁹⁶ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter XI.

Christian keep God's commandments, refrain from sin, and please God. Sin, in some real sense, is excluded from the life of the justified.

In conclusion, the Catholic understanding of sin is one that clearly upholds Scriptural teaching about Adam's fall from justice that merited him and all of his descendants suffering and death. The curse of sin cannot be overcome by the human person; Christ alone had to pay the penalty for human sin. Catholic teaching particularly emphasizes that with God's help, the Christian can avoid sin, and is no longer to be considered a sinner. Believers will still struggle with concupiscence, or the pull toward sin, and they may fall in little or venial ways to sin. Yet believers can and must resist sin. The Council of Trent insists that the justified person can avoid sinful acts, and it differentiates itself from the Protestant idea that there could be some sin in every good act.⁴⁹⁷ Quite to the contrary, the good works of a just person glorify God and merit eternal reward.⁴⁹⁸

3.2 Faith and Assurance

A second significant issue at conflict with the Reformers is the nature of Christian faith. We will examine later the Reformed tradition's insistence on justification being by faith alone, or *sola fide*. Here we want to identify the Catholic teaching on faith, and its relationship to justification.

Trent's "Decree on Justification" describes justification as a union with Christ which specifically entails an infusion of faith, hope, and love into the justified person: "Hence, in the very act of justification...one receives through Jesus Christ, into whom

⁴⁹⁷ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter XI and Canons 25 and 31.

⁴⁹⁸ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter XI, particularly the last two paragraphs of the chapter.

one is inserted, the gifts of faith, hope, and charity, all infused at the same time.”⁴⁹⁹

Contained in one’s justification is an adhesion to Christ and an inhering in him. This inevitably causes one to grow in the gifts of Christ—faith, hope, and love. Thus, faith is not considered alone, but instead as one of several gifts of God, which all must be considered together in one’s justification.

The gifts of faith, hope, and love need to be kept alive in the lives of believers. Believers are commanded to obey God’s law in the fulfillment of these virtues. And in this way they maintain their justification:

Accordingly, while they receive the true Christian justice, as soon as they have been reborn, they are commanded to keep it resplendent and spotless, like their “best robe” given to them through Jesus Christ in place of the one Adam lost for himself and for us by his disobedience, so that they may wear it before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ and have eternal life.⁵⁰⁰

Thus, included in one’s justification is a very real expectation that the justified will move forward on the path of that justification. To continue to be justified, one must continue to do the works of justification, works which result from the faith, hope, and love God grows within the inner lives of his children. For support of this position, the document quotes the well-known verse from James 2.17: “Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”⁵⁰¹ Christian faith is evidenced by the works of hope and charity, resulting from union with Christ. Additionally, these works, through grace, cause the believer to increase in his or her justice. Indeed, Trent declares that by doing them one becomes “further justified.”⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁹ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter VII.

⁵⁰⁰ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter VII.

⁵⁰¹ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter VII.

⁵⁰² Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter X.

Because of its affirmation of faith, hope, and love together, the Council rejects the “*sola fide*” slogan from the Protestants.⁵⁰³ This Reformation controversy involves the nature of confidence regarding salvation. Certainly both Catholics and Protestants agreed that this can only be found in God. Yet the character, or even the modality of that confidence, is different. The Catholic Church at Trent declared that faith in Christ alone—that is, without consideration of hope and love—is only a “vain confidence” for one’s salvation.⁵⁰⁴ The Council states, “For faith without hope and charity neither unites a person perfectly with Christ, nor makes one a living member of his body.”⁵⁰⁵

Some of Trent’s resistance to the idea of *sola fide* is due to a specific understanding of the word “faith.” Susan Wood explains that this understanding of faith can be traced back to earlier medieval tradition in which faith was primarily associated with notional belief. She writes, “The fathers of the Council of Trent followed the medieval tradition by considering faith first as the assent of the understanding to the revealed Word of God, and as the ‘objective’ belief expressed in the church’s creed and its proclaimed doctrine.”⁵⁰⁶ With this understanding of faith, the Council taught that faith alone is not enough for one’s justification.

The catechism contains lengthy teaching on the idea of faith. The traditional understanding of faith can be found in the CCC, which calls faith “a free assent to the

⁵⁰³ See Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Canons 9, 11, 12, and 14.

⁵⁰⁴ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter IX. See also Canon 9 for Trent’s insistence that “faith alone” is inadequate for justification because the human person must cooperate with God “in order to obtain the grace of justification” and Canon 11 that states how justification cannot exclude the “grace and charity which is poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit and adheres in them,” presumably as the idea of *sola fide* would do.

⁵⁰⁵ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter VII.

⁵⁰⁶ Susan Wood, *One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), 155.

whole truth that God has revealed.”⁵⁰⁷ However, the catechism is not univocal in its discussion about the nature of faith. Indeed, as the CCC speaks so prolifically about faith and about the multi-faceted nature of faith, it would be untrue to reduce the contemporary Catholic understanding of faith to mean merely “intellectual assent.” A contemporary Catholic understanding of faith includes the idea of a person’s free choice to believe in God, something that only results from God’s initial grace. The CCC states, “Faith is man’s response to God,”⁵⁰⁸ and it is both “a grace” and “an authentically human act.”⁵⁰⁹ God graciously works in the human person via prevenient grace, and he or she responds by placing faith in God and working out the deeds of hope and love in his or her salvation.

Overall, the Council teaches that there is an efficacy of Christ’s death and resurrection that inevitably causes an increase in the gifts of faith, hope, and love to the believer. People can ascertain this growing piety in themselves, but even so, the eternal reward is not to be simply assumed for oneself. Trent states, “Let no one promise oneself any security about this gift [of perseverance] with absolute certitude, although all should place their firmest hope in God’s help.”⁵¹⁰ Likely in response to Protestant teaching about faith creating an assurance of salvation in the believer, the Council instead encourages a spirit of humility and of action when contemplating one’s eternal salvation.⁵¹¹ The believer must be active, persevering in his or her justification until the time of death:

⁵⁰⁷ Catechism of Catholic Church, 150.

⁵⁰⁸ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, 26.

⁵⁰⁹ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, 153 and 154.

⁵¹⁰ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XIII.

⁵¹¹ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XII and XIII and Canons 14-19.

Knowing that they are reborn unto the hope of glory and not yet unto glory, they should be in dread about the battle they still have to wage with the flesh, the world and the devil, in which they cannot be the winners unless with God's grace they obey the apostle who says: "...if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."⁵¹²

Again, with the aid of grace, the justified person cooperates with God, continuing to grow in faith, hope, and love. Trent gives some examples of what this may include: "in labours, in vigils, in almsgiving, in prayers and offerings, in fastings and charity."⁵¹³ And while the Council speaks of the gift of perseverance, or God's constant help to complete his will in the lives of believers, Trent cautiously reminds readers that with fear and trembling they must work out their salvation.⁵¹⁴ In the end, there can be no absolute certainty when it comes to eternal salvation.⁵¹⁵

3.3 Grace

Grace is an important concept in the theology of justification, and this is not less true for the Reformed tradition as it is for the Catholic tradition. However, these traditions define grace differently. In the Catholic tradition, there is a quintessential distinction between nature and grace that was mediated through the theology of Thomas Aquinas. As we have seen, Aquinas believed that humanity, though originally created with a good nature, was yet in need of divine grace to enable it to reach its ultimate end of eternal life with God in glory.⁵¹⁶ Grace functions to elevate human nature, making it possible for the believer to experience ultimate happiness in the divine vision. Duffy

⁵¹² Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter XIII.

⁵¹³ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter XIII.

⁵¹⁴ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter XIII.

⁵¹⁵ That is, unless one has learned of this by a special revelation of God. See also Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter XII-XIII and Cannons 15-16.

⁵¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1 of 2, Q. 109, Art. 5.

explains that for Aquinas, “In the order of *nature*, all creatures move and change in dependence on the Prime Mover, though with an inner spontaneity flowing from their own natural forms. In the order of *grace*, spiritual beings are moved to a destiny beyond the range of their natural powers.”⁵¹⁷ Divine grace is the vehicle that enables human nature to go beyond its natural powers and be made capable of experiencing everlasting life before the face of God. In a similar way, Trent identifies the key concept of infused grace. As the believer becomes justified, the merits of Christ are “infused” into the human person,⁵¹⁸ and the person becomes capable of a salvation that is naturally impossible for him or her.

As shown above, the “Decree on Justification” distinguishes between prevenient grace, which begins the process of justification, and habitual grace, which assists the believer to grow in his or her justification.⁵¹⁹ God graciously creates a state of justice by awakening new believers with his prevenient grace, and God does this quite apart from any previous merits on their part. Once having received prevenient grace, the believer is further assisted with habitual grace to assent and cooperate with God, so that the believer is turned away from sin and toward God.

Overall, it is fair to say that in Catholic soteriology, grace is a complex concept. Grace begins something new in the human person—the condition of justice, and it then aids that person in the preservation and increase of that justice.⁵²⁰ This grace is infused into believers as the gifts of Christ become their own. And with the exercise of these

⁵¹⁷ Duffy, *Dynamics of Grace*, 132.

⁵¹⁸ See Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter VII, particularly the first and third paragraphs.

⁵¹⁹ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter V.

⁵²⁰ See the Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Canon 24 for the reference to the preservation and increase of justice through doing good works. Canon 11 states that this is possible only by the grace and charity poured into the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit.

gifts, believers are made increasingly able to participate in their salvation as they become worthy of the eternal reward.⁵²¹

The catechism reflects this understanding of grace. The concept of grace is prevalent throughout the CCC, but its role in justification is defined more specifically in paragraph 1996: “Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is favour, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.” Grace is specifically said to be infused; it is “infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it.”⁵²²

In its discussion of justifying grace, the catechism distinguishes between habitual grace and actual graces. Habitual grace is a “permanent disposition” and a “supernatural disposition” toward God in which the believer lives and acts in accordance to God’s law and love.⁵²³ Actual graces are acts of God’s more specific intervention in the life of a believer, including “the beginning of conversion” and other incidents that occur “in the course of the work of sanctification.”⁵²⁴ The catechism here includes Trent’s notion of prevenient grace as an actual grace, since it constitutes the beginning of one’s justification.

Finally, the CCC speaks more definitively about the connection between grace and union with God than does Trent when it states that, “Grace is a participation in the life of God.”⁵²⁵ The catechism calls this a “supernatural vocation” for the human being

⁵²¹ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Canons 26 and 32.

⁵²² *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1999.

⁵²³ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §2000.

⁵²⁴ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §2000.

⁵²⁵ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1997.

because it far surpasses human ability.⁵²⁶ It is accomplished only in grace; grace creates in the believer what the catechism calls “a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love.”⁵²⁷ The catechism also refers to this as a “deifying grace”⁵²⁸--not that the human person becomes God, but rather that he or she is made united with Christ and enjoys what the catechism calls the “intimacy of the divine life.”⁵²⁹

In conclusion, grace is a highly important category in the Catholic understanding of justification. Divine grace is active in the lives of believers, making them aware of the reality of God and of their supernatural destiny with God. Prevenient grace begins the justification of the Christian, while habitual grace sustains, increases, and perfects him or her in that justification. Grace is infused into the human person; it awakens believers to God’s salvation, cleanses them from sin, and assists them in living a life that pleases God. Ultimately, divine grace enables the believer to contribute to and be deemed worthy of the eternal reward.

3.4 Merit

It is that grace-enabled contribution that makes up another important and distinctively Catholic understanding of justification--that is, merit. Because Catholic theology incorporates sanctification with justification, salvation is understood in terms of process and increase of Christ’s infused grace. This understanding of salvation is the foundation for the concept of merit. God begins human salvation with the initial gift of

⁵²⁶ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1998.

⁵²⁷ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §2000.

⁵²⁸ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1999.

⁵²⁹ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1997.

prevenient grace, and then (with the constant aid of habitual grace) the believer is empowered to participate and contribute to its progression. In some real way, divine grace creates in the believer the capacity to work with God in order to finally achieve eternal life with God.

It should be said that the idea of human merit has a long history within Christian thought. Thomas Aquinas incorporated the language of merit in his theology,⁵³⁰ but he by no means initiated it. We saw above that Augustine, too, used the concept. Nick Needham comments that many theologians spoke of merit, and that there is diversity or “shifting nuances”⁵³¹ in what the early church Fathers meant by it. Merit could refer simply to faith, or more specifically to good works, or in some instances, “that which obtains.” Merit seems to have multiple meanings, but the general idea is that merit was something good enough to be worthy of reward.

According to Thomas Aquinas, the human person is enabled to achieve merit: “the works of supernatural virtue...are meritorious.”⁵³² Overall, he uses the term merit to identify works of supernatural virtue that gain a person increasing enjoyment of God. Yet he is very clear: “An act cannot be meritorious as coming from free-will, except in so far as it is informed by grace...Hence it does not appear to be possible for anyone to enjoy beatitude, and at the same time to merit it.”⁵³³ It is important to emphasize that any meritorious work someone can do is always the result of divine grace first moving in them to do so. Grace is absolutely intrinsic to the concept of merit.

⁵³⁰ Aquinas speaks of human merit in multiple places within the *Summa*, but a more focused discussion is found in 1st of 2nd, Q. 114.

⁵³¹ Needham, “Justification in Early Church Fathers,” 52-53.

⁵³² Aquinas, 1st of 2nd, Q. 109, Art. 2.

⁵³³ Aquinas, I, Q. 62, Art. 4.

With the aid of grace moving them, people are helped to work toward what Aquinas calls “the essential reward,”⁵³⁴ which ultimately consists of the beatific vision. Accruing merit toward this reward is possible even after the introduction of sin. However, Aquinas admits that merit is made more difficult for people to achieve after the fall.⁵³⁵ Regardless of the increased challenge, Aquinas believes that God makes it possible for the human person to obtain merit and contribute toward his or her eternal blessedness.

The Council of Trent assumes this Thomistic line of thought, but not without insisting on the primacy of Christ’s merit in salvation. Above all else, the Council teaches that the only solution to human sin is the salvific work of Jesus Christ. In order to be saved, a sinner needs to be reborn in the work of Christ’s death and resurrection; he or she needs to be justified. Specifically, “the merit of Christ’s passion” is “the grace in which they become just.”⁵³⁶ Only in the work of Christ can one be forgiven of sin, become justified, and be united to Christ.

Likewise, the catechism reflects this emphasis upon Christ’s merits when it reads, “The charity of Christ is the source in us of all our merits before God,”⁵³⁷ and, “Man’s merit, moreover, itself is due to God, for his good actions proceed in Christ, from the predispositions and assistance given by the Holy Spirit.”⁵³⁸ It is clear that God must first initiate and sustain the believer with grace for merit to be possible for him or her. The catechism specifically refers to merit as the result of the Holy Spirit’s activity within the

⁵³⁴ Aquinas, I, Q. 95, Art. 4.

⁵³⁵ Aquinas, Q. 95, Art. 4.

⁵³⁶ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter III.

⁵³⁷ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §2011.

⁵³⁸ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §2008.

believer; merit occurs when we are so “moved by the Spirit and by charity.”⁵³⁹ Overall, the catechism and Trent insist that the notion of merit is appropriate, but that it is achievable only because of Christ’s work applied to the believer through divine grace.

The “Decree on Justification” includes clear teaching on the rewards of good human works or merit. On the whole, it insists that eternal salvation is the reward of the justified. The document states:

And eternal life should therefore be set before those who persevere in good works “to the end” and who hope in God, both as a grace mercifully promised to the children of God through Jesus Christ, and “as a reward” which, according to the promise of God himself, will faithfully be given them for their good works and merits.⁵⁴⁰

In order to merit such reward, the Council teaches that Christ “infuses” strength into the believer.⁵⁴¹ Again, a Christian cannot be said to have merited anything apart from that infused strength of Christ, because “without it, [the good works] could in no way be pleasing to God or meritorious.”⁵⁴² Yet they are meritorious, even to the extent that the justified can be regarded as having truly merited their eternal life.⁵⁴³ The catechism reiterates this Tridentine teaching, saying that with God’s help, “we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life.”⁵⁴⁴

In Roman Catholic soteriology there is a delicate balance of both divine and human action. As we have seen, prevenient grace--that initial gift of justice--is only merited by the sacrifice of Christ, and that grace is infused into the believer. God also

⁵³⁹ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §2010.

⁵⁴⁰ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XVI.

⁵⁴¹ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XVI.

⁵⁴² Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XVI.

⁵⁴³ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XVI.

⁵⁴⁴ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §2010.

grants habitual grace to believers so that they can become further united with Christ.⁵⁴⁵

In Catholic thought, the Christian is called to grow in the justice of his or her justification and to seek after the eternal reward merited by good works.

One way in which the Catholic Church encourages the faithful to pursue salvation through the infused strength of Christ is with the proper use of indulgences.⁵⁴⁶

Indulgences and merit are related; merit is called the "principle fruit" of an indulgence.⁵⁴⁷

The Council of Trent's final decree is on indulgences, and this was a subject of immense controversy and concern for the Council.⁵⁴⁸ The decree itself is very brief; however,

scattered within other documents from Trent is important reform concerning the sale of indulgences and of those who administer them.⁵⁴⁹ The decree briefly but strongly

defends the God-given power of the Church to grant indulgences. The use of

indulgences, according to the decree, is "most salutary to the Christian people."⁵⁵⁰

Due to the heightened controversy about this issue (both historically during the Protestant Reformation and in contemporary context⁵⁵¹), it is worthy of more discussion here. It was not until after the Second Vatican Council, in 1967, that Pope Paul IV gave

⁵⁴⁵ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §2013-2015.

⁵⁴⁶ The "Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*" invites contemporary reconsideration and use of indulgences, so that both individuals and the church may be increasingly purified and further united to Christ. See Paul IV, "Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*," 6 Aug. 1964, vatican.va, accessed May 2013, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-vi_apc_19670101_indulgentiarum-doctrina_en.html, §9 and 11.

⁵⁴⁷ Paul IV, " *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*," §12.

⁵⁴⁸ Council of Trent, "Decree on Indulgences," Twenty-Fifth Session, 4 December 1563.

⁵⁴⁹ See Council of Trent, *Cannons and Decrees* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1941), 28 and 142 for examples.

⁵⁵⁰ Council of Trent, "Decree on Indulgences".

⁵⁵¹ Michael Root explains the more recent controversy over the Jubilee Indulgence in "The Jubilee Indulgence and the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*," *Pro Ecclesia* 9, no. 4 (Sept 1, 2000), 460-475. This article is a worthwhile read; however, one of Root's main arguments is questionable. Specifically, Root says that indulgences are not properly related to justification, because they benefit only those persons who are already justified. However, Catholic teaching defines justification as a grace-led process of becoming increasingly righteous by an inhering justice toward the eternal reward. From this perspective, indulgences can be very much related to justification. Indulgences contribute to one's justification by granting an increase in sanctification and furthering the believer (and others) in the attainment of his or her eternal reward.

greater explanation of the Church's doctrine of indulgences and reformed their practice. *Indulgentiarum Doctrina* states that following the example of Christ and "the ancient dogma of the communion of saints," the faithful are enabled to carry "each one's own cross in expiation of their sins and of the sins of others, convinced they could assist their brothers and sisters to obtain salvation from God the Father of mercy."⁵⁵² The document gives the example of the Virgin Mary and the saints, saying that "they ... with the help of his grace, sanctified themselves and completed the work which the Father had given them to do, so that, effecting their own salvation, they also contributed to the salvation of their brothers and sisters in the unity of the mystical Body."⁵⁵³

This document teaches that indulgences are to be seen as a treasury of the church from which the faithful can draw benefit for themselves, for others, and even for the dead.⁵⁵⁴ This treasury exists and is efficacious only through the merits of Christ.

Indulgentiarum Doctrina does clarify that indulgences deal with not the guilt of a sin, but rather the temporal punishment resulting from that sin.⁵⁵⁵ That temporal punishment is remitted through an indulgence, or an exchange of goods in an act of charity. It states further that it is within the proper authority of the Church to dispense and apply this treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints to the faithful.⁵⁵⁶ The catechism connects indulgences with the sacrament of Penance, as something one would obtain for the remission of the temporal punishment for their sin, or the sin of someone else.⁵⁵⁷ In

⁵⁵² Paul IV, " *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*," §5.

⁵⁵³ Paul IV, " *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*," §5.

⁵⁵⁴ Paul IV, " *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*," §5.

⁵⁵⁵ Paul IV, " *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*," §7.

⁵⁵⁶ Paul IV, " *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*," §7-8.

⁵⁵⁷ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1471-1473.

its discussion of indulgences, the catechism consistently upholds the teaching of *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*.⁵⁵⁸

The ideas of merit and indulgences are consistent with and further support the Catholic understanding of justification, where one is enabled by grace to grow in justice. The believer experiences this growth by actively pursuing works of faith, hope, and love; Trent specifically asserts that the exercise of these good works cause an increase in one's justification.⁵⁵⁹ This understanding is expanded by the idea of indulgences, by which the believer is enabled to further aid others in their salvation, and even aid in the salvation of the dead.⁵⁶⁰ Overall, Trent teaches that "one is not inactive"⁵⁶¹ in his or her justification. From the Catholic perspective, then, merit provides an important impetus for godly living. With the help of grace, the good work of a believer will earn an eternal reward, and can even help other believers in the attainment of their eternal reward.

In conclusion, official Catholic teaching clearly endorses the idea of merit in the attainment of eternal salvation. However, merit is always seen as both the result of God's grace infused into the believer and the response of the believer to that grace. Catholic teaching states that the believer's free response in cooperating with God produces reward, even the eternal reward. The believer is not merely passive in salvation; he or she is helped to merit increase in justice before God.

Significantly, however, both Trent and the Catholic Catechism refer to God's action as primary, even in the attainment of merit from good works. Both are clear that no one merits the beginning of his or her justification. The initial grace of forgiveness is

⁵⁵⁸ See *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1471-1479.

⁵⁵⁹ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Canon 24.

⁵⁶⁰ Paul IV, "Indulgentiarum Doctrina," §5.

⁵⁶¹ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter V.

always of God's initiative and wholly reliant upon the merit of Christ. The "Decree on Justification" says further that with the believer's good works, God "wants his own gifts to be their merits."⁵⁶² Similarly, the CCC concludes its section on merit with a comment about the saints having a "lively awareness" that their own merits before God were of "pure grace."⁵⁶³ It seems fair to say that while Catholic soteriology remains committed to the idea of one's eternal salvation being a result of both God's gift of grace and one's own effort cooperating with that grace, that the work of God in grace always remains the most fundamental and important.

3.5 Ecclesiology

A final issue of importance for defining the justification question in Catholic teaching is the idea of ecclesiology. The church itself has a role in the application of one's justification. Specifically, the believer's justification is begun and made greater with proper use of the sacraments, and it is the church that has the God-given authority to administer them.⁵⁶⁴ It is important to understand that in Catholic thought, God's grace of justification is meted out by the church and has a very particular ecclesial setting.

The Council of Trent gave attention and explanation to the sacraments at multiple times during the duration of the council: at session seven in the "Decree Concerning the Sacraments,"⁵⁶⁵ at session thirteen in the "Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist,"⁵⁶⁶ at

⁵⁶² Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter XVI.

⁵⁶³ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §2011.

⁵⁶⁴ This is the express argument in Trent's 21st session when answering the controversy over partaking of communion under one species. See Council of Trent, "Doctrine on Communion Under both Species and on Communion of Little Children," Twenty-First Session (16 July 1562), Chapter II in *The Christian Faith* (New York: Alba House, 2001).

⁵⁶⁵ Council of Trent, "Decree Concerning the Sacraments," Seventh Session (3 March 1547).

⁵⁶⁶ Council of Trent, "Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist," Thirteenth Session (11 October 1551).

session fourteen in "The Most Holy Sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction,"⁵⁶⁷ at session twenty-two in "Doctrine on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass,"⁵⁶⁸ and at session twenty-three in "The True and Catholic Doctrine Concerning the Sacrament of Order."⁵⁶⁹ These decrees speak of the relationship between the sacraments and justification. Indeed, already the second sentence of the introduction to the "Decree on the Sacraments" states: "For all true justification either begins through the sacraments, or, once begun, increases, through them, or when lost is regained through them."⁵⁷⁰ Consistent with its "Decree on Justification," the Council explicates justification as a process that includes the sacraments as an essential part.

This is most obvious in the sacrament of baptism, which begins justification with a gift of grace:

The justification of the sinner...[is] a transition from the state in which one is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace and adoption as children of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ our Saviour. After the promulgation of the Gospel, this transition cannot take place without the bath of regeneration or the desire for it.⁵⁷¹

Thus baptism is called the instrumental cause of justification;⁵⁷² it is the means by which God, through the church, grants initial justification.

First and foremost, the sacrament of baptism removes original sin. The original sin, "contracted" from Adam, "must be expiated by the bath of regeneration."⁵⁷³ Baptism is done for the forgiveness or remission of that sin. Trent's "Decree on Original Sin"

⁵⁶⁷ Council of Trent, "The Most Holy Sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction," Fourteenth Session (25 November 1555).

⁵⁶⁸ Council of Trent, "Doctrine on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass," Twenty-second Session (17 September 1562).

⁵⁶⁹ Council of Trent, "The True and Catholic Doctrine Concerning the Sacrament of Order," Twenty-third Session (15 July 1563).

⁵⁷⁰ Council of Trent, "Decree on the Sacraments."

⁵⁷¹ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter IV.

⁵⁷² Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter VII.

⁵⁷³ Council of Trent, "Decree on Original Sin."

expressly teaches this healing power of the sacrament: “the guilt of original sin is remitted by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ given in baptism.”⁵⁷⁴ After baptism, a person is freed from that sin. Those who are baptized are “created after the likeness of God, innocent, unstained, pure and guiltless, [and] have become the children of God...nothing henceforth holds them back from entering into heaven.”⁵⁷⁵ Thus according to Catholic theology, after baptism one cannot properly be considered a sinner. Instead, he or she has been reborn as a child of God. The catechism is consistent with Trent, saying that original sin, the “deprivation of original holiness and justice” is erased by Baptism.⁵⁷⁶ The CCC further states that, “Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith.”⁵⁷⁷

The sacrament of penance also has direct ties to justification. Since people so often do not preserve the justice granted to them in their baptisms, God graciously provides a remedy in the sacrament of penance, “whereby the benefit of Christ's death is applied to those who have fallen after baptism.”⁵⁷⁸ The need for penance is great: when one falls into serious sin, one’s justification is forfeited by that sin.⁵⁷⁹ Penance grants the believer the means to regain his or her justification through the merits of Christ. Thus, penance is referred to as “the second plank after the shipwreck of the loss of grace.”⁵⁸⁰

Penance is not only a confession of sin, but also includes acts of satisfaction for the remedy of temporal punishment. This includes acts of contrition or satisfaction,

⁵⁷⁴ Council of Trent, “Decree on Original Sin.”

⁵⁷⁵ Council of Trent, “Decree on Original Sin.”

⁵⁷⁶ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §405.

⁵⁷⁷ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1992.

⁵⁷⁸ Council of Trent, “Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance,” fourteenth Session, (25 November 1551), in *The Christian Faith* (New York: Alba House, 2001), chapter I.

⁵⁷⁹ Mortal sin causes one separation from the grace of Christ and excludes him or her from the Kingdom of God. See Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XV.

⁵⁸⁰ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter XIV.

which the Council teaches "greatly detach penitents from sin"⁵⁸¹ and keep them from repeating the sin in the future. Even more, these "punishments" make satisfaction to God for sin, and do so whether imposed by the priest or undertaken voluntarily.⁵⁸² Trent says that God graciously allows and enables the believer "to make satisfaction before God the Father through Christ Jesus."⁵⁸³ Likely in response to Protestant criticism of penance and the idea of human contribution toward satisfaction of sin, the Council insists that these satisfactions in no way diminish the atonement of Christ. Canon fourteen addresses this directly:

If anyone says that the satisfactions by which penitents atone for their sins through Christ Jesus are not worship of God but human traditions which obscure the doctrine of grace, the true worship of God and the benefit of Christ's death himself, *anathema sit*.⁵⁸⁴

Thus, the sacrament of penance and the prescribed satisfactions therein do expiate human sin, but they only do so through the merit of Christ and with the help of grace. Overall, the sacrament of penance provides the means for fallen believers to regain the grace of their justification.

The Eucharist, too, is connected to justification. According to the Council, this sacrament is "the soul's spiritual food;" it "nourishes and strengthens" believers, and serves to be "also a remedy to free us from our daily faults and to preserve us from mortal sin."⁵⁸⁵ Trent teaches that the mass is a propitiatory sacrifice that truly profits the believer.⁵⁸⁶ The grace offered in the Eucharist cleanses and strengthens, aiding the believer with supernatural power. Furthermore, Catholic teaching about the Eucharist

⁵⁸¹ Council of Trent, "Doctrine on Penance," Chapter VIII.

⁵⁸² Council of Trent, "Doctrine on Penance," Canon 13.

⁵⁸³ Council of Trent, "Doctrine on Penance," Chapter IX.

⁵⁸⁴ Council of Trent, "Doctrine on Penance," Canon 14.

⁵⁸⁵ Council of Trent, "Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist," Chapter II.

⁵⁸⁶ Council of Trent, "Doctrine on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass," Chapter II.

includes the idea that the mass is to be offered for both the living and the dead, for their “sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities.”⁵⁸⁷ The Eucharist applies Christ’s merits to the believer, both before and after death. It seems clear that participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist enables one to increase in his or her justification before death, and to aid others in their justification after death.

To highlight the important connection between justification and the sacraments, Trent continues to say that faith alone—that is, faith if not accompanied by proper use of the sacraments—is not enough for salvation.⁵⁸⁸ The “Decree Concerning the Sacraments” pointedly says that participation in the sacraments (or at least the desire to participate) is necessary for one’s justification.⁵⁸⁹ As shown above, Christian faith must be accompanied by other virtues and actions, and the Council teaches that this includes participation in the sacraments.

One final point from Trent’s teachings on the sacraments is of ecumenical significance today. This is the affirmation of the Council in canon four about baptisms being performed by non-Catholics, presumably by the Protestants. The Council says that these baptisms, if done in the name of the Trinity, and if done “with the intention of doing what the church does,”⁵⁹⁰ are to be accepted. Those who were so baptized—even if under these imperfect circumstances—are to be considered as having received true baptism and are not to be rebaptized. Considering that Trent considers baptism the sacrament of justification, it is important to see that its acceptance of baptisms done in

⁵⁸⁷ Council of Trent, “Doctrine on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass,” Canon 3.

⁵⁸⁸ This is not to say that the church believes that God is limited in whom he chooses to save with his gift of grace. There ought be a careful acknowledgment of the possibility of salvation for the unchurched.

⁵⁸⁹ Council of Trent, “Decree on the Sacraments,” Canon 4.

⁵⁹⁰ Council of Trent, “Canons on the Sacrament of Baptism,” Seventh Session (3 March 1547), in *The Christian Faith* (New York: Alba House, 2001), Canon 4.

churches separated from the Catholic Church includes the possibility that others can be justified. There is here the recognition that salvation might be possible apart from a formal, conscious relationship with the Catholic Church.

4. Conclusion: The Catholic Doctrine of Justification

Catholic theology has assumed a certain philosophical and ontological foundation for its understanding of justification. The doctrine was influenced by Thomas Aquinas, solidified by the Council of Trent, and has been upheld in more recent official doctrinal publications like the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

To summarize, God freely chooses to create humanity, calling them to share in his divine life through the gift of his grace. Humankind's first parents lived in a state of original justice, in harmony with God and each other. Catholic doctrine teaches that through divine grace, humanity is transformed to partake in the divine life now and to experience the beatific vision in the afterlife, God's purpose for humanity. Catholic thinking on soteriology is uniquely ordered towards the beatific vision.

Catholic teaching on the Fall speaks of Adam's sin as affecting the whole of the human race. This original sin incurs guilt on every person, but it is removed by the sacrament of baptism, the vehicle through which the merits of Christ are applied to the faithful in the gift of prevenient grace. This is not to say that grace is confined to the sacrament of baptism, for God is not confined in how he distributes his grace. Rather, the Catholic Church affirms that the sacraments are one way God ordains to bestow his grace through his church; indeed, they are efficacious means of grace. After sin, grace has a

dual purpose—to cleanse from sin as well as to elevate believers, enabling them to work toward their eternal supernatural destiny with God.

After baptism, Christians do continue to struggle with an inclination toward sin or concupiscence, but the Catholic Church is careful to say that this is not sin in a true and proper sense. From the Catholic perspective, the justified person cannot truly be considered a sinner. Human nature is wounded by the Fall and deprived of its original holiness and justice, yet it is not totally corrupted. The human person is still free, and, with the aid of divine grace, turns to God in the increase of his or her justification. As well, the sacrament of penance enables believers to regain their justification should they fall into a state of mortal sin.

Justification in Catholic understanding is generally articulated as a passage from a state of sin into a state of righteousness. It is a process, and it happens only through the merits of Christ applied to the sinner by supernatural grace. It includes both the forgiveness of sin and the renewal of a growing holiness within. God's grace has a sanctifying power, which makes the Christian increasingly righteous, and the Christian thus can be rightly said to grow in his justification. The Catholic catechism also attributes this growth in justification to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Overall, divine grace is infused into the human person and has an ontological effect on him or her. Once transformed by that grace, the believer is enabled to do spiritually good works, and in some real way is now able to merit eternal blessedness. Trent insists upon the reality of human merit relative to one's eternal reward, though never without the help of grace. The human person cooperates with the Holy Spirit in grace, and is thus can be said to contribute to his or her eternal reward. In short,

justification in the Catholic understanding means that the believer is made to be justified. In other words, the single formal cause of one's justification is the inhering justice by which the believer becomes just.

All of this constitutes the distinctively Catholic doctrine of justification. Its unique characteristics are due to its reading of the biblical witness, to its reliance upon the Church Fathers and medieval scholastics like Thomas Aquinas, and to the declarations of the Council of Trent. The result is a complex doctrine that looks and feels different than its Protestant counterpart. In particular, Catholic theology has defined sin, faith, and grace in ways particular to its understanding of justification as a process. This understanding allows for the inclusion of human good works or merit in justification, and it provides a distinct ecclesial and sacramental context for justification. All of these things are challenged by the Protestant Reformers, who chose to define justification differently. It is to this that we turn next.

Chapter 4: The Doctrine of Justification and the Reformed Tradition

1. History of the Reformed Paradigm of Justification

To the Protestant Reformers, the doctrine of justification was the touchstone of orthodoxy; they believed that it encapsulated the truths of the gospel.⁵⁹¹ We will see that the Reformers disagreed with the teaching of the Catholic Church on justification, and that this opposition became one of their most significant issues of protest. Justification is also connected to other important areas of their protest, including understandings of ecclesiology and the sacraments of the Catholic Church. In many ways, justification was central to the Protestant Reformation and to the theology that became known as Protestant and Reformed. The theology of justification thus gives important identity to the Reformed tradition and it can be argued that even today that the doctrine of justification has much to do with some of the facets of the Reformed tradition that make it unique and distinct.

Theologies of justification, however, are more complicated than simple historical agreement or disagreement over points of doctrine. This chapter will show how the Reformer's articulation of justification relied upon a different understanding of the human person, including what they judged to be a more comprehensive view of sin and a more limited sense of personal eschatology. Justification, too, caused the Reformers to redefine and nuance the concepts of faith and grace, leading them to reject the notion of

⁵⁹¹ John Calvin, for instance, calls justification "the main hinge on which religion turns." See Calvin, *Institutes, Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), III, XI, 1.

merit, and endorse the idea of the believer's assurance of salvation. These are important aspects of the theology that became known as Reformed, and they reflect a shift in thinking about human salvation.

John Calvin is generally considered to be the greatest theologian of the Reformed tradition, and according to Bruce McCormack, it was Calvin who formulated an understanding of justification which has had particular importance for the churches issuing from the Reformation.⁵⁹² He says that the Protestant doctrine of justification was most clearly articulated by Calvin, and that Calvin's forensic view "quickly became the standard Protestant view."⁵⁹³ In particular, McCormack writes that Calvin's understanding of justification is reflected in confessional documents such as the French Confession, the Belgic Confession, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Westminster Confession of Faith.⁵⁹⁴

This chapter will identify the main characteristics of the doctrine of justification from the historic, confessional Reformed tradition. First, this chapter will examine that historic and theological context with a look at the correspondence between John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto on the issue of justification, as that theology was still becoming solidified in the two communities. Then we will take a more detailed look at what became the general understanding of justification in the Reformed tradition, using the work of John Calvin and a number of the historic Reformed confessions and catechisms.

⁵⁹² See Bruce McCormack's explication of Calvin's prominence in articulating the traditional evangelical understanding of justification in Bruce McCormack, "*Justitia aliena: Karl Barth in Conversation with the Evangelical Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness*," *Justification in Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 169-172.

⁵⁹³ McCormack, "*Justitia aliena*," 171. Cornelius Venema also agrees with this estimation of Calvin's importance to the formation of the doctrine of justification. See Venema, "Calvin's Understanding of the 'Two-fold Grace of God' and Contemporary Ecumenical Discussion of the Gospel," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007), 67-69.

⁵⁹⁴ McCormack, "*Justitia aliena*," 171.

As with the Catholic theology of justification in the previous chapter, this chapter will pay particular attention to understandings of sin, faith, grace, merit, eternal life and ecclesiology. These aspects of justification give a fuller picture of Reformed soteriology, and focus the study on some of the important and unique features of the Reformed view of justification.

1.1 John Calvin

John Calvin was born in 1509 in Noyon, France, into a Roman Catholic home. He desired to become a Catholic priest, and would have done that had his father not intervened, insisting that Calvin become a lawyer instead.⁵⁹⁵ Law school turned out to be instrumental in Calvin's development, as he was exposed to the new French Humanism that was revolutionizing the universities at the time. Historians do not agree on precisely when Calvin made an official break with the Catholic Church. Certainly by 1533 his defection was made obvious when Calvin fled Paris and lived in hiding after his friend Nicolas Cop, the rector of the University of Paris, delivered a public address critical of the Catholic Church.⁵⁹⁶ John McNeil says that "Calvin was in some way implicated" in the speech, which "alarmed the authorities" and put Calvin in flight.⁵⁹⁷ After that experience, it is clear that Calvin begins his work as a publically Protestant theologian and preacher.

⁵⁹⁵ For more extensive information on Calvin's background, see T. H. L Parker's classic work, *John Calvin: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975).

⁵⁹⁶ See John McNeil, "Introduction," In *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) xxx, and Derek Thomas "Who was John Calvin?" in *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, & Doxology*, ed. by Burk Parsons (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 21-23.

⁵⁹⁷ McNeil, "Introduction," xxx.

Three years later and living abroad in Basel, Switzerland, Calvin published the first edition of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*⁵⁹⁸. It was an instant success and is still considered to be one of the best explications of Reformed theology today. In it he raises many objections to the theology of the Catholic Church, including—and perhaps especially—its doctrine of justification.⁵⁹⁹ After the *Institutes* were published, Calvin earned increasing acclaim as a leader in the growing Protestant movement.

Another important source for our purposes is Calvin's critique of the *Decrees of the Council of Trent*. This was published in 1547, by which time Calvin had become a well-known preacher and community leader in Geneva, Switzerland. He entitles the lengthy tract “The Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote.”⁶⁰⁰ Certainly that title gives one a sense of Calvin's less-than-positive assessment of Trent, and this is especially true of the council's “Decree on Justification.” From this and the *Institutes*, one can get a good picture of Calvin's understanding of justification, and of the unique perspective that Calvin's work gives to the Reformed tradition and its doctrine of justification.

1.2 Calvin and the Sadoletto Debate

Calvin's tenure in Geneva was not without controversy. In particular, from the spring of 1538 to the fall of 1541, Calvin and another leading Genevan reformer, Guillaume Farel, were banished from the city by municipal leaders over a dispute

⁵⁹⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536 edition), trans. F. L. Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). All other citations are from the much expanded 1559 edition, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

⁵⁹⁹ Michael Horton argues that in Calvin's disagreements with the Catholic Church (and others), justification was a central and distinctive doctrine for Calvin. See Horton, “The Principle Article of Salvation,” in *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, & Doxology*, ed. by Burk Parsons (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008).

⁶⁰⁰ John Calvin, “Acts of the Council of Trent with Antidote,” in *Selected Works of John Calvin*, volume 3, edited and translated by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 17-188.

concerning matters of church liturgy.⁶⁰¹ John Olin comments that Protestantism in Geneva was then at “a critical juncture,”⁶⁰² and it is during this time that Cardinal Jacopo Sadoleto wrote the Genevan city council a letter imploring them to return to the Catholic faith. Richard Douglas says that the letter was understood as part of a “Catholic counter-offensive on Protestant Geneva.”⁶⁰³ The letter is dated March 18, 1539, and with Calvin and Farel gone, the city council found itself at a loss as to who could respond to such a letter.⁶⁰⁴ Eventually the letter was brought to Calvin in Strasbourg, who wrote a reply to Sadoleto on behalf of the city of Geneva in September of 1539.⁶⁰⁵

The two letters provide an insightful historical frame to the justification issue between Catholic and Reformed Christians. Cardinal Sadoleto’s letter to Geneva, though written almost a full decade before the Council of Trent was convened, presents ideas and theology consistent with what would be declared at Trent years later. Likewise, Calvin’s reply is consistent with the trajectory of what was becoming the Reformed understanding of justification. Indeed, one Reformed pastor has described Calvin’s reply to Sadoleto “perhaps the greatest apologetic for the Reformation.”⁶⁰⁶ Overall, these letters demonstrate how theologies of justification were growing increasingly solidified in the two traditions, and how differences in the articulation of the doctrine had become pronounced in a way that helped inform the self-understanding of both the Catholic and Reformed traditions.

⁶⁰¹ See John C. Olin, “Introduction,” in *A Reformation Debate* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 12 and 17-18, and D. G. Hart “The Reformer of Faith and Life,” in the more popular work *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, & Doxology*, ed. Burk Parsons (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 46-48.

⁶⁰² Olin, “Introduction,” 12.

⁶⁰³ Richard M. Douglas, *Jacopo Sadoleto 1477-1547: Humanist and Reformer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 144.

⁶⁰⁴ Olin, “Introduction,” 19.

⁶⁰⁵ Olin, “Introduction,” 19.

⁶⁰⁶ Harry Reeder, “The Churchman of the Reformation,” in *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, & Doxology*, ed. by Burke Parsons (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 57.

1.2a Sadoleto's Letter to the City of Geneva

Michael Walsh says that amongst his contemporaries, Cardinal Jacopo Sadoleto was “rightly regarded as one of the most learned members of the College of Cardinals.”⁶⁰⁷ Douglas explains that Sadoleto is often considered as part of the Middle Group of Catholic reformers, or “those who sought a reformation of the Church and clergy within the limits of tradition.”⁶⁰⁸ He was also what Walsh calls a “would-be ecumenist,”⁶⁰⁹ demonstrating this by writing letters not only to Geneva, but also to Protestant reformer Philip Melanchthon.⁶¹⁰

Sadoleto's letter to Geneva is primarily concerned with the unity of the Christian church and faith. His tone has been well described as being “paternally cordial”⁶¹¹ as he implores the Genevan people to return to the authority and unity of the Catholic Church.

Sadoleto begins with a pointed affirmation of Christ's life, death, and resurrection as the Son of God and the Savior of the souls of humanity.⁶¹² He then defends the right of the Church to define that salvation for humanity. He writes:

This Church hath regenerated us to God in Christ, hath nourished and confirmed us, instructed us what to think, what to believe, wherein to place our hope, and also taught us by what we must tend toward heaven. We walk in this common faith of the Church, we retain her laws and precepts. And if, at any time, overcome by frailty and inconstancy, we lapse into sin...we, however, rise again in the same faith of the Church; and by whatever expiations, penances, and satisfactions, she tells us that our sin is washed away...For we do not arrogate to ourselves anything beyond the opinion and authority of the Church...⁶¹³

⁶⁰⁷ Michael Walsh, *The Cardinals: Thirteen Centuries of the Men Behind the Papal Throne* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 78.

⁶⁰⁸ Douglas, *Jacopo Sadoleto*, xi.

⁶⁰⁹ Walsh, *The Cardinals*, 78.

⁶¹⁰ Walsh, *The Cardinals*, 81.

⁶¹¹ Douglas, *Jacopo Sadoleto*, 144.

⁶¹² See Jacopo Sadoleto, “Sadoleto's Letter to the Genevans,” in *A Reformation Debate*, trans. by Henry Beveridge and edit. by John Olin (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 33-36.

⁶¹³ Sadoleto, “Sadoleto's Letter,” 37.

Sadoletto says that those teaching otherwise—presumably Calvin and Farel—are “innovators on things ancient and well established” who have “filled all places with strife and sedition.”⁶¹⁴ He adds, “such is always the appropriate course of those who seek new power and new honors for themselves, by assailing the authority of the Church.”⁶¹⁵

Douglas believes that the authority of the church is Sadoletto’s chief concern in the letter to the Genevans. Douglas explains, “The accent here fell on the unity of Christian tradition and on the sanctity of the historical Church rather than on the returning probity of the contemporary Church. The treatise is therefore a defense of the authority against disobedience and of dogmatic tradition against innovation.”⁶¹⁶ Olin agrees: “Sadoletto’s letter essentially is a defense of the age-old Church against those who would overturn its authority and alter its practices and beliefs.”⁶¹⁷ In short, Sadoletto asserts that the Catholic Church—as everywhere present for hundreds of years, and as united in Christ and guarded by his Spirit in such a way that it cannot err—is the only authority to be trusted in matters of salvation.⁶¹⁸

A secondary concern in Sadoletto’s letter is to offer a response to the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone. In words that will be echoed at the Council of Trent years later, Sadoletto insists that faith in Christ alone is an inadequate grounds for one’s salvation.⁶¹⁹ When speaking of justification, faith must always be considered alongside of hope and love.⁶²⁰ He affirms the idea of Christian faith, what he calls “mere

⁶¹⁴ Sadoletto, “Sadoletto’s Letter,” 31.

⁶¹⁵ Sadoletto, “Sadoletto’s Letter,” 31.

⁶¹⁶ Douglas, *Jacopo Sadoletto*, 144.

⁶¹⁷ Olin, “Introduction,” 19-20.

⁶¹⁸ Sadoletto, “Sadoletto’s Letter,” 40-41 and 45.

⁶¹⁹ Sadoletto, “Sadoletto’s Letter,” 35-36.

⁶²⁰ Sadoletto, “Sadoletto’s Letter,” 36.

credulity and confidence in God,” because he says that faith “forms the first access which we have to God.”⁶²¹ Yet he states quite clearly, “but it is not enough.”⁶²² The true believer has the duty and the desire to do what pleases God. And God, in his Holy Spirit, resides in the minds of justified believers and empowers them to do good works.

Sadoleto explains that a “prompt desire to obey God in all things...is the true habit of divine justice. For what else does this name of justice signify, or what other meaning and idea does it present to us, if regard is not to be had in it to good works?”⁶²³ Christian faith must include “the hope and desire of obeying God” as well as love as “the head and mistress of all the virtues.”⁶²⁴ Indeed Sadoleto states that as pertains to our salvation, love is what is most important: “in this very faith, love is essentially comprehended as the chief and primary cause of our salvation.”

Douglas states that Sadoleto simply finds the Protestant doctrine of justification inadequate.⁶²⁵ He says that according to Sadoleto, “To preach justification *fide sola* is to say that the believer is excluded from responsibility for his moral conduct and from participation in his own salvation.”⁶²⁶ The Christian must obey God’s commands and incorporate into his or her life the virtues of hope and love—particularly love—in order to receive God’s salvation. Justification includes the participation and cooperation of the human person, as the Christian is obedient to the commands of God through the power of the Holy Spirit within him or her.

⁶²¹ Sadoleto, “Sadoleto’s Letter,” 35.

⁶²² Sadoleto, “Sadoleto’s Letter,” 35.

⁶²³ Sadoleto, “Sadoleto’s Letter,” 35.

⁶²⁴ Sadoleto, “Sadoleto’s Letter,” 36.

⁶²⁵ Douglas, *Jacopo Sadoleto*, 145.

⁶²⁶ Douglas, *Jacopo Sadoleto*, 145.

In the end, Sadoletto's letter makes a strong plea to the Genevan people. He implores them to reconsider the saving authority of the Catholic Church and asks them to rethink the idea of justification by faith alone. Perhaps a sign of how serious and challenging the letter was for the Genevan City Council, the beleaguered John Calvin is eventually asked to write a response on their behalf.

1.2.b Calvin's Reply to Sadoletto

Calvin offers Sadoletto a lengthy response. He denies that he and his Protestant associates can be considered innovators of theology; he says instead that the Genevan people have accepted "a purer teaching of the gospel," and escaped a "gulf of error" in which they had been immersed in the Catholic Church.⁶²⁷ He denies that the Genevan Protestants have deserted the church, saying instead that their work was to "establish a better form of the Church."⁶²⁸ Olin counts these ecclesial issues as the most significant part of Calvin's argument: "in essence it [Calvin's letter] rejects this image of the Church—this Catholic concept of the enduring Church of Christ, erring not."⁶²⁹ A close second part, however, is Calvin's defense of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone.

First, Calvin denies that the Roman Catholic Church has priority as the true church of God. According to Calvin, Christ governs his church by the written word of God—that is, the Bible, and thus the church always remains under its authority.⁶³⁰ When the church finds itself in conflict with Scripture, something he attempts to show that the

⁶²⁷ John Calvin, "Calvin's Reply to Sadoletto," in *A Reformation Debate*, trans. Henry Beveridge, edit. John Olin (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 57.

⁶²⁸ Calvin, "Calvin's Letter," 57.

⁶²⁹ Olin, *A Reformation Debate*, 20.

⁶³⁰ Calvin, "Calvin's Letter," 60-63.

Catholic Church is guilty of,⁶³¹ it must be reformed by conforming itself again to God's word. Calvin says that what he and others have attempted to do is simply to return the church to what he calls its "ancient form,"⁶³² in utter obedience to the teachings of the Bible. Therefore Calvin is not impressed by Sadoletto's argument about the authority of the church and its teachings, including "all which has been approved for fifteen hundred years or more, by the uniform consent of the faithful."⁶³³ Instead, Calvin cares only that the church and its teachings be *biblical*.

Second, Calvin goes into a longer exposition of the justification question. He tells Sadoletto that he considers it "the first and keenest subject of controversy between us."⁶³⁴ Olin comments that, "Sadoletto's rather cursory rejection of the Protestant concept of *sola fide* was bound to evoke a fairly extended affirmation of the fundamental belief by Calvin."⁶³⁵ This it does, and Calvin's writing becomes increasingly sharp as he explains what he understands to be the biblical doctrine of justification.

Human sinfulness and God's judgment is the first part of Calvin's defense of *sola fide*. Calvin suggests that if people seriously examine themselves, considering their consciences before God's tribunal, they are bound to recognize their misery and inadequacy before God.⁶³⁶ He states that, "all mankind are, in the sight of God, lost sinners."⁶³⁷ Human salvation must then be wholly dependent upon the work of God: "The only haven of safety is in the mercy of God, as manifested in Christ, in whom every

⁶³¹ Calvin, "Calvin's Letter," 66-74.

⁶³² Calvin, "Calvin's Letter," 62.

⁶³³ Calvin, "Calvin's Letter," 62.

⁶³⁴ Calvin, "Calvin's Letter," 66.

⁶³⁵ Olin, "Introduction," 22.

⁶³⁶ Calvin, "Calvin's Letter," 66.

⁶³⁷ Calvin, "Calvin's Letter," 66.

part of our salvation is complete.”⁶³⁸ In other words, he says that Christ must be “their only righteousness.”⁶³⁹ They have no righteousness of their own to speak of, and can only rest in the mercy of God.

Human good works, then, can have no part in the believer’s justification. Calvin does not deny the place of works in the lives of believers, but states that in terms of justification they are not worth “one single straw.”⁶⁴⁰ Here Calvin appeals what was to become the classic Protestant distinction between justification and sanctification, stating that, “We deny that good works have any share in justification, but we claim full authority for them in the lives of believers.”⁶⁴¹ Good works make up an essential piece of sanctification, of Christ’s work in believers through the Holy Spirit to make them holy.⁶⁴² But this is to be strictly kept separate from the grounds of their justification. God’s people ought to be “zealous of good works,”⁶⁴³ while at the same time recognizing that their salvation is dependent solely on Christ’s gratuitous gift on their behalf.⁶⁴⁴

Calvin finishes the letter with some brief, but pointed, criticism of the Catholic Church and of some Catholic theology related to justification. For example, he denies that human sin can be expiated by “penance and satisfactions.”⁶⁴⁵ He also disagrees with any notion of purgatory,⁶⁴⁶ and he rejects the idea that the Eucharist is a sacrifice.⁶⁴⁷

None of these things does Calvin find to be sufficiently biblical, and he tells Sadoletto

⁶³⁸ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 66.

⁶³⁹ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 66.

⁶⁴⁰ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 67.

⁶⁴¹ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 68.

⁶⁴² Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 68.

⁶⁴³ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 68.

⁶⁴⁴ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 69.

⁶⁴⁵ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 69.

⁶⁴⁶ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 73.

⁶⁴⁷ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 74. Calvin’s word are, “We are indignant that in the room of the sacred Supper has been substituted a sacrifice, by which the death of Christ is emptied of its virtues.”

again that the true Christian Church “tests all obedience by the Word of God.”⁶⁴⁸ Indeed, he says further that this principle also applies to the Church Fathers and other ecclesial leaders, who “are of authority only in so far as they accord with the rule of the Word.”⁶⁴⁹ Calvin concludes that he cannot be rightfully charged by Sadoletto with breaking up the true Christian Church, or “dismembering the Spouse of Christ.”⁶⁵⁰ Instead, and with strong language, he accuses the Catholic Church of inventing “strange doctrines” and “numberless superstitions,” so much so that he thinks it no longer resembles the Church of Christ, but rather what he calls a “faction of a Church.”⁶⁵¹

The last paragraph of Calvin’s response is especially weighty for our ecumenical purposes. To answer the general thrust of Sadoletto’s appeal for the Genevan Christians to return to the authority and the unity of Catholic Church, Calvin ends his letter with an explanation of what he believes will constitute the visible unity of the Church. He writes:

The Lord grant, Sadoletto, that you and all your party may at length perceive, that the only true bond of ecclesiastical unity would exist if Christ the Lord, who hath reconciled us to God the Father, were to gather us out of our present dispersion into the fellowship of His body, that so, through His one Word and Spirit, we might join together with one heart and one soul.⁶⁵²

Clearly, Calvin does not have much hope of full ecclesial reconciliation for Catholic and Reformed Christians on this side of glory. It is interesting to notice, however, that he does not doubt Sadoletto’s eternal salvation. Indeed, he believes that there is a coming day when the two of them will be joined together by Christ. Furthermore, it will be a day when Catholics and Protestants will be joined together. But it is obvious that from

⁶⁴⁸ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 75.

⁶⁴⁹ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 92.

⁶⁵⁰ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 92.

⁶⁵¹ Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 92-93.

⁶⁵² Calvin, “Calvin’s Letter,” 94.

Calvin's perspective, Christian unity will not be found in the ecclesiastical unity that Sadoleto is hoping for.

1.2.c Conclusion of the Calvin-Sadoleto Debate

By and large, the issues raised by Sadoleto and Calvin became definitive for both the Reformed and Catholic traditions. First, questions of authority underlay their correspondence and also the justification question: Is justification to be based on the teaching authority of the church, guarded by apostolic succession, and passed on to the faithful as Sadoleto insisted? Or is the theology of justification to be based on the teaching authority of Scripture alone, as Calvin insisted? At the onset, each man is taking his starting point at a different place, and this says something about the traditions they represent. This question of ultimate theological authority, whether it be ecclesiastical or biblical, became an important issue of identity for both the Reformed and Catholic churches, and remains so today.

Second, it is clear that the nature of justification is defined differently by Sadoleto and Calvin. While neither man offers a description of justification in its entirety, some serious disagreements are obvious from what they do include in the letters. For example, while Calvin says that faith alone justifies the believer, Sadoleto says instead that faith is only a starting point and that to be justified believers must be active in works of love and obedience. Sadoleto teaches further that the Holy Spirit empowers believers to contribute to and increase in their justification. But Calvin says instead that the sinful believer can contribute nothing, and must simply rest in the assurance that their justification is wholly dependent upon Christ's work on their behalf. These are not minor differences, and they

reflect distinct understandings as pertains to the nature of justification in both of the Catholic or the Reformed traditions.

2. Reformed Soteriology and Justification

We will now examine the traditional Reformed doctrine of justification in more specific detail. As reflected in the Sadoletto and Calvin letters above, there are historical differences in how the Catholic and Reformed traditions came to define justification, and differences, too, to what authority each appealed in order to make their claims. It is fair to say that in general the Protestant Reformers chose to depart from the tradition of the Catholic Church in their thinking about the human person and his or her salvation. The Reformers offered more nuanced definitions of sin and faith, and a more limited understanding of grace, the sacraments, and of what happens after death. They also objected to the idea of human merit being included in the process of the believer's justification by insisting instead upon the notion of justification as immediate imputed righteousness. We will first sketch the general line of thought as pertains to justification in the Reformed tradition before examining more closely those characteristics that are uniquely Reformed. We will use Calvin and the Reformed confessions to explore these aspects of justification.

Most significantly, the Reformed tradition understands justification as the divine decision of God to consider the sinner to be perfectly righteous through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. The believer is declared to be justified; that is, forgiven of all sin and counted right before God in the perfect holiness of Christ. The Bohemian Confession (1535) explains, "by faith in Christ men are freely justified, saved, given remission of

sins through mercy, without any human work or merit.”⁶⁵³ The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) states more personally, “God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ.”⁶⁵⁴ Notice the “imputes,” as the Reformed tradition insists that justification is about a righteousness that is not grown within the believer, but rather credited or imputed to the believer. Finally, according to Reformed theology, justification comes only through faith, as the Lausanne Articles (1536) explain, “Sacred Scripture knows no other way of being justified beyond that which is through faith in Jesus Christ offered once for all.”⁶⁵⁵ With this initial definition of justification, some of the distinct characteristics of the Reformed view immediately start to become clear.

It should be said from the onset, however, that both the Reformed and the Catholic traditions fully affirm that human salvation is only found in Christ and only made available to us by God's grace. Both testify that because humanity has fallen into sin, it stands in need of redemption, or of God's salvation accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Calvin generally describes this salvation as something thoroughly Trinitarian: that it is the will of God the Father for the salvation of humanity to be accomplished in the work of the Son and applied by the Spirit.⁶⁵⁶ In this, too, there is no argument with the Catholic Church. Yet it is in how these traditions parse out the application of redemption that differs.

⁶⁵³ The Bohemian Confession (1535) in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol I, trans. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008), 308.

⁶⁵⁴ The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 60.

⁶⁵⁵ The Lausanne Articles (1536) in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol 1, trans. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008), 340.

⁶⁵⁶ See, for example, Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.2-5, III.i.1, or III.xi.16.

There are two major differences between the Reformed view and the Catholic view on justification, and also some less important (but still significant) differences that result from those major ones. First, while Calvin and other Reformers believed that salvation has two parts, justification and sanctification, they insisted that these two parts need to be kept distinct. In the Reformed tradition, sanctification is not understood as a part of the larger justification process as it is in the Catholic tradition. The second and related major difference is whether justification is about the imputation of righteousness (the Reformed view), or about the acquisition of righteousness (the Catholic view). This refers again to what is known as the formal cause of justification, and it remains an important difference between the Catholic and Reformed traditions to this day. We will now take a closer look at both of these differences.

2.1 The Justification-Sanctification Distinction

First, while the Reformed tradition believes that God provides both justification and sanctification in the salvation of a believer, the two are understood to be distinct components of the believer's redemption. Calvin explains that both flow from the believer's union with Christ simultaneously, but individually. In other words, even though he says that justification and sanctification "are constantly conjoined and cohere,"⁶⁵⁷ he teaches that they are to be strictly separated as concerns the ground of our salvation.

The Reformed confessions reflect this justification-sanctification distinction. For example, the First Helvetic Confession (1536) distinguishes sanctification from what it

⁶⁵⁷ Calvin, "Acts of Trent," 116.

calls other “divine benefits” including reconciliation with God and redemption.⁶⁵⁸ Similarly, the Geneva Confession (1536/37) speaks of the two things that have been granted to believers in Christ: “first...we are reconciled with Him...in His righteousness and innocence...[and] second, that by His Spirit we are regenerated in a new spiritual nature.”⁶⁵⁹ Later Reformed Confessions continue the distinction and emphasize it. The Belgic Confession (1561) clearly separates the two in its discussion of salvation,⁶⁶⁰ and strongly states that even the best works believers can do--“forasmuch as they are all sanctified by His grace”--they are not to be included in any discussion of justification, for “they are of no account towards our justification.”⁶⁶¹ Interestingly, the Anglican Catechism (1553) uses the terminology of cause and effect to distinguish between justification and sanctification, specifically naming the *cause* of salvation as Christ’s righteousness given in justification, and the *effects* of salvation as the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification.⁶⁶² Calvin resisted language of cause and effect to distinguish justification and sanctification, preferring instead to explain them as two distinct parts of the whole that is what he called the “double grace”⁶⁶³ of salvation. Regardless, it is clear that the distinction between justification and sanctification is a consistent aspect of Reformed soteriology.

⁶⁵⁸ See First Helvetic Confession (1536) in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol 1, trans. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008), 346 and particularly paragraphs 11 and 13.

⁶⁵⁹ Geneva Confession (1536/37) in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol 1, trans. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008), 396.

⁶⁶⁰ See Belgic Confession, in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol 2, trans. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008), 436-438.

⁶⁶¹ Belgic Confession, Article XXIV.

⁶⁶² See Anglican Catechism (1553) in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol 2, trans. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008), 30-31.

⁶⁶³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III. Xi. 1. See also *Institutes*, III.iii.19.

In fact, Louis Berkhof calls the distinction "the great material principle of the Reformation."⁶⁶⁴ Calvin explains the need for the distinction in his typical legal style. According to Calvin, sinful humanity has two problems: we are guilty (a legal problem) and we are wicked (a moral problem). Justification addresses only the first—our guilt before a just God.⁶⁶⁵ Sanctification addresses the second—our lack of holiness.⁶⁶⁶ In short, justification seen from a Reformed perspective does not include any sense of regeneration or interior renewal usually associated with sanctification. Berkhof says that in justification, "He [God] pardons our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight, but does not change us inwardly."⁶⁶⁷

Instead, the Reformed tradition understands justification as best described in terms of acquittal; this is often referred to as "forensic justification." Before the tribunal of God, the human person is declared just. McCormack summarizes, "Calvin's understanding of justification is strictly forensic or judicial in character. It is a matter of divine judgment, a verdict of acquittal."⁶⁶⁸ The sinful believer stands before God in perfect righteousness, credited to him or her by Christ. One's status before God is changed; he or she is declared just, even though their actual condition is still one of sin. Forensic justification emphasizes that the Christian does not acquire an increase of righteousness that aids him or her on judgment day. Instead, one is justified only because he or she has been declared to belong to Christ. Justification thus conceived teaches that believers are saved apart from themselves, or apart from any of their good efforts toward

⁶⁶⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 512.

⁶⁶⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xii.

⁶⁶⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.19-20.

⁶⁶⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 512.

⁶⁶⁸ Bruce McCormack, "What's at Stake in the Current Debate over Justification? The Crisis of Protestantism in the West," *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, Ed. M. Husbands and D. Treier (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 101.

an increase in godliness or sanctification. Even if those good efforts are filled with the strength of God's grace, the Reformed tradition maintains that they can contribute nothing to one's standing before God. The Belgic Confession says this directly, saying that good works "are of no account towards our justification," that "we do good works, but not to merit by them" and that, "although we do good works, we do not found our salvation upon them."⁶⁶⁹ From this perspective, the Christian cannot even cooperate with God in his or her justification. Overall, justification is about God's decision to forgive the believer's sin and to consider him or her as righteous in Christ. The Reformed view is that justification alone determines one's eternal standing with God, and that one's sanctification must be understood as excluded from that decision of God.

All of this is not to undermine the importance of sanctification. The Reformed tradition still insists that sanctification is a necessary component of salvation. The believer does grow in holiness and faithfulness; he or she is increasingly conformed to the perfection of Christ. What was declared by God about the believer (justification) is increasingly made manifest in the life of that believer (sanctification). Thus Calvin heartily exhorts his readers on to the work of sanctification.⁶⁷⁰ Likewise, the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) speaks of the faith that justifies as a "lively" faith, or faith that proves itself to be true by producing fruit as good works in the lives of believers.⁶⁷¹ Indeed, it explains that "a man is not created or regenerated through faith that he should

⁶⁶⁹ Belgic Confession, Article XXIV.

⁶⁷⁰ Calvin, Institutes, III.iii.1. He writes that holiness of life is born from God's gift of faith to the believer, and that, "Surely no one can embrace the grace of the gospel without betaking himself from the errors of his past life into the right way, and applying his whole effort to the practice of repentance."

⁶⁷¹ Second Helvetic Confession (1566), in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol 2, trans. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008), 840.

be idle.”⁶⁷² A Christian ought to be concerned with his or her sanctification and be busy with good works; the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) states that a Christian will naturally do this: “it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.”⁶⁷³ Overall, then, sanctification is important and necessary, but from the Reformed perspective, it cannot supply the grounds for one’s righteousness, even if only partially or referentially.

2.2 Imputed Righteousness

A second and very much related difference between the Reformed and Catholic understandings of justification is the idea of imputation. Imputation is a significant concept for Reformed theology. Sometimes the phrase “double imputation” is used. This refers to the transfer of a foreign blame and innocence; specifically, how human guilt and sin are negatively granted to Christ, and the perfect obedience and righteousness of Christ is positively granted to believers. The Bohemian Confession (1573) uses this idea of double imputation in its definition of justification: “justification is the remission of sins, the taking away of eternal punishment which the severe justice of God requires, and to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ or the imputation of it.”⁶⁷⁴ More commonly, imputation refers to that positive transfer of Christ’s righteousness to the sinner. This concept protects the idea that the Christian is considered to be righteous in Christ’s righteousness alone, and not in any of their own righteousness. The French Confession (1559) says succinctly that in his or her salvation the believer must “rest upon

⁶⁷² Second Helvetic Confession (1566), 842.

⁶⁷³ The Heidelberg Catechism in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol 2, trans. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008), 783 or Question 64.

⁶⁷⁴ The Bohemian Confession (1573), 340.

the sole obedience of Jesus Christ, which is imputed to us.”⁶⁷⁵ Likewise, Calvin insists that, “we are righteous in Christ only.”⁶⁷⁶

The key difference implied by imputation is that Christ’s righteousness does not create an inner righteousness in the believer; there is no righteousness that actually belongs to the believer. The Heidelberg Catechism explains in more detail that:

Although my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have never kept any of them, and am still prone always to all evil; yet God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sins, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me.⁶⁷⁷

Thus, imputation refers to a righteousness that is sometimes described as “foreign” or “alien” to the human person, and it remains so. According to Reformed teaching, a believer does not acquire a certain goodness or godliness in which he or she must remain. Instead, it is stressed that in this life people have little righteousness of their own to display, certainly nothing they could place confidence in before God.

Here again the term formal cause is important. From the Reformed perspective, the single formal cause of one’s justification is that imputation of Christ’s righteousness to them. We have already seen from the Tridentine understanding in the previous chapter, the formal cause of justification is the inhering righteousness of Christ, which is infused to believers and transforms them, making them just. This difference about formal cause is essential to understanding the Reformation controversy over justification. Calvin and other Protestant leaders defined justification differently, as a forensic declaration of Christ’s imputed righteousness. McCormack agrees: "At the heart of the Reformation

⁶⁷⁵ French Confession (1559) in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol 2, trans. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008), 147.

⁶⁷⁶ Calvin, “Acts of Trent,” 116.

⁶⁷⁷ Heidelberg Catechism, Question 60.

understanding of justification lay the notion of a positive imputation of Christ's righteousness. That was the truly distinctive element in the Reformation understanding."⁶⁷⁸

We have to understand how different and even shattering the concept of imputation would have been to established Catholic theology. McCormack says succinctly that the idea of an immediate divine imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers "renders superfluous the entire Catholic system of the priestly mediation of grace by the church."⁶⁷⁹ Justification is God's decision to grant Christ's righteousness directly to the believer, and it requires no consent, effort, or cooperation from the believer or from the church. Strikingly different from its Catholic counterpart, justification is neither mediated by the church nor increased in the lives of the faithful.

In their historical context, the Protestant Reformers understood that their articulation of the nature of justification differs from the Catholic view. For example, Calvin is able to summarize some of the traditional Catholic belief about justification:

They include under the term "justification" a renewal, by which through the Spirit of God we are remade to obedience to the law. Indeed, they so describe the righteousness of the regenerated man that a man once for all reconciled to God through faith in Christ may be reckoned righteous before God by good works and be accepted by the merit of them.⁶⁸⁰

By disagreeing with this view and insisting instead on justification as a forensic declaration of imputed righteousness, Calvin and other Protestant Reformers were separating and distinguishing their view from the Catholic understanding. Overall, they taught that any sense of inner renewal or personal growth in righteousness must be kept

⁶⁷⁸ McCormack, "What's at Stake," 83.

⁶⁷⁹ McCormack, "What's at Stake," 82.

⁶⁸⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xiv, 11.

separate from the grounds of one's justification. This was new and different, and it has become a mainstay of Reformation theology. Collin Smith explains:

Since the sixteenth century, Reformed theology has distinguished justification and sanctification in order to safeguard the forensic nature of justification and defend against any suggestion that the growth in holiness seen in a Christian man contributes to his being declared righteous by God.⁶⁸¹

Again, the believer does grow in holiness by God's grace, but the definitive difference is that in Reformed theology this growth has nothing to do with justification.

In sum, in the Reformed tradition, the idea of justification is centered on the concept of God declaring the sinner righteous. Human sin is imputed to Jesus Christ, and Christ's perfect righteousness and obedience is imputed to the believer. The believer does not become righteous, and can stand before God only in the foreign righteousness of Christ given to him or her in justification. And while the believer will gradually grow in holiness throughout the course of his or her life on earth (sanctification), this growth is not included as part of his or her adoption by God (justification). In Reformed theology, justification pertains to God's sovereign gift of salvation to his people. It is given to the sinner only in the atoning death of Christ, through faith, and in grace so that nothing can be required of the believer in return. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) says it well: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone."⁶⁸² We will turn now to focus more specifically on some concepts that help explain and support this concept of justification, including sin, faith, and grace.

⁶⁸¹ Collin Smith, *Calvin's Doctrine of Justification in Relation to the sense of Sin and the Dialogue with Rome* (Master's thesis, London Bible College, Sep. 1993), 81.

⁶⁸² Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) in *Book of Catechisms: Reference Edition* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001), Question 33.

3. Important Aspects of Justification

As stated above, traditional Reformed theology defines justification differently than its Catholic counterpart, particularly its distinction between justification and sanctification, and its insistence that Christ's righteousness is imputed rather than infused or acquired. We will now see how this definition led to other theological differences. Specifically, Calvin and other Reformers offered more nuanced definitions of sin and faith, and a more limited understanding of grace, the sacraments, and of what happens after death. They also defined the role of the church concerning salvation differently. These ideas historically differentiated Reformed theology from Catholic theology, and even today help identify the defining characteristics of the Reformed tradition.

3.1 Sin

One important characteristic of the Protestant Reformation is a theological attention to sin and a comprehensive understanding of human sinfulness. During the Reformation, there was a reappraisal of what sin is and what it does. Sin was simply defined differently by the Reformers, and their changes support their view of the justification question.

In particular, both Martin Luther and John Calvin have much to say about human sin. Luther is well-known for his deep conviction of sin, and how a wrestling with his own sense of human sinfulness led to what is considered his breakthrough doctrine, that

of justification by faith alone.⁶⁸³ It also can be seen in his understanding of the human person as both saint and sinner, which became another foundational dogma for Lutherans.⁶⁸⁴ Calvin also gives ample explication of sin. As a second-generation Reformer who came into leadership after the Reformation was already established, he developed a more thorough and systematic doctrine of sin than earlier Reformers like Luther. His understanding of sin was also highly influential, and it remains one of Calvin's most important legacies.⁶⁸⁵ Indeed, it is fair to say that Calvin's doctrine of sin became an essential component of the Reformed understanding of justification.

To begin, the Reformers differed from Catholic teaching on concupiscence, or on what actually constitutes sin. According to Colin Smith, this is a major source of difference between Protestants and Catholics when considering justification. He writes, "Behind the disagreement on what justification is, what regeneration involves, and the status of the good works that proceed from the justified lies a fundamental disagreement on what actually counts as sin."⁶⁸⁶ The Protestant Reformers believed that Catholic teaching on concupiscence minimized the seriousness of sin. The Reformed tradition holds that even the inclination toward sin (concupiscence) is sin and thus accrues guilt before a holy God. Sin, then, is not only the performance of a sinful act; sin is also the thinking, the desiring, or the enjoying of any evil thought contrary to God's will.

⁶⁸³ Roland Bainton's classic biography of Martin Luther, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), well describes Luther's distress and despair over his sinfulness and unconfessed sin. See 44-47 and 54-66.

⁶⁸⁴ Bainton, 65.

⁶⁸⁵ This is widely and popularly recognized. Reformed pastor and seminary president John MacArthur comments on this in "Man's Radical Corruption," *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, & Doxology*, ed. Burk Parsons (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 133-138.

⁶⁸⁶ Smith, *Calvin's Doctrine of Justification*, 189.

On this point, Calvin distinguished between himself and the thought of Augustine: While Augustine taught that concupiscence becomes sin when a person consents to the sinful desire, Calvin believed that there is sin in the person's enjoyment at the thought. Calvin taught that even if we are able to keep ourselves from the sinful act, we sin when we entertain the thought with pleasure.⁶⁸⁷ This fuller understanding of sin and guilt became a distinctive feature of the Reformed tradition.

Following Calvin, traditional Reformed doctrine began to insist that human beings are not sinners because they sin; rather, they sin because they are sinners. Indeed, the Heidelberg Catechism warns believers that they will struggle with their sinful natures for the duration of their lives on earth.⁶⁸⁸

Clearly, then, Calvin agrees with Luther about the believer being both saint and sinner or *simil justus et peccator*,⁶⁸⁹ although this term is more characteristically

⁶⁸⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.10.

⁶⁸⁸ Heidelberg Catechism, Question 56.

⁶⁸⁹ David Lose explores similarities and differences between Luther and Calvin on the issues of justification and sin. He finds that Luther and Calvin are in "substantial agreement" as to the main components of justification, including the condition of the unregenerate person (depravity), the necessity of imputed righteousness, the definition of faith, and the inability of the law to justify the sinner. They are in further agreement as to the idea that the believer is fully justified in Christ Jesus and lacks nothing in relation to his or her salvation. However, Lose finds some differences between them on how they describe the justified saint and sinner. Lose states that these differences have to do with different understandings of the law, particularly Luther's more negative assessment of the law as opposed to Calvin's "third use" of the law. Calvin finds some continuity between the unregenerate and regenerate person, describing the believer in terms of a reform or a renewal that conforms to God's will as prescribed in the law. In contrast, Luther prefers to describe the Christian life with strong distinctions such as sin and righteousness, law and gospel, and death and life—highlighting the idea that the believer in Christ has been freed from the law and its penalty. See David Lose, "Luther & Calvin on Preaching to the Human Condition," *Lutheran Quarterly* (Sept 1, 1996), 281-318. With these comments, one can argue that traditional Lutherans use the *simil justus et peccator* to describe the tension and contradiction of the believer's struggle in this life—sinner and saint—a struggle only to be overcome in the next life. The Reformed tradition would affirm the idea of *simil justus et peccator*, but also include the idea of the gradual improvement in sanctification—from sinner to saint—something that begins in this life but is made complete only in the next life.

Lutheran than Reformed.⁶⁹⁰ According to this perspective, believers—those justified in Christ—will continue to struggle with what is truly sin for as long as their life endures. Calvin explains: "There remains in a regenerate man a smoldering cinder of evil, from which desires continually leap forth to allure and spur him to commit sin...the saints are as yet so bound to the disease of concupiscence that they cannot withstand being at times tickled and incited."⁶⁹¹ Calvin insists that concupiscence actually leads one to sin, and that the fallen believer is not able to resist it at every instance. In Calvin's "Antidote" to the Council of Trent, he takes up this very issue concerning Trent's fifth session on original sin. According to Calvin, believers are counted acceptable before God only because they "are clothed with the innocence of Christ,"⁶⁹² and not because they are innocent themselves. The believer is then both *justus et peccator*.

To get a fuller picture of this key Reformation concept, we will summarize Reformed teaching on sin from the confessions and from Calvin's *Institutes* and the confessions. Typical of traditional Reformed thought, Calvin describes Adam's original sin in many ways, including pride, disobedience, unfaithfulness, and ingratitude. These demonstrate how Adam wanted to attain equality with God, something Calvin calls "a monstrous wickedness" and an "apostasy" that was a "vile reproach" against God and

⁶⁹⁰ Lose makes some helpful remarks both theologically and ecumenically about this topic. See "Luther and Calvin," 303-310. Eugene Klug also comments on the *simil justus et peccator* and Reformed differences from a pro-Lutheran perspective in "Luther on Law, Gospel, and the Third Use of the Law" in *Springfielder* 38.2 (Spring 1974) 162-163, although I find his overall argument about Luther employing the "third use" of the law unconvincing. Jonathan Beeke makes the interesting comment that the pre-lapsarian Adam and Eve were not *simil justus et peccator*, and that in a few limited instances Luther distinguished between the law before sin and the law after sin, the former belying the possibility of a more positive role of the law. Beeke argues that when this idea is drawn out it leads to a more Reformed (!) understanding. See Jonathan Beeke, "Martin Luther's Two Kingdoms, Law and Gospel, and the Created Order: Was there a Time when the Two Kingdoms were Not?" in *Westminster Theological Journal* 73 (2011), 212-214.

⁶⁹¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, iii, 10.

⁶⁹² Calvin "Acts of Trent," 86.

God's authority.⁶⁹³ This rebellion threw Adam and all of his descendants into a corruption of both body and soul. A seed of sin is embedded into the nature of every human person. The Canons of Dort (1618-1619) state succinctly that, "all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin."⁶⁹⁴ Likewise, the Belgic Confession calls the fallen human person "wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways...[and without God], man is nothing but the slave of sin."⁶⁹⁵ Calvin spares no words in describing the corruption of sin: humanity is defiled, entangled, polluted, perverted, wounded, faulty, and depraved.⁶⁹⁶ As such, every human being stands justly accursed and condemned by God, as the Canons of Dort expressly teaches.⁶⁹⁷

It should be said that while the Reformed tradition certainly emphasizes the severe ramification of humanity's sinfulness, it does not teach that the human person has become wholly evil. Although certain created gifts were totally lost in the fall, such as righteousness, holiness, pure faith, and a natural love of God, other good gifts do yet remain. These include the gifts of judgment, reason, and will.⁶⁹⁸ Calvin explains: "In

⁶⁹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, i, 4.

⁶⁹⁴ Canons of Dort (1618-1619) in *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 1988), III-IV, Article 3.

⁶⁹⁵ Belgic Confession, Article 14.

⁶⁹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, i, 1-5.

⁶⁹⁷ Canons of Dort 1618-1619), I, Article 1. In fact, the document begins with this very statement.

⁶⁹⁸ Belgic Confession, Article 14 speaks of remaining "small traces" of humanity's excellent gifts from before the Fall. The Canons of Dort explains more fully that, "There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in man after the fall, by virtue of which he retains some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrates a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far from enabling man to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him—so far, in fact, that man does not use it rightly even in matters of nature and society. Instead, in various ways he completely distorts this light, whatever its precise character, and suppresses it in unrighteousness. In doing so, he renders himself without excuse before God." See Canons of Dort, III-IV, Article 4.

man's perverted and degenerate nature some sparks still gleam."⁶⁹⁹ Humanity does still display some of the created goodness intended by the Creator. Yet the human person is a far cry from fully being what he or she was created to be. So while humanity retains the gift of reason, that reason is polluted and confused. Even though the human mind is composed of wisdom and understanding, those abilities are dulled and darkened. Although humanity has free will, that will has become enslaved and is easy prey for selfishness and vanity.⁷⁰⁰

Calvin's sober discussion of sin includes pastoral concerns. He believed that having a proper understanding of the seriousness and pervasiveness of sin enables believers to know both themselves and their need for God.⁷⁰¹ Smith explains, "For Calvin, the point is not merely that concupiscence is sin, but that because it is sin, it has a crucial role in bringing us to realize that we are sinners."⁷⁰² According to Reformed theology, true knowledge of oneself as sinner is fundamental to one's repentance and turning to God as the only hope for salvation. Calvin further believed that doing so grants peace to the anxious sinner, who needs only look to Christ for his or her entire salvation.⁷⁰³ This understanding is clearly reflected in the Heidelberg Catechism's Question 2 about what one must know to live and die in the comfort of knowing their salvation. It answers, "Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance."⁷⁰⁴ From the Reformed perspective, knowing oneself as sinner enables

⁶⁹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, ii, 12.

⁷⁰⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, ii, 12.

⁷⁰¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i.1-2.

⁷⁰² Smith, *Calvin's Doctrine of Justification* 28.

⁷⁰³ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.iii.6.

⁷⁰⁴ Heidelberg Catechism, Question 2.

one's knowing God as Savior, and grants the believer a measure of assurance that though they still struggle with sin, God remains sovereign over their salvation.

In the end, however, the Reformed tradition is not wholly negative about human bondage to sin and the Christian life. There is room for improvement. Calvin quotes Augustine saying that sin in the life of the saints, "loses its dominion on earth."⁷⁰⁵ There is a gradual dying of sin's powers in the heart of the redeemed. Calvin says that only at the point of one's mortal death does it perish completely, but it is a process which begins in earthly life. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, true conversion can be summed up by both a gradual dying away of the old, sinful self, and a coming to life of the new self in Christ.⁷⁰⁶ At the same time, however, it teaches that as long as believers are still in this life, they must be considered sinners and thereby are unable to cooperate with God in the work of their salvation in any meritorious way.

This last point needs unpacking. In particular, Calvin's view of human sin leads him to strongly disagree with the idea of cooperative grace in Catholic soteriology. Calvin dismisses any notion of sinful human nature having the power to seek after God or cooperate with God in salvation, even if one is only able to do so after an initial help of grace.⁷⁰⁷ Indeed, he says that he is offended by the very idea of grace so conceived, as if "it is our right either to render it [divine grace] ineffectual by spurning the first grace, or to confirm it by obediently following it."⁷⁰⁸ Calvin thinks it misleading to describe grace as cooperative, because it allows believers the "hint" of thinking themselves capable of

⁷⁰⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III. iii, 10.

⁷⁰⁶ Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 88-91.

⁷⁰⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, ii, 6-7.

⁷⁰⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.6.

good works towards salvation,⁷⁰⁹ something a sinner is never capable of. The notion of cooperative grace, according to Calvin, inevitably leads the believer to a false sense of self-justification, at least in part. Instead, he tells his readers that it is far better “utterly to forsake” any confidence in themselves.⁷¹⁰

Today, one of the most prominent aspects of Reformed theology is still its doctrine of sin. There is a fundamental comprehensiveness of human sinfulness that permeates the Reformed tradition, and distinguishes it from other Christian traditions such as the Catholic tradition.

As a contemporary Reformed theologian, Michael Horton agrees with this estimation. He defines original sin as both collective guilt and corruption, and believes that this understanding of sin is essential to the church’s Christian witness in the world today. He says, “No doctrine is more crucial to our anthropology and soteriology, and yet no doctrine has been more relentlessly criticized ever since it was articulated.”⁷¹¹ Similar to Calvin above, Horton argues that a comprehensive understanding of human sinfulness offers to the world what he believes is a crucial truth: human beings are sinners in need of God’s forgiveness and salvation.⁷¹²

Reformed theologians today use the term total depravity to describe the post-fall condition of the human person. This term is often misunderstood. Total depravity means that the person, in every aspect of his or her being, has been touched and damaged by sin. Humanity is not wholly evil, but sin has crept into the very core of the person and affects all that comes out from there. Herman Bavinck puts it this way:

⁷⁰⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.6.

⁷¹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, ii, 9.

⁷¹¹ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 423.

⁷¹² Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 149-152.

Humanity as a whole, and every person in particular, is burdened with guilt, defiled, and subject to ruin and death. These facts are so potent and so obvious that they have also frequently been noted and acknowledged outside the circle of special revelation. Frivolous people may think of life as a game; but all those who respect moral ideals, seriously contend with their own sins, and have the courage to look at reality as it is have acknowledged the deep depravity of human nature.⁷¹³

Yet Bavinck is careful to qualify this deep depravity. Human beings are not wholly evil at every moment of their earthly lives. In his words, "The teaching of Scripture...is not that every human lives at all times in all possible sins and is in fact guilty of violating all God's commandments." Instead, total depravity refers to the "deepest inclination" or the "innermost disposition" or even the "fundamental directedness of human nature" which has become turned away from God.⁷¹⁴ The human heart contains the contagion of evil, necessarily infecting its thoughts and actions. Yet human beings still reflect the goodness of their creator. From the Reformed perspective, the human person is damaged, but not destroyed, marred but not unrecognizable, and condemned but not abandoned.

In conclusion, the Reformed tradition teaches that the human beings are sinners, and are therefore wholly incapable of saving themselves, even unable to cooperate with God in their salvation. Justification comes to believers entirely from without, from the righteousness of Christ credited or imputed to them by God's decision. The believer remains a sinner for the entirety of his or her earthly life, though the power of sin gradually lessens its hold on believers in the process of sanctification. The Reformed understanding of human sinfulness makes up an essential piece of the theology of justification. From this perspective, the severity of human sin, in its comprehensiveness

⁷¹³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol III, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 78.

⁷¹⁴ Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 120.

and depravity, drives the believer to seek a salvation that the Reformers called *sola fide*.⁷¹⁵

3.2 Faith

The importance of "*sola fide*" to the Reformers can hardly be overemphasized. Calvin, for example, writes, "This is the pivotal point of our disputation."⁷¹⁶ He and other Reformers see the difference concerning faith to be at the crux of the Reformation conflict over justification. The confessions, too, insist upon a justification that comes by faith alone. The Bohemian Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Westminster Catechism explicitly use the terminology of "faith alone."⁷¹⁷

At the onset, however, it should be said that faith is a complex idea in the Christian biblical and theological tradition. Louis Berkhof identifies a number of biblical terms that can be translated "faith" from the Old Testament, New Testament, and the Septuagint.⁷¹⁸ These Scripture usages of the word faith can indicate a variety of things, including belief, fidelity, confidence, trust, and reliance. Theology, too, can describe different kinds of faith,⁷¹⁹ as well as different grounds of faith and objects of faith. One ought to recognize that the idea of faith can denote a variety of things, include multiple elements, and be used in different ways.

The Protestant Reformers, however, employed a more limited definition of faith. They strongly contrasted the notion of faith alone with the concept of merit from the

⁷¹⁵ See again Heidelberg Catechism, Question 60.

⁷¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xiv, 11.

⁷¹⁷ Bohemian Confession (1573), 340, the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 61, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 33, and the Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 70.

⁷¹⁸ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 493-495.

⁷¹⁹ Berkhof distinguishes between four types of faith: historical faith, miraculous faith, temporary faith, and true saving faith. See *Systematic Theology*, 501-503.

Catholic tradition. *Sola fide* meant that faith alone saves, or that one's standing before God can never be aided by human effort, even if helped by grace. Calvin adopts the reformation slogan that justification is by "faith alone" because he believes that the only righteousness a believer can speak of is a faith righteousness that exists in that imputation from God.⁷²⁰ This idea is consistently found in the Reformed confessions. For example, the Bohemian Confession (1535) states that, "men are justified before God only by faith...without any efforts, works, or merits of their own."⁷²¹ Similarly, the later Bohemian Confession (1573) speaks of a "true and full justification" that comes by faith,⁷²² and that "faith alone...justifies or makes a man just before God, without any works which he may add or any merit of his own."⁷²³ From the Reformed perspective, the insistence of faith alone flows from its high view of sin. Christians, knowing themselves to be sinners and their works to be stained by sin, can rely only on the faith given them by God for their salvation. Notice, too, that in the Reformation conception of faith, the human person is passive; he or she receives the gift of faith from God.⁷²⁴

This passive aspect to faith does need to be qualified. While saving faith is passive in regards to justification, there is yet an active element of desiring God's truth more fully in the process of sanctification. Calvin says saving faith "is far different than sheer ignorance in which those sluggishly rest who are content with the sort of 'implicit faith.'"⁷²⁵ In other words, true faith in the life of a believer is something that is active and

⁷²⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xiii.4-5.

⁷²¹ Bohemian Confession (1535), 308.

⁷²² Bohemian Confession (1573), 339.

⁷²³ Bohemian Confession (1573), 340.

⁷²⁴ Calvin says exactly this in the *Institutes*, III.xiii.5: "For, as regards to justification, faith is something merely passive, bringing nothing of ours to the recovering of God's favor but receiving from Christ that which we lack."

⁷²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.5.

that grows throughout the life of the Christian. Furthermore, Reformed theology teaches that there is no true faith without the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration within the person. And thus, when Reformed theology speaks of a logical order of salvation (the *ordo salutis*), faith always follows regeneration.⁷²⁶ Bavinck explains,

Furthermore, according to the unanimous confession of the Reformation, humans are themselves incapable of believing or repenting. Faith and repentance, therefore, had to be the fruits of an omnipotent operation of the Holy Spirit, the fruits of a seed planted in the heart by the Holy Spirit. Thus for a variety of reasons, theologians saw themselves compelled to distinguish between the working of the Holy Spirit and the fruit of that operation; in other words, between the faculty and the act of faith, between conversion in a passive and in an active sense.⁷²⁷

In this sense faith cannot be described as wholly passive; it is also the Spirit-led activity of the believer in the work of sanctification. Stated another way, one could say that while the Holy Spirit causes us to believe, the Spirit does not believe for us. But again, the distinction in Reformed theology between justification and sanctification protects the idea that even the believer's faith contributes nothing to his or her eternal standing with God.

What, then, is faith? Generally, in the Reformed tradition faith is that which attaches the believer to Christ. It functions as the means of his or her justification, as it contains the deposit of Christ's gift of righteousness. Calvin says that a proper definition of faith includes knowledge: "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise of Christ," but says that faith is "both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."⁷²⁸

Calvin actually emphasizes the affective aspect over the intellectual: "I...will reiterate more fully--[faith] is more of the heart than of the brain, and more of the disposition than

⁷²⁶ See Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 564-564-565 and 579-585 or Berkhof's summary in *Systematic Theology*, 418.

⁷²⁷ Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 581-582.

⁷²⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 7.

of the understanding."⁷²⁹ Faith is also the work of the Holy Spirit, who seals the truths of God in Christ onto the hearts and minds of believers.

I suspect that faith thus described is not opposed by Catholic teaching, especially today.⁷³⁰ In fact, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* contains lengthy teaching on Christian faith, much of it very similar to the Reformed view. Consider paragraph 162: "Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to man."⁷³¹ And paragraph 161 includes, "without faith no one has ever attained justification."⁷³² Obviously, then, the idea of faith as God's gift of salvation to the believer is amenable to Catholic teaching.

The traditional difference between the Protestant and the Catholic understanding of justification by faith is the word "alone" that the Reformers insisted upon. Trent adamantly denies the idea that faith alone justifies, because Catholic thought couples faith with hope and love, which together unite the believer to Christ in justification.⁷³³ Faith, hope, and love are together "inserted" or "infused" into the believer at the same time,⁷³⁴ and they are together necessary for the believer's justification. As discussed earlier, the Catholic Church has traditionally associated faith primarily with the intellect, and thus faith needed to be formed and completed in hope and love. Bavinck, too, describes faith as it was understood in the Catholic tradition through the first Vatican Council: "Faith, in Roman Catholic thought, is a firm and certain assent to the truths of

⁷²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 8.

⁷³⁰ Anthony Lane says much the same. He notes the American Catholic-Lutheran dialogue document *Justification by Faith*, commenting on a significant change in the understanding of faith at Vatican II and beyond. See Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 179 and the dialogue document *Justification by Faith*, §73 for the reference.

⁷³¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 162.

⁷³² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 161.

⁷³³ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Sixth Session, 13 January 1547, Chapter XI.

⁷³⁴ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Chapter XI.

revelation on the basis of the authority of God in Scripture and the church.”⁷³⁵ This understanding of faith can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which calls faith “a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed.”⁷³⁶

However, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks so prolifically about faith and about the multi-faceted nature of faith, it would be untrue to reduce the contemporary Catholic understanding of faith to mean “intellectual assent.” It seems fair to say that a contemporary Catholic understanding of faith is generally about a person’s free choice to believe in God, to adhere to God, and to assent to God’s truth.⁷³⁷ The catechism explains that, “Faith is man’s response to God,”⁷³⁸ yet faith can only result from God’s initial gift of grace to the believer, so thus faith must be considered both “a grace” and “an authentically human act.”⁷³⁹ God graciously works in the human person via prevenient grace, and he or she must respond by placing faith in God and working out the deeds of hope and love in his or her salvation. Enabled by grace, the believer’s faith (coupled with hope and love) can be said to contribute to his or her justification in Christ. Therefore, from the Catholic perspective, faith is not conceived of as something primarily passive in justification, and this is a remaining difference between the two traditions.

Contemporary Reformed theology also picks up on this passivity or non-contributory nature of faith when speaking of justification. Horton says, “Strictly speaking, one is not justified by faith but by Christ’s righteousness which is received through faith. Therefore, faith is always extrospective: looking outside of itself. Faith

⁷³⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, vol I, ed. John Bolt, tran. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 571.

⁷³⁶ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §150.

⁷³⁷ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §150.

⁷³⁸ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §26.

⁷³⁹ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §153 and 154.

does not arise within the self, but comes to us from the outside... This means that in the act of justification faith is itself completely passive, *receiving* a gift, not offering one.”⁷⁴⁰

Christian faith is about belonging to Christ, and specifically knowing and trusting that one is counted as righteous in Christ. Again, Horton offers a nice summary: “faith... is the specific conviction of the heart, mind, and will that God is gracious to us in Jesus Christ on the basis of God’s Word.”⁷⁴¹ From the Reformed perspective, Christian faith immediately leads the believer to an assurance of salvation.

The question of whether a believer can truly have certainty about his or her salvation was historically significant during the Protestant Reformation, with the Council of Trent answering a firm “no” to this question,⁷⁴² and the Reformed tradition answering an equally firm “yes.” Overall, the Reformed tradition has always held that Christian faith naturally confers a sense of certitude about one’s salvation to the believer. By faith Christians know not only that God is faithful to his promise of salvation, but also that God’s promises are for them. Calvin speaks strongly in favor of faith conferring this assurance of salvation:

Now it [faith] is an assurance that renders the conscience calm and peaceful before God's judgment... Briefly, he alone is truly a believer who, convinced by a firm conviction that God is a kindly and well-disposed Father toward him, promises himself all things on the basis of his generosity; who, relying upon the promises of divine benevolence toward him, lays hold on an undoubted expectation of salvation.⁷⁴³

Faith and assurance always go together in the Reformed tradition, and this is reflected in how the Reformed confessions articulate the nature of Christian faith. For example, the

⁷⁴⁰ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 583.

⁷⁴¹ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 585.

⁷⁴² Chapter IX of Trent’s “Decree on Justification” says that “no one can know with a certitude of faith... that one has obtained God’s grace.” It calls the idea of an assurance of salvation being taught by the Protestants a “vain confidence which is foreign to all piety.”

⁷⁴³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, II, 16.

Heidelberg Catechism which defines faith as “not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in his Word is true,” but also “a deep-rooted conviction that...I too have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation.”⁷⁴⁴ Likewise, the First Helvetic Confession includes a definition of faith that incorporates the assurance: “This faith is a certain and undoubted substance and apprehension of all things hoped for from the benevolence of God.”⁷⁴⁵ Since Christians are justified apart from any righteousness on their part, since even their faith is a gift from God, they can rest in the assurance that their eternal destiny has been earned by Christ and will be held for them by him. Nothing they do can add to their justification before God; not even their cooperation is necessary or possible. Indeed, Horton summarizes that “faith *is* assurance because Christ’s meritorious work is already completed.”⁷⁴⁶

In sum, the concept of faith was highly important to the Protestant Reformers and to the Reformed tradition that followed them. Faith alone, or *sola fide*, designates that from the Reformed perspective, human merit is never incorporated into one’s justification. Calvin and the Reformed confessions speak of faith as something mainly passive: the sinful believer receives the gift of faith from God, and can be assured that that his or her salvation has been fully achieved by Christ on the cross.

⁷⁴⁴ "The Heidelberg Catechism," *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 1988), 19.

⁷⁴⁵ The First Helvetic Confession, 347.

⁷⁴⁶ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 585.

3.3 Grace

Another aspect of redemption that becomes defined in a more limited way during the Reformation is the concept of grace. In Reformed thought, grace is primarily understood as restorative. By grace the believer is freely forgiven of his or her sins and made right with God. The Belgic Confession teaches in more detail the penal substitutionary atonement, explaining how Christ is charged with human sin and bears its just punishment.⁷⁴⁷ This is done, notably, “for our justification,”⁷⁴⁸ and “by grace.”⁷⁴⁹ Thus the chief function of grace is to restore the sinful believer into a righteous relationship with God through the salvation earned by Christ’s sacrifice of himself. Calvin describes grace with a variety of terms, including free mercy, forgiveness, free favor, free salvation, free gift, and even fatherly kindness.⁷⁵⁰ The Westminster Catechism explains how justification is a divine act of “free grace” in its definition of justification:

Justification is an act of God’s free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sin, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them and received by faith.⁷⁵¹

Seen in this light, grace is predominantly associated with forgiveness; it is God’s free decision to restore the sinner into a right relationship with Godself through the atonement of Christ. God’s decision is often understood as declaration, as the proclamation of God’s divine forgiveness. There is an emphasis in the Reformed tradition that grace comes through the hearing of the word of God. In other words, it is through the

⁷⁴⁷ The Belgic Confession, Art. 20-21.

⁷⁴⁸ The Belgic Confession, Art. 20.

⁷⁴⁹ The Belgic Confession, Art. 23.

⁷⁵⁰ See Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvii.1-3, 5.

⁷⁵¹ Westminster Catechism, Question 70.

preaching of the gospel that the sinner comes to an understanding of Christ's work of grace on his or her behalf .

Once again, the Protestant Reformers used this notion of grace to distinguish their teaching from that of Catholic teaching. Grace alone, or *sola gratia*, meant that no human effort is necessary or possible in human justification; justification comes to the believer solely by God's free decision. The Westminster Catechism specifically teaches that nothing is required of believers for their justification.⁷⁵² Effectively, *sola gratia* is another term that the Reformers used to state their opposition to the idea of human cooperation or merit in the Catholic tradition. The Belgic Confession states exactly this:

And the same apostle says that we are justified “freely” or “by grace” through the redemption in Jesus Christ. And therefore we cling to this foundation...not claiming a thing for ourselves or our merits and leaning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified, which is ours when we believed in him.⁷⁵³

By grace alone, the Reformed believer is taught to rely entirely on God's free gift of salvation as the only basis for his or her acceptance by God.⁷⁵⁴

It should be clear, then, that from the Reformed perspective, divine grace does not create a change within the believer. In traditional Reformed thought, grace is not commonly understood to be an agent of transformation, elevation, or empowerment. Rather, divine grace is most commonly seen to be that which changes the status of the person before God.

However, in some limited sense the Reformed tradition can speak of grace being active in the whole of the Christian life, in sanctification as well as justification. For

⁷⁵² Westminster Larger Catechism, 161 or Question 71.

⁷⁵³ The Belgic Confession, 23.

⁷⁵⁴ Calvin embraces the “grace alone” in the *Institutes* III.ii.7 stating that “our salvation rests with God” and that “our salvation is his care and concern.” He concludes by connecting *sola gratia* with assurance, saying, “Accordingly, we need the promise of grace, which can testify to us that the Father is merciful; since we can approach him in no other way, and upon grace alone the heart of man can rest.”

instance, the Westminster Catechism calls sanctification “a work of God’s free grace.”⁷⁵⁵ In explaining the difference between justification and sanctification, the catechism goes so far to explain that in sanctification, grace is “infused.”⁷⁵⁶ While language of infused grace is highly unusual in the Reformed tradition, its mention here proves that it is not entirely unheard of when speaking of sanctification. Reformed theology can speak of God as gracefully demonstrating forgiveness and mercy to his people in many ways. One example of this is how, in the process of sanctification, God can be pleased by the good works of believers, even while those works always remain stained by sin to some extent.⁷⁵⁷ It is by God’s grace, too, that he allows these works to bear fruit. Again Reformed theology is very clear that good works are not meritorious in justification, but states that they are not disdained by God and that God may even grant believers a heavenly reward for their good works.⁷⁵⁸ All of this is due to grace; in it God condescends to the human person and shows his great kindness and generosity to the sinful believer.

Much more commonly, however, grace is defined as the forgiveness that sinful humanity needs. Grace heals and restores; it is primarily medicinal. Thus in Reformed theology, there is no element of elevating human nature toward God by grace; likewise, the idea of grace as enabling the human person to receive a clear, essential vision of God is foreign to the Reformed tradition. Grace simply does not function this way in Reformed thought. Instead, grace is God’s mercy granted to the fallen human person.

⁷⁵⁵ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 35.

⁷⁵⁶ Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 77.

⁷⁵⁷ Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 62-64; Belgic Confession, Article 24.

⁷⁵⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xv, 3 and III, xviii, 2-3 and Belgic Confession, Article 24.

This is why in Reformed thought grace can be seen as technically unnecessary before the entrance of sin into the world. Bavinck explains that:

Grace serves, not to take up humans into a supernatural order, but to free them from sin...In a real sense, it was not necessary in the case of Adam before the fall but has only become necessary as a result of sin. It is therefore not absolutely necessary but only incidentally...When grace removes sin with its entailment of guilt, pollution, and punishment, it has done its work...Grace restores nature and takes it to its highest pinnacle, but it does not add to it any new and heterogeneous constituents.⁷⁵⁹

In this way, the Reformed tradition has always understood the role of grace differently than the Catholic tradition. The Reformers rejected the Catholic *donum superadditum*—the gift of divine grace added to nature that elevates the human person and enables him or her to seek after the divine. An earlier chapter discussed how these ideas about grace in Catholic theology were influenced by Thomas Aquinas, and how the Protestant Reformers attempted to reject much of Aquinas' thought.⁷⁶⁰ The Reformers argued instead that humanity's original integrity and righteousness needed no such gift of supernatural grace to reach its ultimate end and fulfillment.⁷⁶¹ The human person was created with the ability to mature and develop,⁷⁶² but that is different than the idea of

⁷⁵⁹ Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 577.

⁷⁶⁰ It is, again, a worthy question as to whether the Reformers adequately interpreted or understood Aquinas; Arvin Vos offers a compelling argument that Protestants, following in the Reformer's footsteps, have too quickly rejected Aquinas' work without an honest hearing in *Aquinas, Calvin, & Contemporary Protestant Thought*.

⁷⁶¹ Louis Berkhof offers a concise discussion on differences between the Reformed and Catholic views of the human person, including the *donum superadditum* in *Systematic Theology*, 206-210. Bavinck, too, highlights this difference in understanding between Reformed and Catholic theologies of grace in *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 571-579. Their explanations do represent the general understanding amongst Reformed thinkers about Catholic theology on this issue. However, it could be argued that Bavinck and Berkhof (and Reformed theology in general) have not given Aquinas a fair hearing on grace, as Vos argues in *Aquinas, Calvin, & Contemporary Protestant Thought*, 123-160. While it may be helpful to evaluate to what extent the differences about grace are real or perceived, I think it is fair to say that the Reformed tradition does not believe that the idea of the *donum superadditum* is a good way to think about grace.

⁷⁶² Reformed theology testifies to the idea of a "plus" in the redeemed state, that there is something more to our future eternal life than a mere return to Eden. Brian Mattson explores this in Bavinck's work

grace as an element of transformation or elevation as in Catholic thought in the *donum superadditum*. Horton agrees that grace was technically not necessary before sin. He explains in detail:

It is premature to insert into the creation covenant an element of divine graciousness, strictly speaking. Grace is not the same as goodness; mercy is not the same as love. Scripture speaks lavishly of God's goodness, kindness, generosity, and love toward his unfallen creation, but there is not a single verse that refers to God's grace and mercy toward creatures prior to the fall. Grace is synonymous with mercy: not merely unmerited favor, but the kind of loving-kindness that God shows to those who actually deserve the very opposite.⁷⁶³

Perhaps not all Reformed theologians would speak so frankly, but Horton is certainly consistent with the Reformed trajectory of thought that the human being before sin did not require a special gift of grace to transcend any natural spiritual limitation. Thus in comparison to Catholic thought, the Reformed tradition offers a more limited understanding not only on what grace is, but also in what it does.

It should be said that there is one other way to speak of grace within the Reformed tradition, and that is common grace. This is primarily a post-Reformation distinction in Reformed theology about grace, although there is some recognition of the idea in Calvin's writings and in the confessions.⁷⁶⁴ Common grace is the idea that God bestows underserved blessings on both believers and unbelievers. Common grace is not the saving grace that we have been discussing; it refers instead to God's sovereign ability to be good to those who are not Christians, even to those whom he will never save. Berkhof attempts to summarize Calvin's understanding of common grace, although he notes that Calvin does not use the term "common grace" as he is using it. He writes:

in *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology & the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). This idea will be further discussed in the next section.

⁷⁶³ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 423.

⁷⁶⁴ Berkhof discusses the history of the concept of common grace and its inception into Reformed thought in *Systematic Theology*, 432-435.

This is the grace which is communal, does not pardon nor purify human nature, and does not effect the salvation of sinners. It curbs the destructive power of sin, maintains in a measure the moral order of the universe, thus making an orderly life possible, distributes in varying degrees gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art, and showers untold blessings upon the children of men.⁷⁶⁵

Significantly, when the confessions refer (or infer) to the idea of common grace, their argument is always to stress that common grace is not salvific. For example, the Canons of Dort use the term in its “Rejection of the Errors,” objecting to the ideas of those “who teach that corrupt and natural man can make such good use of common grace (by which they mean the light of nature) or of the gifts remaining after the fall that he is able thereby gradually to obtain a greater grace—evangelical or saving grace—as well as salvation itself.”⁷⁶⁶ The Westminster Catechism speaks very similarly, but without using the term.⁷⁶⁷ These comments reveal a certain tension in Reformed thought as to whether common grace can truly be called grace at all,⁷⁶⁸ although in contemporary Reformed thought the term has become more commonplace.⁷⁶⁹ Regardless, in the context of justification, grace is not “common.”

In conclusion, Reformed theology says that by God’s grace, sinful believers are brought back to what they are as beloved creatures of God. While there may be some other ways to speak of grace, the chief and primary function of grace in the Reformed tradition is the forgiveness and restoration of lost sinners to their God. It is by grace

⁷⁶⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 434.

⁷⁶⁶ Canons of Dort, Point 3-4, Rejection V.

⁷⁶⁷ Westminster Catechism, Question 60.

⁷⁶⁸ This question was hotly debated in the early 20th century amongst conservative Reformed groups, including my home congregation in Kalamazoo, Michigan which left the Christian Reformed denomination in 1924 and joined the newly formed Protestant Reformed denomination over this issue. For more information on that common grace controversy see Raymond Blacketer, “The Three Points in most Parts Reformed” in *Calvin Theological Journal* 31.1 (April 2000), 37-65. For history on the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Church see the denominational website, www.prca.org.

⁷⁶⁹ See, for example, Bavinck in *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* 256-257, and 466-437 or Horton’s discussion in *The Christian Faith*, 364-368.

alone that in justification, believers receive the imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness and obedience, and it is a gift to which they can contribute nothing.

3.4 Justification and Eternal Life

First, we have already seen that from the Reformed perspective that Christian faith grants to the believer a certain sense of assurance about his or her eternal salvation. In short, since justification rests solely in the work of Christ already accomplished, believers need not worry about God's judgment. They can walk with confidence before God's tribunal, for by grace they stand in the perfect righteousness of Christ. Christians, then, can be certain that they will enjoy a perfect life with God forever, and this knowledge ought be a comfort to them for the duration of their earthly lives.⁷⁷⁰ Horton more specifically identifies the connection between justification and one's future glorification as the Holy Spirit, who assures believers of their eternal home with God:

The link between justification in the present and glorification-resurrection in the future, of course, is the Spirit, who is the pledge or down payment on this final reality. By possessing the Spirit in the present, believers are assured of their final clothing (investiture) in glorification and resurrection, since it has already appeared in their justification and rebirth.⁷⁷¹

The Holy Spirit grants the Christian a foretaste of eternal life, even now in this life. The idea of eternal life being experienced already, albeit imperfectly, in this life is not unique to the Reformed tradition--the Catholic tradition also teaches this⁷⁷²--but the difference again is in the assurance or certainty of it for the believer.

⁷⁷⁰ Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 57 and 58.

⁷⁷¹ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 707.

⁷⁷² While perhaps not always overtly expressed, this idea can be found in many places, including more recent official teachings like the *Catechism of Catholic Church*. For instance, the CCC speaks of the believer's death as "a step towards him [God]," assuming that other steps have already been taken. It also defines heaven as "the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings," something that

Overall, however, the Reformers are cautious in describing eternity. The Heidelberg Catechism, for example, certainly affirms the reality of eternal life, but does so with sparse detail: “Even as I already now experience in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, so after this life I will have perfect blessedness such as no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no human heart has ever imagined: a blessedness in which to praise God eternally.”⁷⁷³ The Westminster Catechism gives a bit more detail coming from Scripture, but is also brief. It states that believers:

will be received into heaven...fully and forever freed from their sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joy; made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul...in the immediate vision and fruition of God...to all eternity. And this is the perfect and full communion, which the members of the invisible Church shall enjoy with Christ in glory.”⁷⁷⁴

It is fair to say that the Reformed tradition is generally willing to affirm what the Bible says about the eternal life of believers, but little more.

Calvin does the same. He uses biblical references to affirm the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and the heavenly afterlife;⁷⁷⁵ however, he does not speak in depth about this. In fact, he admits that he thinks the details are far beyond human capabilities: “For though we very truly hear that the Kingdom of God will be filled with splendor, joy, happiness, and glory, yet when these things are spoken of, they remain utterly remote from our perception, and, as it were, wrapped in obscurities.”⁷⁷⁶

is already begun in this life. It is called a “mystery of blessed communion with Christ,” again something that believers increasingly enjoy in this life and in the next. See §1020-1029. Furthermore, in its teaching on justification and communication with the divine nature, the CCC indicates that this union with God or “divinization” is a process of conversion that is already at work in the lives of Christians. See §1988-1989.

⁷⁷³ Heidelberg Catechism, Question 58.

⁷⁷⁴ Westminster Catechism, Question 90.

⁷⁷⁵ See Calvin, *Institutes*, III, XXV.

⁷⁷⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, XXV, 10.

Again, Calvin seems only willing to say what Scripture says about the believer's eternity, but little more.

Occasionally, however, Calvin does hint at what he thinks the afterlife will consist of, and some of his ideas reflect Reformed thought about the goodness and completeness of the human person. One example comes when Calvin responds to comments about not needing food in the place of eternal blessedness. His response affirms his belief in a future perfect earth: "in the very sight of it there will be such pleasantness, such sweetness in the knowledge of it alone, without the use of it, that this happiness will far surpass all the amenities that we now enjoy. Let us imagine ourselves set in the richest region of earth, where we lack no pleasure."⁷⁷⁷ Calvin imagines the future and eternal home for Christians to be a place of bounty, riches, and joy.

Much of Reformed thought on eternity points to it being a *return* and a *fulfillment* of the original pre-sin state of humanity and the earth. Men and women were created to live as creatures who reflect God and his righteousness, and to remain in that perfect relationship with God and nature. The end or goal for humanity was to experience an eternal communion with God, created as they were in God's image and blessed to live in his presence in the paradise that God had made for them. This refers again to what the Westminster Catechism defines as the creational purpose of humanity-- to glorify God and enjoy him forever.⁷⁷⁸ Some Reformed theologians have, however, pointed out that the believer's eternity will be more than a simple return to the pre-fall condition.

According to Bavinck, for example, there was a development or destination present in the

⁷⁷⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, XXV, 11.

⁷⁷⁸ Westminster Catechism, Question 1.

original creation, an inherent eschatology to the human condition. He says that this, too, will be fulfilled and perfected in eternity.⁷⁷⁹

In eternity, then, the human person will be restored to God's image, forever cleansed from sin, and live in righteous communion with God. In the eternity promised of God, humanity will be returned to its original goodness, and it will be remade into its eschatological fullness. With this in mind, Bavinck gives a fuller description of eternal salvation (Bible references removed):

Scripture itself tells us that eternal life consists in knowing and serving God, in glorifying and praising him. His children remain his servants, who serve him night and day. They are prophets, priests, and kings who reign on earth forever. Inasmuch as they have been faithful over little on earth, they will be put in charge of many things in the kingdom of God. All will retain their own personalities, for the names of all who enter the new Jerusalem have been written on the Lamb's book of life, and all will receive a new name of their own... Tribes, peoples, and nations all make their own particular contribution to the enrichment of life in the new Jerusalem... The great diversity that exists among people in all sorts of ways is not destroyed in eternity but is cleansed from all that is sinful and made serviceable to fellowship with God and each other.⁷⁸⁰

Bavinck's description reflects a contemporary attention to the biblical promise of the redemption of creation, and it is one that has become increasingly prominent in Reformed thought today.⁷⁸¹ Calvin is less clear, but these ideas are consistent with the trajectory of his thought. There is a long tradition in Reformed thought of a certain goodness and completeness of the "creatureliness," of the human person. As said before, humanity thus

⁷⁷⁹ Bavinck explains similarities between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace to show creational human destiny and eschatological fulfillment in Christ, the second Adam. In the perfect obedience of Christ, believers are "restored to their destiny." See Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 586-588 and *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 577. For a much fuller discussion on this point, see again Brian Mattson's excellent book, *Restored to Our Destiny*.

⁷⁸⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 727.

⁷⁸¹ See, for example, Al Wolters' short but comprehensive book, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) or Michael D. Williams' introductory textbook on Reformed theology, *Far as the Curse is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (P & R Publishing, 2005).

conceived is not in need of a gift of grace to perfect it or elevate it. Again, as Bavinck explains, “Grace restores nature and takes it to its highest pinnacle, but it does not add to it any new and heterogeneous constituents.”⁷⁸² The human person in eternity will be very human, not changed or elevated by grace, but rather restored and perfected by grace. Certainly there is a plus in the eternal condition, but it is not one that exceeds humankind’s natural “creaturely” perfection.⁷⁸³

In sum, the Reformed tradition teaches that because believers are justified by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, their faith grants them assurance of their eternal place with God. God’s grace forgives them of their sin and restores them into a right relationship with him, allowing them to live with him forever. In that perfect home, they will enjoy God and serve him in eternity. They will be united with him and other believers in fellowship and purpose, experiencing a communion that they were destined for from the beginning of time.⁷⁸⁴

There are some important differences between the Reformed perspective on eternity and the Catholic perspective on eternity that result from each tradition’s understanding of justification. Here we will explore two. First, in the Reformed tradition, there is no belief in purgatory. Reformed theology teaches that the believer, being already justified by a forensic declaration of Christ’s righteousness, at death goes immediately into the presence of God.⁷⁸⁵ There is no need for an intermediate state to purge any remaining sin, and this idea is consistently expressed in the Reformed confessions. For example, the Waldensian Confession denies that there can be any

⁷⁸² Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 577.

⁷⁸³ Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 376-377.

⁷⁸⁴ Bavinck emphasizes the importance of community to fulfilled human destiny. He states, “the goal and end is a kingdom of God, a holy humanity, in which God is all in all.” See *God and Creation*, 576-580.

⁷⁸⁵ This is overtly taught in the Westminster Catechism, Question 86.

period of purgatory after death⁷⁸⁶ and the Articles of the Church of England calls the notion of purgatory, amongst other things, “repugnant to the Word of God.”⁷⁸⁷ Calvin also rails against the idea of purgatory, saying “But if it is perfectly clear from our preceding discourse that the blood of Christ is the sole satisfaction for the sins of believers, the sole expiation, the sole purgation, what remains but to say that purgatory is simply a dreadful blasphemy against Christ?”⁷⁸⁸ Simply put, the Reformed understanding of justification excludes the possibility of purgatory; it cannot exist within that paradigm of salvation.

A second significant difference between the Catholic and Reformed perspectives on justification concerns the *visio Dei* and relates to matters of theological anthropology. Eugene TeSelle comments that, “the Reformers were wary of too much speculation on such matters as the vision of God, so central to the Catholic discussion of nature and grace, either because of their philosophical caution or because of the Bible's reticence.”⁷⁸⁹ I also think it is fair to say that the hesitancy of Calvin and other Reformers to more fully embrace the idea of the beatific vision is due more specifically to their understanding of justification, and its related assumptions about the human person.

First, the Reformers’ avoidance of the notion of the *visio Dei* reflects a basic and foundational difference in theological anthropology. We have seen how the Reformed tradition emphasizes the completeness of created humanity before the fall into sin, created without a need for divine grace, and certainly not to elevate it into something able

⁷⁸⁶ Waldensian Confession, 174-5.

⁷⁸⁷ The Forty-Two Articles of the Church of England (1552-1553) in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol II, trans. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008), 7-8..

⁷⁸⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, v, 6.

⁷⁸⁹ Eugene TeSelle, “Nature and Grace in the Forum of Ecumenical Discussion,” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 8/3 (Jun 1, 1971), 551.

to attain its ultimate goal or end. Humanity could grow and mature in its relationship with God, but there is no sense of ontological movement or transformation necessary before the human person can experience perfect fellowship with God in eternity. Human nature before the fall into sin simply did not need to be improved or enhanced to enjoy God and see him in glory. By and large, this understanding of the completeness of created human nature excludes the traditional Catholic teaching of the beatific vision.

A second and related reason that the idea of the beatific vision is not popular in Reformed thought is because Reformed theology does not understand the larger picture of salvation in terms of process and increase.⁷⁹⁰ After the human person falls into sin, he or she needs to be forgiven and restored to God, not elevated by grace or improved in justice in order to experience salvation and, ultimately, to see God. We have seen how the Reformed confessions and Calvin identify justification in judicial terms that exclude ontology. Particularly, after humanity falls into sin and needs to be justified, that justification is about a change in its status with God, and not about an increase in one's abilities or person. Reformed theology insists that the justification of a sinner is not a process of improvement; rather, it is a declaration. It is fair to say that the traditional Catholic understanding of the *visio Dei* simply does not function well within this paradigm.

A similar argument comes from Kenneth Kirk, whose book on the vision of God describes a "lapse" in the importance of the *visio Dei* amongst the Protestant

⁷⁹⁰ Because one's salvation is sealed in God's declaration of justification to the sinner, there is no sense of growth in or increase of one's salvation. This is not to say, however, that believers do not increase in their sanctification over the course of their earthly lives, which they surely do. Yet the firm distinction between justification and sanctification in the Reformed tradition precludes any sense of improvement or process to one's salvation.

Reformers.⁷⁹¹ Kirk believes that the Protestant idea of the assurance of salvation to the individual believer is in part the reason for such a decrease in interest in the idea of the beatific vision. He writes, “First of all, the doctrine of the personal assurance of the Christian—of his standing in an inalienable, immediate relationship with God—implies the complete freedom of the individual.” He connects this idea with evidence of an antinomian tendency amongst the Reformers and their followers, as well as it leading to decreased valuing of the idea of the *visio De*, among other things like prayer and contemplation. The importance of these “otherworldly” activities was minimized, and perhaps misconstrued as almost unnecessary when one’s eternal salvation is so assured. Kirk concludes, “As we have just seen, the primacy in private devotion, of worship, contemplation, mystical prayer, the vision of God...was allowed to lapse by Protestantism.”⁷⁹²

This is not to say that the Reformers never spoke of a *visio Dei*. On occasion there is mention of a future “seeing” of God. One example is the Westminster Catechism which teaches that immediately after death believers will “behold the face of God in light and glory.”⁷⁹³ The difference again is that idea of grace as an agent of elevation or improvement of human nature, which the Reformers deny. Bavinck endorses the biblical teaching that in eternity believers will see God in glory, but he is quick to insist that human nature remains human nature, and even in that state of glory. He writes, “regardless of how high and glorious Reformed theologians conceived the state of glory

⁷⁹¹ Kenneth Kirk, *The Vision of God: The Christian Doctrine of the Summum Bonum* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 414-431. Kirk is dissatisfied with any Protestant apathy toward the *visio Dei*; he believes instead that contemplation on the vision of God constitutes one of the highest spiritual goods, and he implores for its return to broader Christianity. His book well describes the historical and biblical support for the idea of the *visio Dei* in Christian thought.

⁷⁹² Kirk, *The Vision of God*, 431.

⁷⁹³ Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 86.

to be, human beings remained human even there...Humanity's blessedness indeed lies in the 'beatific vision of God,' but this vision will always be such that finite and limited human nature is capable of it."⁷⁹⁴ From the Reformed perspective, the beatific vision is possible only because God condescends to make himself known or seen by humanity in its limitedness, and not because humanity is raised up and enabled to see God. The directionality is important: God descends to the human person, that person never ascends to God.

Calvin does not speak of the *visio Dei* often, but does instruct his readers to seek it out in the Scriptures, where he believes God makes himself most visible: "We have no occasion to fear obscurity, [for] when we approach the gospel, God *there* clearly discovers to us his face."⁷⁹⁵ He does say further that our vision of God will be improved when Christ returns to earth at the second coming, for then we will have a "glorious view" of God.⁷⁹⁶ In this instance, Calvin gives the *visio Dei* a Christological interpretation: human beings see God when they see Christ in the flesh. Although not widely discussed in Reformed theology, it seems most consistent from the Reformed perspective to understand the idea of the *visio Dei* Christologically. Thus, the highest example of God descending to human persons--condescending to them in order to make himself seen by them--is the incarnation.

Overall, in the Reformed tradition, the believer can expect perfect communion with God in eternity, but this is somewhat different than what is expressed by the *visio Dei* in the Catholic tradition. Language such as "union of the soul with God," "intuitive

⁷⁹⁴ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 191.

⁷⁹⁵ John Calvin, *2 Corinthians*, electronic ed., Calvin's Commentaries (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998), 2 Co 3:18.

⁷⁹⁶ Calvin, *2 Corinthians*, 2 Co 3:18.

vision of the divine essence,⁷⁹⁷ or seeing God “face to face, as he is,”⁷⁹⁸ is not common in Reformed circles. In fact, some Reformed theologians fear that such language comes dangerously close to violating the distinction between God and humanity. Bavinck expresses this very fear, arguing vigorously against what he calls the “supernaturalism” of Catholic theology, which he thinks implies a deification of the human person, amongst other problematic ideas.⁷⁹⁹ It is fair to question whether Bavinck is adequately interpreting Catholic theology on this point,⁸⁰⁰ but his concern over Catholic language about the *visio Dei* is typical of Reformed thought. Regardless, it is fair to say that the idea of the vision of God is not common in the Reformed tradition. From a Reformed perspective, one’s seeing of God is not the result of an elevation of the soul via infused grace. There is not a perceived need to transcend any natural limitation to be able to experience God in eternity. Instead, God condescends to human beings, accommodating himself in order to be known and seen by them. The best example of this is Christ, in whose face the Christian does see God. In eternity, therefore, believers will live in the presence of Christ. They receive the goodness of their created humanity back, and have

⁷⁹⁷ These phrases come from Kirk’s description of Aquinas’ understanding of the *visio Dei*. See Kirk, *The Vision of God*, 379-394.

⁷⁹⁸ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §163. Other sections of the catechism give greater detail. For example, paragraph 1721 speaks of believers becoming “partakers of the divine nature” and entering “into the glory of Christ and into the joy of the Trinitarian life.” These comments would cause concern to the Reformed reader, but it needs to be stated that the Catholic catechism does not teach that the believer becomes God.

⁷⁹⁹ See Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 539-548.

⁸⁰⁰ Such sharp criticism of Catholicism requires careful support, and I do not believe Bavinck adequately does this. He also ought to have included a more sustained discussion of Aquinas on this issue. Furthermore, Brian Mattson makes the astute observation that Bavinck’s criticism of Catholic “supernaturalism” is not entirely consistent, for Bavinck’s understanding of the eschatological nature of the human person (particularly when considering his affirmation of the covenant of works) results in some surprising similarities with the Catholic view. There are differences, but the differences may not be as great as Bavinck understood them to be. Mattson does clarify that, “he [Bavinck] wishes, in effect, to affirm the *donum* but not the *superadditum*; that is, he acknowledges the gracious “gift” nature of both the image of God and eschatological life, but nevertheless insists that the image is natural and “given” with human existence as such.” See Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 82-90.

the image of God restored in them to its fullness. Human persons are returned to and perfected into what they were created to be. With God and each other, they will enjoy blessedness forever.

In conclusion, the Reformed tradition, with its insistence on justification as the forensic declaration of Christ's imputed righteousness, relays a certain vision of eternity. Believers are taught to rest in the comfort of knowing that they belong to God, now and forever, because they have been counted righteous in Christ's merit. Their justification requires no assent or action on their part. They can have eternal certitude that their salvation has been earned for them, because it is about a decision of God and not a gift of grace that creates an increase of inhering righteousness in the believer. Because process and increase are not a part of Reformed soteriology, the tradition does not accept the teaching of purgatory after death as does the Catholic tradition. It also has led to a much more limited sense of the vision of God, at least from the human standpoint. Believers will enjoy eternal blessedness and communion with God and each other, but they do not need grace infused and increased in them in order to achieve this. In fact, they can never achieve it except that God himself condescends to the human person and makes himself to be seen by them. The chief example, then, of the *visio Dei* is the incarnate Christ.

3.5 Ecclesiology, the Sacraments, and Justification

A final point to examine in light of the Reformed understanding of justification is the relationship between justification and ecclesiology, and between justification and the sacraments. A previous chapter explored these relationships in the Roman Catholic tradition where they are constantly conjoined. Specifically, justification is begun with the

sacrament of baptism, and is increased through the proper use of the other sacraments. It is the church who has the God-given authority to apply the merits of Christ in the believer's justification. Thus, in the Catholic Church, justification occurs by God through the church and the sacraments.

In contrast, the Reformed tradition does not understand such a formal relationship between the sacraments and justification, and neither is the church seen to have the authority to apply the merits of Christ in the believer's justification. Reformed theology defines justification as a declaration of God made to a believer, and therefore, there is no need for ecclesial mediation or sacramental application. Stated earlier was McCormack's comment that the idea of an immediate divine imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers "renders superfluous the entire Catholic system of the priestly mediation of grace by the church."⁸⁰¹ From the Reformed perspective, justification is God's decision to grant Christ's righteousness directly to the believer, and it requires no consent, effort, or cooperation from the believer or from the church.

This is not to say that ecclesiology and the sacraments are unimportant for Reformed believers, but only that there is no formal connection to justification. Generally, the Reformed confessions emphasize that the church's chief role is to preach the gospel, as governed by the word of God.⁸⁰² The Bohemian Confession spends much time defending its understanding of the true church, and it agrees that the preaching of the gospel is the primary role of the Christian Church: "And this administration of the word is held to be most important of all among us."⁸⁰³ The church then, does not have the

⁸⁰¹ McCormack, "What's at Stake," 82.

⁸⁰² Belgic Confession, Article 29; First Helvetic Confession, 347-348

⁸⁰³ Bohemian Confession (1535), 318.

authority to mediate justification to its members, but rather it is under the authority of the Bible and must preach biblical truths about justification--the gospel--to its members.

In a similar way, the sacraments are seen as under the word of God, more specifically as instituted by Christ's direct command in Scripture,⁸⁰⁴ and they are not formally related to justification. The First Helvetic Confession calls the sacraments "symbols of the divine grace of God."⁸⁰⁵ The Belgic Confession says that they are "signs and seals" that "pledge his good will and grace toward us."⁸⁰⁶ They are effectual, they "nourish and sustain our faith,"⁸⁰⁷ but never is justification attributed to them. The Heidelberg Catechism states in more detail that the sacraments "were instituted by God so that by our use of them he might make us understand more clearly the promise of the gospel, and might put his seal on that promise."⁸⁰⁸ This efficacy is something Calvin insisted on, stating, "the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace."⁸⁰⁹ In all of this teaching on the sacraments, justification is never mentioned. The connection between justification and the sacraments is simply not the same in Reformed theology as it is in Catholic theology.

In conclusion, these understandings about ecclesiology and the sacraments are remaining differences between Catholic and Reformed theology. They are differences, too, that reflect each traditions' understanding of justification. Furthermore, they speak

⁸⁰⁴ This is also why the Reformed tradition holds to only two sacraments, that of baptism and the Lord's Supper, both which the Reformers believed came with direct biblical instruction. See Belgic Confession, Article 33.

⁸⁰⁵ First Helvetic Confession, 349.

⁸⁰⁶ Belgic Confession, Article 33.

⁸⁰⁷ Belgic Confession, Article 33.

⁸⁰⁸ Heidelberg Catechism, Question 66.

⁸⁰⁹ Calvin, Institutes, IV,xiv,17.

to each traditions' understandings of itself as church, and of its role and calling to be the church. In other words, these differences about ecclesiology and the sacraments are larger issues of identity and mission that help define what it means to be Catholic or Reformed. While it is impossible here to articulate these issues more fully, it is at least important to notice how some of the remaining differences are connected to each traditions' understanding of justification.

4. Summary: The Reformed Tradition and Justification

In the Reformed tradition, justification is Christ's imputation of righteousness to the believer. It results from a totally free decision of God to grant forgiveness to the sinner. The Reformers insisted on the forensic nature of this justification, or justification as the legal transfer of unmerited grace to the undeserving sinner. By defining justification this way, the Reformed tradition strictly distinguishes between justification and sanctification, the process whereby the sinner gradually becomes increasingly righteous. Human salvation includes both justification and sanctification, but Reformed theology insists on this distinction, so that the formal cause of justification is always and only the righteousness of Christ, and not any acquired righteousness of the believer. According to Calvin, the justification-sanctification distinction ensures that God receives all credit in the work of salvation, and teaches believers that they can neither contribute to their justification nor cooperate with God to grow increasingly justified. To emphasize this teaching, the Reformers taught that justification is *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, or that justification entails God's free gift of faith to the sinner, to which nothing can be added or increased.

As shown above, this understanding of justification differs from the Catholic understanding on a few important points. These differences speak not only to differences in soteriology, but also to differences in identity. As doctrines of justification became increasingly solidified in the two traditions through the writing of confessions and catechisms, understandings of what it means to be a Catholic Christian or a Reformed Christian became increasingly clear. Each tradition has a unique perspective that the justification question helped substantiate. Theology and identity are not unrelated, and the final task of this dissertation is to suggest ways in which these differences could be presented as gifts at the ecumenical table using the insights of Receptive Ecumenism.

Chapter Five: Justification and Reformed-Catholic Receptive Ecumenism

After laying out the doctrine of justification in both the Catholic and Reformed traditions, it is time to draw some conclusions about the doctrine and its future ecumenical potential. As we have seen, there are actual differences in how the Catholic and the Reformed traditions understand soteriology, and justification in particular. These differences are historically and confessionally rooted, and they speak to the particular identity of each tradition. Each tradition has a distinctive way of parsing out the work of the believer's salvation in Christ. From the perspective of Receptive Ecumenism, it can be argued that each has some unique insights on the doctrine as well as some unique concerns about the position of the other tradition. These insights and concerns can be valuable material for ecumenical discussion done from the perspective of Receptive Ecumenism.

This chapter will first review the goals and insights of Receptive Ecumenism. Second, it will summarize the similarities between the Catholic and Reformed doctrines of justification. Some similarities may be surprising; indeed, I believe that our popular caricatures of each other's theology are often inadequate and misleading. Third, this chapter will identify the areas of remaining difference and disagreement on the doctrine of justification. These differences speak to the identity of that tradition and its particular perspective of soteriology, and they ought not be minimized or relativized in ecumenical discussion. Finally, this chapter will apply the ideas of Receptive Ecumenism to this discussion. In particular, I will suggest ways in which each tradition can be open to the other on the doctrine of justification, seeking gifts that each tradition can offer to the other.

1. Receptive Ecumenism

Receptive Ecumenism is a reassessment of the ecumenical process in light of the remaining challenges and difficulties faced by ecumenists. It also recognizes that ecumenism might need to adjust to the complex diversity of the Christian church today, especially amidst a culture that no longer sees diversity as a negative thing. The goal of traditional ecumenism—visible unity through theological and ecclesiological convergence—is put aside in favor of a methodology of mutual enrichment and receptive learning.

As shown earlier, Paul Murray is an ecumenist and a leading advocate of Receptive Ecumenism. He identifies the main question of Receptive Ecumenism as, “What can we learn, or receive, with integrity from our various others in order to facilitate our own growth together into deepened communion in Christ and the Spirit?”⁸¹⁰ Clearly, this thinking recognizes differences between us and others in the Christian community, but the working assumption is that because of these differences, everyone has something to learn from someone who has a different doctrinal viewpoint. Thus Receptive Ecumenism advocates an openness to the ideas of others, but without necessarily seeking compromise or convergence. In a similar way, Margaret O’Gara argues that ecumenism today should be seen as an exchange of Christian gifts,⁸¹¹ indicating that everyone has something to share at the ecumenical table. Receptive Ecumenism emphasizes the hospitality or receptivity that it claims is essential to the ecumenical process. Yet this receptivity includes what Murray calls a “self-critical”

⁸¹⁰ Murray, “Preface” in *Receptive Ecumenism*, ix.

⁸¹¹ O’Gara, “Receiving Gifts in Ecumenical Dialogue,” in *Receptive Ecumenism*, 27.

attitude,⁸¹² where every dialogue partner is willing to critically engage their own positions and traditions in the light of others. So while Receptive Ecumenism allows dialogue partners their individual commitments in an ecumenical environment that is open to these differences, they are still expected to critically engage with themselves in the process of truly hearing other churches express their commitments. In this way, proponents of Receptive Ecumenism insist that ecumenical learning includes some sense of personal engagement and evaluation.

We also saw how Avery Dulles, at the end of a long and committed work in ecumenism, affirmed the perspective of Receptive Ecumenism (or what he calls “an ecumenism of mutual enrichment by means of testimony”⁸¹³) in an important article entitled “Saving Ecumenism from Itself.”⁸¹⁴ In the article, Dulles admits that Receptive Ecumenism has a much more modest goal than the earlier ecumenism of theological-eclesial convergence.⁸¹⁵ And while he still recognized the value of former convergence-style ecumenical efforts, he suggested that Receptive Ecumenism offers the best potential for further ecumenical progress.⁸¹⁶ He believed that this would be particularly effective for those theological issues that ecumenism has not been able to conclusively resolve.⁸¹⁷ In the end, Dulles makes a strong argument in favor of ecumenism turning away from its assumptions about convergence and instead more realistically affirming a deeper sense of unity in diversity.

⁸¹² Paul Murray, “Faith and Order & Receptive Ecumenism,” *One in Christ* 43/2 (2009): 194.

⁸¹³ Dulles, “Saving Ecumenism from Itself,” 26.

⁸¹⁴ See Avery Dulles, “Saving Ecumenism from Itself,” *First Things* 178 (Dec. 2007).

⁸¹⁵ Dulles, “Saving Ecumenism from Itself,” 26-27.

⁸¹⁶ Dulles, “Saving Ecumenism from Itself,” 27.

⁸¹⁷ Dulles gives examples of unresolved differences that he believes need to be identified as matters of doctrine instead of “mere matters of theological speculation or linguistic formulation.” He lists some examples, including much of what this dissertation has previously discussed-- the idea of sin remaining in the justified, the possibility of human cooperation toward an increase in justification, and others. See “Saving Ecumenism from Itself,” 25-26.

Similarly, Receptive Ecumenism more candidly asserts that unity might not mean conformity on every issue. It tries to better balance the goal of Christian unity with the individuality and distinctiveness of the Christian churches. This has special meaning for each church or tradition, as they are encouraged to draw from their own history, sources of authority, distinctive doctrines, and unique practices to speak at the ecumenical table. For the Catholic believer, Dulles says that this means including the understandings of tradition, liturgy, sacrament, and the primacy of the bishop of Rome. For believers in churches of the Reformation, he suggests that this means including understandings of the authority of the word, the priesthood of all believers, and the particular expressions of the Reformation slogans: Scripture alone, grace alone, Christ alone, faith alone, and to God's glory alone.⁸¹⁸ These distinctive understandings are cherished in each faith community and ought to be openly said and heard at the ecumenical table. By listening and speaking, each side grows in insight and understanding, with the goal to obtain what Dulles calls, "a deeper share in the truth of Christ."⁸¹⁹ Our dialogue partners may have something true to offer to us that can strengthen our own understanding, perhaps even shore up a weakness in our own perspective.

Overall, I think that good doctrine reflects something true—true about God, true about ourselves, and true about how God reveals himself to us. Ecumenism benefits when we can begin to see these truths in the position of others, and recognize that those truths might not always threaten the truths in ours. To be clear, I am not suggesting that truth is relative, nor am I arguing for a plurality of truths. Rather, Receptive Ecumenism acknowledges that each dialogue partner has something to share at the ecumenical table,

⁸¹⁸ Dulles, "Saving Ecumenism," 26.

⁸¹⁹ Dulles, "Saving Ecumenism," 27.

and that those gifts offered need to be given a hearing beyond a quick assessment of whether their words agree, point by point, with our words. Instead, Receptive Ecumenism encourages each partner to seek out the nugget of truth in the positions of the other partners. We might still walk away believing that our own articulation of doctrine is better, perhaps even *the* right one. Yet through ecumenical dialogue, we might be surprised to see how our partner's articulation of doctrine may not be entirely wrong either.

This assumes, therefore, that we are willing to adopt a more critical assessment of ourselves. James Sweeney speaks of a "necessary self-transcendence" as an ingredient of the ecumenical openness that Receptive Ecumenism seeks.⁸²⁰ We must be able to "self-transcend" at some level, to hear the concerns of others and be open to the possibility of thinking differently. The ecumenist should be willing to admit that there may be weaknesses in his or her tradition's articulation of doctrine, or unintended consequences when that doctrine is lived out. Perhaps there are shortcomings or oversights that he or she has yet to be made aware of. The ecumenical process is one that will help uncover these deficiencies, if ecumenists are willing to listen and evaluate. So while Receptive Ecumenism says that commitments to one's traditions and sources of authority are essential in ecumenical discussion, it also says that these commitments must be held onto humbly.

⁸²⁰ James Sweeney, "Receptive Ecumenism, Ecclesial Learning, and the 'Tribe,'" 334.

2. Similarity and Difference on the Doctrine of Justification

The doctrine of justification is a good example of how the differences between the Catholic and Reformed traditions are not as straightforward as they have often been made out to be. As Anthony Lane insightfully comments, “In the popular imagination, the difference between the two sides is very simple: justification by faith versus justification by works. In reality, however, it is far more subtle, though real and significant.”⁸²¹ Those real and significant differences are about subtleties, and they are substantive but perspectival. When theology of justification is placed within the larger picture of a particular tradition’s view of soteriology, the subtleties become clearer.

The subtleties are also reflective of deeper philosophical differences that speak to the foundations of these traditions. There seems to be a greater contemporary attention to and awareness of these underlying structures in theological thought. Margaret Hampson, for example, identifies structures of thought in the Lutheran and the Catholic theologies of soteriology.⁸²² She believes that there are fundamental differences between the Catholic “structure” of a more linear grace-fueled transformation model and the Lutheran “structure” of a more dialectic sin and faith model. These abstractions are imperfect, but she thinks they show how each tradition has a unique way to “conceptualize the human relationship to God.”⁸²³ Pieter De Witte makes a similar argument when discussing the Joint Declaration. He suggests that there are underlying principles and convictions of the Catholic and Lutheran theologies of justification that are reflected in the JDDJ. He

⁸²¹ Anthony Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (New York: T & T Clark, 2002), 127.

⁸²² Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*.

⁸²³ Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 3.

identifies a “semi-historical” Catholic paradigm and a “*fiducia*” Lutheran paradigm.⁸²⁴ Without getting into his lengthy analysis, it is sufficient to say that De Wille believes that these individual underlying convictions do create what he calls a “fundamental difference” when considering the doctrine of justification and its expression in the JDDJ.⁸²⁵ However, he says that these categories are never exact, and thus there is an “appropriate blurredness” of the lines drawn between Catholic and Lutheran doctrine, as is done in the Joint Declaration.⁸²⁶ Regardless of the strength of each of these examples, I think it is genuinely helpful to try to see difficult differences in theology from the larger perspective of differing structures of thought, philosophical perspectives, or underlying principles. This is, of course, a much larger subject. But it is also one in which ecumenists need to become further invested in to more adequately deal with similarity and differences.

A more specific Catholic-Reformed example comes from Henri Blocher. He discusses some challenges to Reformed churches when considering whether or not they could sign on to the Catholic-Lutheran Joint Declaration,⁸²⁷ suggesting that coming to a Catholic-Reformed convergence on justification would be more difficult to achieve than was the Catholic-Lutheran convergence, because of greater different philosophical “ground motives” between the Catholic and Reformed traditions. Using the analysis of Herman Dooyeweerd, a Reformed philosopher, Blocher argues that the Catholic and

⁸²⁴ De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 221. This argument is weaved throughout the book, but the reference is to his conclusions in the last chapter.

⁸²⁵ De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 219. Again, this is a larger argument that is found throughout the book.

⁸²⁶ De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 221.

⁸²⁷ See Henri A. Blocher, “The Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declarations,” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce McCormack, 197-217 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

Lutheran ground motives are similar, whereas with Calvinism, they are much less similar.

Blocher writes:

The Augustinian monk Luther, who had been trained as a nominalist theologian, did not break away totally from his past. The ground-motive of his thought remained the nature-grace antinomy—the same as still governs the Catholic worldview. Luther produces a sharply *antithetic* version of nature-grace thought, whereas the wonderfully balanced *synthetic* version of Thomas Aquinas prevailed in the Roman Catholic Church. Yet the deep kinship is there, which favors some degree of understanding. Calvin, trained in Renaissance philosophical and legal studies, was the man of the creation-fall-redemption motive, the other ground motive (and the biblical one in Dooyeweerd’s estimation); hence the strange flavor of his argument for Roman Catholic readers.⁸²⁸

While Dooyeweerd does not discuss soteriology *per se*, he works to show how the concepts of nature and grace lie beneath all of Catholic thought.⁸²⁹ According to Dooyeweerd, Catholic thought cannot be understood apart from this historical and philosophical context.⁸³⁰ In contrast, he says that the Reformed tradition relies upon what he describes as a more linear “ground motive” of Creation-Fall-Redemption.⁸³¹ It should be said that while Dooyeweerd’s work is limited and may not offer an adequate historical interpretation of Catholicism (see footnotes below), the attempt is at least worth considering. At the very least, he explicates some Reformed assumptions about Catholicism, and these assumptions say something about the character and identity of the

⁸²⁸ Blocher, 216-217.

⁸²⁹ Dooyeweerd more generally addresses distinctively Catholic understandings of society, culture, and the church. Typical of Protestantism, he does assume an inadequate assessment of Aquinas when tracing Catholic thought; his material is also dated to the intellectual crisis of the post World War II European period, making it somewhat limited. However, Dooyeweerd does offer helpful analysis on the deeper reasons for differences between Catholic and Protestant thought, and his thought can be applied to the justification question, as Blocher does. See Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, trans. John Kraay (Toronto: Wedge Publishing, 1979), particularly chapters 1, 2, and 5; pages 115-121 focus more specifically on the Catholic ground motive of nature and grace.

⁸³⁰ Dooyeweerd believes that the Catholic paradigm is highly reliant on Greek philosophical thought instead of on Scripture, and as a Reformed philosopher, he finds this problematic. While I agree with him in some general sense, I also believe that Dooyeweerd does not fully substantiate this claim, nor does he adequately discuss what *is* biblical about the Catholic perspective. See Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, chapter 5.

⁸³¹ Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 28-36.

Reformed tradition. Without diving deeper into Dooyeweerd's philosophical reasoning, it is sufficient to say that Dooyeweerd's work is an example of how the Reformed tradition has wanted to define itself and its theology in distinction from the Catholic tradition.⁸³² These distinctions and differences certainly apply to the justification question. This dissertation has attempted to show that differences between Catholic and Reformed theology in the articulation of justification, reflect to some extent different perspectives on the divine-human relationship, and this, in turn, says something about the identity and self-understanding of those traditions.

Furthermore, one ought not overlook the perhaps-obvious historical fact that some of the differences in the articulation of the theology of justification were intentional. As shown earlier, the Protestant Reformers used concepts such as *simul justus et peccator* and *sola fide* to distinguish their teaching from that of Catholic teaching, and it made their theology unique and distinctively Protestant. In a similar way, the fathers at the Council of Trent defined Catholic teachings in ways that distinguished it from the teaching of the Reformers, and it makes their theology uniquely and distinctively Catholic. From a historical perspective, these differences in both traditions were consciously and intentionally created. Good ecumenism, then, must give account of intentional differences, paying careful attention to what one's theology reveals about both its historical context and its traditional identity within its larger paradigm of the divine-human relationship. It is a difficult task.

Overall, Receptive Ecumenism offers something fresh and hopeful to the ecumenical process. It better accounts for the larger, more obvious issues of ecclesial

⁸³² The question of whether the Reformed tradition has used adequate grounds to do so is another matter. See again Vos' book, *Aquinas, Calvin, & Contemporary Protestant Thought*.

identity and historical self-understanding. It can also helpfully illumine less obvious philosophical perspectives and underlying viewpoints. With these in mind, the ecumenist can make better sense of similarity and difference between the churches.

We will now more specifically compare those understandings and make some conclusions. First, we will see that there are some surprising similarities as well as some difficult differences between them on the doctrine of justification. Finally, this chapter will make some suggestions about various gifts each tradition may be able to offer to the other at the ecumenical table.

2.1 Surprising Similarities

Between the Catholic and Reformed doctrine of justification there are some important similarities, and I believe that these similarities have too often been overlooked by traditional Protestants. Perhaps eager to draw a line between themselves and Catholics, they have not adequately considered Catholic soteriology in its ontological setting that emphasizes process and increase of Christ's applied grace. Reformed soteriology, as I have argued earlier, is situated in a very different forensic setting that emphasizes the declaration of Christ's accomplished grace. When these very different philosophical perspectives are taken into account, some surprising similarities come into view. I suggest two—*solus Christus* and *sola gratia*.

First, the saving work of Christ is as essential in the Catholic tradition as it is in the Reformed tradition. Both traditions champion Christ as the only Savior of fallen humanity, and both clearly teach that justification is *solus Christus*. Trent is unmistakable when it states, “the sinner is justified by God by his grace, through the

redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”⁸³³ The Catholic Catechism is just as clear: “Justification has been merited for us by the passion of Christ who offered himself on the cross as a living victim, holy and pleasing to God, and whose blood has become the instrument of atonement for the sins of all men.”⁸³⁴ There is no other redeemer, no other savior, no other rescuer. It is Christ, and the grace of Christ’s atonement alone that justifies the sinner.

Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg pick up on this similarity in their discussion on contemporary ecumenism and the doctrine of justification. They perceptively comment that for ecumenical progress, we must remain “unswervingly on the Christological foundation.”⁸³⁵ An essential feature of the Christian religion is justification as centered on and achieved by the person and work of Jesus Christ. Lehmann and Pannenberg further add, “In faith we recognize that the nearer we draw to Jesus Christ, the closer we come to one another.”⁸³⁶ Both traditions testify that all true believers share in Christ and that in him they are one.

There are, however, obvious differences on how Christ’s work of atonement is applied to believers. The Catholic tradition insists that believers are made just “through the merit of his [Christ’s] passion,”⁸³⁷ and as they are being made just, they are “disposed” or “helped” to participate with God in that justification.⁸³⁸ Believers, having Christ’s merit applied to them by grace, can then in grace merit an increase in their

⁸³³ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Sixth Session, 13 January 1547, Chapter VI.

⁸³⁴ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1992.

⁸³⁵ Karl Lehman and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era*, 36.

⁸³⁶ Lehmann and Pannenberg, 36.

⁸³⁷ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter III.

⁸³⁸ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter V.

justification.⁸³⁹ Christ's merits become their own, and so much so that that the formal cause of one's justification is understood to be an inner adhering righteousness.⁸⁴⁰

By contrast, the Reformed tradition teaches that the only merit one ought to speak of is Christ's merit.⁸⁴¹ Believers are declared just, and there is no corresponding increase in justice that they can participate in or cooperate with. One cannot merit an increase in justification; in fact, from the Reformed perspective, it is inappropriate to take into account any human merit when considering salvation. Believers are justified by Christ's foreign righteousness that never becomes their own.⁸⁴²

Nevertheless, both traditions clearly and univocally teach that the justification of a Christian is established in Christ alone. His passion—his atoning work—is the central facet of Christian salvation as taught by both the Catholic and the Reformed traditions. The Joint Declaration states this quite well, “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.”⁸⁴³ When it comes to salvation, both the Reformed and the Catholic traditions heartily affirm *solus christus*.

This fact is sometimes disputed; Calvin himself criticizes the Catholic Church for teaching that salvation comes partly through Christ's work and partly through human work.⁸⁴⁴ I do not think this criticism is accurate, and especially not if one understands how the Catholic tradition sees the application of the atonement differently, consistent

⁸³⁹ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter V and Canon 24.

⁸⁴⁰ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter VII.

⁸⁴¹ See French Confession (1559), 147 or Calvin, “Acts of Trent,” 116.

⁸⁴² Heidelberg Catechism, Question 60.

⁸⁴³ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration,” §15.

⁸⁴⁴ See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.xi.13-16.

with its understanding of justification as incorporating sanctification. We will examine the notion of merit shortly; for now it is sufficient to say that the Catholic tradition and the Reformed tradition share a deep commitment to the idea of human salvation as being entirely Christo-centric.

A second important similarity concerns grace. Indeed, the necessity of grace in the work of justification is as essential to the Catholic understanding as it is to the Reformed. Both traditions insist that without divine grace, no one is justified. And both insist that the merits of Christ are applied to the believer wholly in grace. There are differences in how grace functions in justification. Yet these differences, too, are eased when one allows for the differences in how justification is understood.

Specifically, in the Catholic tradition, with its understanding of justification as a process, salvation is begun only by grace, something usually referred to as prevenient grace. Trent specifies that, “in adults the beginning of that justification must proceed from the predisposing grace of God through Jesus Christ...[and] without any merits on their part.”⁸⁴⁵ God must start with grace for anyone to be justified; no one can merit the justifying grace that initiates the believer’s salvation in Christ.⁸⁴⁶ Ultimately, then, one’s salvation is entirely dependent upon grace because no one is justified without it. The Reformed tradition, while disagreeing that justification is a process that needs to be begun, agrees that justification comes to the believer only by grace.⁸⁴⁷ Its understanding of justification as forensic declaration is also wholly dependent upon the work of Christ applied to the believer in grace.

⁸⁴⁵ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter V.

⁸⁴⁶ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §2001.

⁸⁴⁷ Westminster Catechism, Question 70.

There are also differences in the way that grace is understood to function in the two traditions. As we have seen, the Reformed tradition emphasizes grace as that which forgives a person's guilt and restores him or her into a right relationship with God. Although it can have other roles, in this model grace is primarily medicinal. This concept of grace functions well with the Reformed understanding of justification. It is by grace that the believer is declared righteous in the act of justification.

By contrast, in the Catholic tradition, grace is understood more as an agent of transformation and even elevation. Certainly grace does forgive and heal in Catholic thought as it does in Reformed thought. However, the emphasis in the Catholic tradition is different. The idea more common in Catholic thought is that grace conforms believers into the likeness of Christ and increasingly enables them to obtain the beatific vision.⁸⁴⁸ This concept of grace functions well within the Catholic understanding of justification. It is by grace that the believer is made righteous in the process of justification.

Furthermore, it ought to be noted that the *sola gratia* of the Reformation has been embraced by some Catholic theologians. Dulles examines this idea in contemporary Catholic theology, concluding, "Catholics can accept the Reformation principle of *sola gratia*."⁸⁴⁹ The Joint Declaration, too, uses this terminology in that key paragraph fifteen, saying: "By grace alone...we are accepted by God..."⁸⁵⁰ It states in a later paragraph that, "Justification takes place solely by God's grace."⁸⁵¹ I believe that the willingness of the Catholic Church to use the *sola gratia* terminology ought to be more

⁸⁴⁸ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §1997.

⁸⁴⁹ See Avery Dulles, "Justification in Contemporary Catholic Theology," in *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, ed. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, 256-277 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 264-265.

⁸⁵⁰ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration*, §15.

⁸⁵¹ Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration*, §19.

recognized or affirmed by Protestants. For even while differences remain as to the function of grace and the nature of justification, it is not true that justification is less an act of grace in the Catholic tradition than it is in the Reformed tradition.

Overall, the ideas of salvation being *solus Christus* and *sola gratia* are important areas of similarity between the Catholic and Reformed theology of justification. Certainly these concepts must be interpreted within their respective theological-philosophical milieu, and therefore they do not consist of a one-for-one correspondence. However, it is important to see that these concepts are fundamental to the theology of justification in both traditions. Perhaps especially for traditional Protestant Christians, seeing the centrality of Christology and grace in Catholic soteriology would be a significant way to redress some long-held misunderstandings and unnecessary divisiveness.

2.2 Difficult Differences

When considering those similarities above, we looked at differences in the way those similarities were expressed, considering their respective underlying philosophical differences. There are differences, even some significant ones. When speaking of justification, the Catholic tradition and the Reformed tradition define its very nature differently. They see grace functioning differently in justification. They also understand the human person differently, and they speak differently about his or her eternal destiny differently too. By now, I hope that all of those differences have been sufficiently articulated. However, there are two other differences that deserve some additional explication.

First, and from the Reformed viewpoint, the notion of merit in the Catholic tradition remains an area of both considerable difference and concern. As stated above, the impact of the idea of merit is lessened when one takes into account that in Catholic teaching, justification includes sanctification. Thus, justification incorporates the work of holiness that believers must apply themselves to with the help of grace. *Human merit functions only within that context.* Nonetheless, for the Reformed Christian, the idea of merit remains troublesome and perhaps even entirely objectionable. While Catholic theology does not teach that human salvation is earned partly by Christ's work and partly by human work, the idea of merit might be misunderstood to lead to this way of thinking. Thus, I think Calvin is correct in suggesting that the terminology of human merit is misleading, and potentially dangerous.⁸⁵² The concept of merit has also led to other divisive areas between Catholics and Protestants, including purgatory and indulgences. The ideas of merit, purgatory, and indulgences were categorically rejected by the Protestant Reformers, condemned by the Reformed confessions, and are still denied by Reformed Christians today.⁸⁵³

In the end, I do not think that there is a way to positively navigate the chasm of difference on the idea of merit. Either human merit toward salvation is possible or it is not, and the Reformed and Catholic traditions give different and incompatible answers to this question. Perhaps this is why ecumenical discussion has tended to avoid the idea of merit. Michael Root agrees, saying that merit is a significant issue that has not been adequately addressed in ecumenism. He writes:

⁸⁵² See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.xv.2. De Witte makes a similar argument in *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 214-216.

⁸⁵³ See again Bohemian Confession (1535), 308, "The Belgic Confession (1561)," Art. 23, Waldensian Confession, 174-5, Articles of the Church of England 7-8, and Calvin, *Institutes*, III, v, 6.

One might suspect that merit would have been discussed in great detail in ecumenical dialogues. After all, the Reformation accusation is often that Catholic theology teaches some form of salvation by one's own works, and the teaching that our works can be meritorious would seem central to that suspicion. In fact, the topic of merit has received very little explicit ecumenical attention.⁸⁵⁴

Root concludes that this lack constitutes a problem in current ecumenical discussion about justification. It is important to notice that even in the Joint Declaration, little precise theological attention is paid to the notion of merit. As shown earlier, when merit is mentioned, the JDDJ repeatedly and negatively says that justification cannot be merited, yet the JDDJ never positively sets forth the Catholic understanding of human contribution toward justification through grace—that is, merit.⁸⁵⁵ This lack of attention is disconcerting. Instead, Root suggests that, "Even on a topic as controverted as merit, Lutherans (and other Protestants) and Catholics need to hear the questions posed by the other."⁸⁵⁶ Receptive Ecumenism can do this. Instead of minimizing or avoiding this difficult issue, ecumenical discussion may be able to foster some deeper understanding between Catholics and Protestants..

A second significant difference, and one from the Catholic viewpoint, is the idea of the sacraments and their role in justification. We have seen how in the Catholic tradition, the sacraments are very much a part of the process of justification. Baptism, in particular, is understood to justify. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that one's justification is conferred in the sacrament of baptism.⁸⁵⁷ Once a person is baptized, his or

⁸⁵⁴ Michael Root, "Aquinas, Merit, and Reformation Theology after the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," *Modern Theology* 20:1 (Jan 2004) 5-21, 10.

⁸⁵⁵ See Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration*, §15, 17, 38, and 39 for examples. It should be said again that in Catholic teaching, the first grace of justification results from prevenient grace and can never be merited. After that initial unmerited gift of grace, believers can merit an increase in their justification. We have seen that this discussion--and these important distinctions--are missing in the JDDJ.

⁸⁵⁶ Root, 18.

⁸⁵⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1992.

her justification is sustained and increased by proper use and participation in the sacraments. Overall, there is an important, if not essential, connection between the sacraments and justification.

The Reformed tradition does not understand the sacraments, and baptism in particular, to be connected to justification in the way that the Catholic tradition does. John Calvin specifically disagreed that baptism functions as the instrumental cause of one's justification, saying, "Their salvation, therefore, has not its commencement in baptism, but being already founded on the word, is sealed by baptism."⁸⁵⁸ He does not deny an efficacy to the sacraments; indeed, he insists that the sacraments are truly signs and seals of God's grace. Likewise, the Reformed tradition believes that grace is conferred in the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, but that grace is not qualified. The Reformed Confessions can speak highly of the work of grace involved in baptism, as the Belgic Confessions does at length:

...he [Christ] signifies to us that just as the water washes away the dirt of the body when it is poured on us and also is seen on the body of the baptized when it is sprinkled on him, so too the blood of Christ does the same thing internally, in the soul, by the Holy Spirit. It washes and cleanses us from its sins and transforms us from being the children of wrath into the children of God. This does not happen by the physical water but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God...but our Lord gives what the sacrament signifies—namely the invisible gifts and graces; washing, purifying, and cleansing our souls of all filth and unrighteousness...⁸⁵⁹

However, the sacraments always remain "signs and "seals" of Christ's salvation promise."⁸⁶⁰ They confirm and strengthen the believer's faith, but they do not initiate or

⁸⁵⁸ Calvin, "Acts of Trent," 110.

⁸⁵⁹ Belgic Confession, Art. 34.

⁸⁶⁰ Heidelberg Catechism, Question 66.

begin that faith.⁸⁶¹ The sacraments are simply not understood as having a role in one's justification.

It is also important to note that the Reformed tradition has always emphasized a certain primacy of the Word—the preached gospel message—over the sacraments. The Belgic Confession teaches that the sacraments are “added to the Word of the gospel,” to help us further understand what Christ has done for us.⁸⁶² It states also that the believer's rebirth occurs through “the Word of the gospel,” and that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper “testifies” to us that gospel.⁸⁶³ The sacraments come alongside of the preached gospel message, supporting it and making it more visible to the believer. It is perhaps fair to question whether placing such a strong preference of the Word over the sacrament may hinder or discourage a fuller recognition of the grace offered in the sacraments. This may be the case in some Reformed churches that choose to celebrate the sacrament only a few times a year.⁸⁶⁴

Perhaps afraid to say too much, Reformed Christians often say too little about the efficacy of sacraments. Doubtlessly, a Catholic believer would find this inadequate and problematic. And more troubling, while Reformed theology teaches that the sacraments are efficacious means of grace, in practice this is often misunderstood. Sometimes a Zwinglian tendency appears in Reformed churches, when the sacraments are seen more as memorials or pledges of God's grace rather than an actual means of grace. Catholic theology would obviously reject this, and I think correctly so.

⁸⁶¹ Heidelberg Catechism, Question 65.

⁸⁶² Belgic Confession, Art. 33.

⁸⁶³ Belgic Confession, Art. 35.

⁸⁶⁴ Statistics on Eucharistic celebration are hard to substantiate, but I recently worshipped at a Reformed church that celebrates the Lord's Supper four times a year. In my experience, this lack of observance seems to be more common among very conservative Reformed congregations.

Regardless, differences in understanding about the sacraments remain a significant area of difference between the Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformed tradition. This is true on many levels, and it is reflected in the justification question as well. Overall, there is a sacramental dimension to the Catholic ecclesial self-understanding that the Reformed tradition simply does not share.

In conclusion, there are some significant differences in both theology and practice that the theology of justification brings to the ecumenical table. In particular, the idea of human merit contributing to one's justification is something a Reformed believer would oppose, believing that the Catholic Church says entirely too much about the value of human effort. As well, the lack of connection between the sacraments and salvation is something a Catholic believer would oppose, saying the Reformed tradition says much too little about the value of the sacraments. There may not be a way for these traditions to reach theological consensus on these issues, but again, ecumenism would benefit from straightforward discussion of them.

3. Gifts Offered in Receptive Ecumenism

Using the perspective of Receptive Ecumenism, we can now think about ways in which both the Catholic tradition and the Reformed tradition can be helpful to each other. Coming from their unique historical and philosophical perspectives, each tradition has a distinct voice and identity. Each has strengths, and perhaps also weaknesses. How can ecumenical discussion benefit the understanding and work of each tradition? I suggest two gifts from each of the Catholic and the Reformed traditions that can be offered to the other.

3.1 Gifts from the Reformed Tradition

First, the Reformed tradition offers to the ecumenical table its encompassing understanding of faith. If the Protestant Reformers were united on one thing, it would be *sola fide*, and this Reformation slogan relied upon a certain concept of faith. That idea of faith remains important in the Reformed tradition, and helps provide definition to Reformed identity. It is fair to say that there is a depth in Reformed discussion about the nature of the Christian faith, including what it contains and entails. On both counts, the notion of faith is a strength of this tradition, and one that is worthy of further exploration in wider Christian circles.

We discussed earlier how the Protestant Reformers developed their definition of faith and *sola fide* in justification, in part to distinguish it from the notion of merit in the Catholic tradition. Yet even beyond the justification debate, they gave much thought to the idea of Christian faith. Calvin, for example, devotes a lengthy chapter in his *Institutes* to explain the nature of faith,⁸⁶⁵ and much of his thought was reiterated in the Reformed confessions. Overall, in the Reformed tradition, Christian faith is about belonging to Christ, and specifically knowing and trusting that one is counted as righteous in Christ. Saving faith is a gift of God that binds the believer to Christ, according to the sovereign will of the Father, and through the Spirit's sealing of those truths onto the hearts and minds of believers. As such, there is a certain passive element to the notion of faith in the Reformed tradition because justifying faith is not so much what the believer has or

⁸⁶⁵ See Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii which is entitled, "Faith: Its Definition Set Forth, and its Properties Explained." The chapter contains forty-three subsections and is fifty pages long.

exercises, but rather what the believer has been given. For the Christian, faith includes a knowledge of God and of his salvation, and this knowledge gives that believer a deep-rooted comfort in the struggles of this life. Calvin says that true faith involves both the intellect and the heart, and for him, faith is actually more about the heart than the intellect.⁸⁶⁶ The faith of a believer is not only that they know Christ as savior, but also that Christ is their savior. Faith thus described naturally leads the believer to a personal assurance of salvation, another important idea from the Reformed perspective. In sum, saving faith is strong, trustworthy, and certain because it is secured in Christ and in his work of atonement. This is the *fide* of the Reformed tradition.

The Catholic tradition, too, has a long history of understanding faith. I pointed out earlier that traditionally in Catholic thought, faith referred to simple intellectual assent to orthodox teaching, and thus it always had to be perfected in hope and love. However, as we saw in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the notion of faith in the Catholic tradition has become more broadly interpreted. The catechism offers many beautiful descriptions of Christian faith, some similar to those of the Reformed tradition. Lehmann and Pannenberg, too, comment that the Protestant understanding of faith "is no longer a problem for contemporary Catholic theology."⁸⁶⁷ The JDDJ, for example, includes much discussion on faith.⁸⁶⁸ The Annex of the agreement goes so far as to say that "Justification takes place...by faith alone."⁸⁶⁹ This inclusion indicates at least some

⁸⁶⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 7-8.

⁸⁶⁷ Lehmann and Pannenberg, *Condemnations of Reformation Era*, 51.

⁸⁶⁸ See Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration*, §16, 17, 25, 26, 27, 37, and especially appendices 4.3 for examples.

⁸⁶⁹ Annex, §2C.

willingness on the part of the Catholic participants to reconsider this phrase and the understanding of faith that it conveys.

In the end, the Heidelberg Catechism offers a powerful and simple definition of faith from the Reformed perspective. To the question of “What is true faith?” it answers:

True faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in his Word is true; it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation.⁸⁷⁰

To what extent the Catholic tradition could consider this definition would be a good question for ecumenical discussion. Perhaps the Reformed emphasis on faith creating an assurance of salvation would remain problematic for Catholic theology, as Trent denies the possibility of such certainty about one’s salvation.⁸⁷¹ These comments, however, have to be balanced by Trent’s own admission that, “no devout human person should doubt God’s mercy, Christ’s merit, or the power and efficacy of the sacraments.”⁸⁷² So while Catholic teaching does not connect the notion of faith to a direct assurance of salvation, it still insists that believers ought to be assured of God’s mercy to them. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains in more detail:

Since it belongs to the supernatural order, grace escapes our experience and cannot be known except for faith. We cannot therefore rely on our feelings or our works to conclude that we are justified and saved. However, according to the Lord’s words—“Thus you will know them by their fruits—reflection on God’s blessings in our life and in the lives of the saints offers us a guarantee that grace is at work in us and spurs us on to an ever greater faith and an attitude of trustful poverty.”⁸⁷³

⁸⁷⁰ Heidelberg Catechism, Question 21.

⁸⁷¹ Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter IX.

⁸⁷² Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter IX.

⁸⁷³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2005.

With comments like these, it is fair to say that the idea of an assurance of salvation is not wholly foreign from a Catholic perspective. Perhaps this issue is one in which greater agreement could be found between Reformed and Catholic Christians.

In conclusion, the idea of faith in the Reformed tradition is a strength of that tradition, and one that could be offered more fully to members of other Christian traditions. Certainly deeper reflection on the nature and essence of the Christian faith is a worthy endeavor; doing so at the ecumenical table could produce a rich and fruitful discussion.

A second gift from the Reformed tradition could be a reminder of the comprehensiveness of human sinfulness. In a way distinctive to that tradition, Reformed theology candidly affirms the deep depravity of the human situation, and emphasizes the universality of human sin. I think that there is simply something beneficial about speaking so frankly and humbly about the sin that lurks in our hearts, and it's something that the idea of concupiscence does not seem to fully appreciate.

Certainly the Catholic tradition affirms the reality of sin and evil; however, the emphasis is different when compared to the Reformed tradition. The Catholic believer might, quite rightly, insist also on the new nature given to believers. We are born again in Christ, and sin can no longer rule in us as it did before. This intricate balance of sin and righteousness—the *simul iustus et peccator*—has been reexamined by contemporary Catholic theologians and in ecumenical dialogues such as the JDDJ and its Annex. As shown above, the Annex nicely upholds both perspectives and perhaps even reflects a growth in understanding on this issue.⁸⁷⁴ It states that, on the one hand, “We confess together that God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from

⁸⁷⁴ See again De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference*, 202.

sin's enslaving power," and on the other hand states that, "Yet we would be wrong to say that we are without sin."⁸⁷⁵ It concludes, "To this extent Lutherans and Catholics can together understand the Christian as *simul justus et peccator*, despite their different approaches to this subject."⁸⁷⁶

Those comments in the Annex reflect somewhat of a growing willingness in Catholic circles to speak more openly about the remaining sinfulness of the human heart. Lehmann and Pannenberg agree that the Catholic Church has deepened its thought on the issues of concupiscence and sin, and come closer to the Protestant view.⁸⁷⁷ Dulles states that with some clarifications, the *simul justus et peccator* formula could be acceptable to Catholics.⁸⁷⁸ It should also be pointed out that idea of sin remaining in the justified is not entirely foreign to even official Catholic teaching or teachers. One notable example is found in Vatican II's *Decree on Ecumenism*. The introduction states, "The Lord of the ages, nevertheless, wisely and patiently follows out the plan of his grace on our behalf, sinners that we are."⁸⁷⁹ Another, more recent example comes from Pope Francis. When asked in an interview, "Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?", he responded, "I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech."⁸⁸⁰ These examples indicate some warming to the idea of *simul justus et peccator*. This does not necessarily require a turning away from the Catholic emphasis on the holiness of those in Christ. It seems fair to say, however, that there is greater openness in Catholic circles to acknowledge the realities of both righteousness and sin in the lives of believers.

⁸⁷⁵ "Annex," §2A.

⁸⁷⁶ "Annex," §2A.

⁸⁷⁷ Lehmann and Pannenberg, *Condemnations of Reformation Era*, 42-46.

⁸⁷⁸ See Dulles, "Justification in Contemporary Catholic Theology," 269-270.

⁸⁷⁹ Vatican Council II. "Decree on Ecumenism." (21 November 1964), §1.

⁸⁸⁰ Pope Francis as reported by *Christianity Today* 57.9 (Nov 2013), 22 taken from what *Christianity Today* calls an "unprecedentedly frank" interview with Jesuit publications worldwide.

Regardless, the Reformed tradition has always insisted that Christians will continue to struggle with what is truly sin until the moment their earthly lives are complete. This somewhat negative assessment of the human condition is not without hope of improvement, but that hope will not be fully realized until the trials of this life are over. From this perspective, believers are saints and sinners. They die to their sin and rise to Christ in a life-long work of obedience to God. The Holy Spirit in them gradually puts to death their old sinful selves and brings to life their new righteous lives. God's victory in them is guaranteed, but it is not yet fully realized. I believe the *simul justus et peccator* well expresses the reality of the Christian whose work on this earth is not complete.

Such serious reflection on the fallenness of the human condition could be a gift to the greater Christian community. The church, in particular, needs to speak clearly about sin to a world that is lost without the grace of Christ. The church, too, needs to first acknowledge the depth of the problem before pointing to the fullness of the solution. This more comprehensive understanding of human sinfulness is an area in which the Catholic Church could further consider, and one that has potential for closer ecumenical agreement. I believe that deeper understanding of this issue could also lead to greater evangelical efforts together, because it speaks to the heart of the gospel message: We are sinners who need a Savior.

3.2 Gifts from the Catholic Tradition

First, the Catholic tradition offers to the ecumenical table a more encompassing understanding of grace. Catholic theology contains a rich theology of grace. In

discussing justification, Dulles explains that, “Catholic theologians have felt more at home with the theology of grace, viewed in its transformative impact on the recipient (rather than simply God’s graciousness).”⁸⁸¹ Catholic theologians do seem “at home” with their theology of grace, especially when compared to Reformed theologians. There is a certain comfort level that comes from centuries of reflection on grace, and in a tradition that has spoken thoughtfully and carefully about the relationship between nature and grace. I think it is fair to say that the Reformers, in attempting to oppose Catholic ideas about nature and grace for soteriology, also truncated their understanding of grace—and perhaps overly so.

In Catholic thought, divine grace heals, transforms, forgives, perfects, enables, empowers, justifies, and sanctifies. Grace comes from above; it is God’s free initiative with the human person. Grace is God’s forgiveness to the sinner, but it is much more. Grace is God’s power to make the sinner holy. Grace makes it possible for the believer to experience ultimate happiness in the divine vision. Grace begins, upholds, and completes God’s work of salvation in the believer.

It is fair to say that grace is a complex concept in Catholic soteriology, and some of it is unique to the Catholic perspective. In this examination of justification, we have seen how grace functions both to begin the process of justification (prevenient grace), and to enable believers to grow in their justification (habitual grace).⁸⁸² Grace begins something new in the human person—the condition of justice, and it then aids that person in the preservation and increase of that justice. This grace is infused into believers as the gifts of Christ become their own. And with the exercise of these gifts, believers are

⁸⁸¹ Dulles, “Justification in Contemporary Catholic Theology,” 256.

⁸⁸² Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Chapter V.

made increasingly able to participate in their salvation as they become worthy of the eternal reward.⁸⁸³ This is all due to the work of God's grace in them.

Reformed articulations of grace are much less robust in comparison. Even in what is called the Reformed "Doctrines of Grace," the focus is on God's action in the decision of justification to the sinner.⁸⁸⁴ Calvin and other Reformed theologians can speak of grace in ways other than its forgiving or restoring function, yet that is always the primary accent. Overall, Reformed theology could benefit from deeper reflection on grace. Certainly, Reformed thought would be cautious of the idea of grace as elevating the believer toward the goal of the beatific vision, and the idea of grace-enabled participation in one's justification would not be acceptable. However, there is yet much to be gleaned from a Catholic understanding of grace. The Catholic tradition is right to point out that the riches of God's mercy are shown to believers in many ways and throughout their lives. God's graciousness is immense, effective, and free, and the Reformed tradition has something to learn from the Catholic tradition in this area.

Specifically, Reformed thought could grow in its understanding of grace as active in the believer's sanctification. Certainly Reformed theology does not deny these things. We saw earlier how Calvin himself insists that salvation consists in the "double grace" of both justification and sanctification⁸⁸⁵, and the Westminster Catechism even speaks of

⁸⁸³ Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," Canons 26 and 32.

⁸⁸⁴ The Doctrines of Grace are summarized by the acronym TULIP, or Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the saints. They are also called the Five Points of Calvinism. See John Piper's explication of them at John Piper, "What We Believe about the Five Points of Calvinism," [desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/what-we-believe-about-the-five-points-of-calvinism), acc. February 2013, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/what-we-believe-about-the-five-points-of-calvinism>.

⁸⁸⁵ See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.xvi.1. See also Cornelius Venema's nice explication of Calvin's idea of double grace in Venema, "Calvin's Understanding of the 'Two-fold Grace of God' and Contemporary Ecumenical Discussion of the Gospel," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007), 76-84. See also Bavinck's hearty exhortation to sanctification in *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 232-237.

grace as “infused” in the believer’s sanctification.⁸⁸⁶ However, generally speaking the idea of grace as active in sanctification is a bit foreign to that tradition.

In conclusion, the theology of grace in the Catholic tradition is a strength of that tradition that could be more fully offered at the ecumenical table. I argued above that both the Catholic and the Reformed traditions share the belief in a salvation that is *sola gratia*. Yet additional reflection and discussion on God’s work in that salvation—his amazing grace—is a worthy endeavor, and one that could enrich Reformed Christians in particular.

A second gift from the Catholic tradition could be a reminder of the absolute importance of sanctification for one’s salvation. As stated above, even though the necessity of sanctification is expressed in Reformed theology, it tends to be an area of theological weakness in that tradition. Catholic theology, by pairing justification and sanctification, provides a natural and strong call to holy living. The Catholic tradition also promotes the examples of the saints and their lives of piety, self-sacrifice, and devotion. And the Catholic tradition practices much more regular celebration of the Eucharist. These beliefs and practices are missing in the Reformed tradition, and in comparison to the Catholic tradition, it often struggles to adequately communicate the idea that believers need to apply themselves to the work of their sanctification.

Reformed teaching, perhaps concerned that an emphasis on sanctification could result in believers mistakenly thinking that their salvation depended upon their good work or effort, does not emphasize sanctification to nearly the same degree as does Catholic teaching. Kevin DeYoung is a Reformed pastor who recently wrote a provocative book entitled, *The Hole in our Holiness*, in which he calls Christians to the work of

⁸⁸⁶ Westminster Catechism, Question 77.

sanctification. He speaks of this same Protestant fear of emphasizing sanctification too much:

Among conservative Christians there is sometimes the mistaken notion that if we are truly gospel-centered we won't talk about rules or imperatives or moral exertion. We are so eager not to confuse indicatives (what God has done) and imperatives (what we should do) that we get leery of letting biblical commands lead uncomfortably to conviction of sin. We're scared of words like diligence, effort, and duty... We know that legalism (salvation by law keeping) and antinomianism (salvation without the need for law keeping) are both wrong, but antinomianism feels like a safer danger.⁸⁸⁷

Reformed Christians are simply more comfortable with describing the gospel message in terms of justification, or what God has done. In fact, to describe the gospel in terms of sanctification, of what the believer must help bring about, sounds dangerous or perhaps heretical to Reformed hearers.

Not helping the situation are comments in the confessions that imply that sanctification is simply a natural result of God's grace to the believer, and not something that necessarily requires the believer's effort or participation. In the Belgic Confession's explanation of sanctification, it speaks first of God's work of regenerating the Christian by the gift of true faith, and concludes, "So then, it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in the human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls 'faith working through love,' which leads man to do by himself the works that God has commanded in his Word."⁸⁸⁸ While the Belgic Confession teaches that it is impossible for the believer not to produce good works in his or her life, it still never conveys the sense of the believer applying personal effort to do so. The Westminster Catechism implies much the same in its definition of sanctification:

⁸⁸⁷ Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in our Holiness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 19.

⁸⁸⁸ Belgic Confession, Article 24.

Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby they, whom God hath, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are, in time, through the powerful operation of his Spirit, applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise into newness of life.⁸⁸⁹

The catechism so highlights God's work of renewal in the believer, that the believer's responsibility to seek after that renewal is obscured. Certainly no one would claim that sanctification is not ultimately God's gracious work within the lives of his people. But one also ought not neglect the fact that Christians are called to a lives of holiness where they do participate in the process of their sanctification. They are to work hard to produce good fruit in keeping with their salvation.

In Reformed theology, salvation entails both justification and sanctification, but the emphasis is always on God's decision to justify the sinner by his sovereign grace. Sanctification gets overlooked, and even when it is under discussion, Reformed thought fails to properly remind believers of their responsibilities before God. Overall, I think Reformed thinking too often neglects to expresses the need for believers to produce good works and apply themselves to the work of their sanctification. This is not the case in Catholic teaching, and Reformed Christians have something to learn from Catholics in this area. Catholic theology, far more comfortable with the idea of grace as active and transforming, has much wisdom to offer at the ecumenical table on the topic of sanctification.

⁸⁸⁹ Westminster Catechism, Question 75.

4. Conclusion

Justification remains a particularly significant and controversial issue that neither modern theology nor ecumenical efforts have resolved conclusively. As we have seen, differences on the doctrine of justification reflect deeper, foundational differences that say something about the identity and perspective of both the Reformed and Catholic traditions. These differences result from different histories, philosophical commitments, Biblical interpretations, and ecclesial traditions. As such, they are deeply engrained in the makeup of each tradition.

Receptive Ecumenism takes a much more modest approach to remaining areas of theological and ecclesial difference. It is an ecumenical approach that more candidly affirms those differences, even when they may be ultimately incompatible. On the doctrine of justification, I think differences on this level would include the concept of merit and the idea of the sacraments and their role in justification. Receptive Ecumenism also recognizes that these two traditions express themselves in ways unique to themselves, emphasizing different aspects of the doctrine. There is even a certain appreciation for these differences, and a sense that each may have something to learn from the other. This mutual ecclesial learning could include incorporating fuller understandings of faith from the Reformed tradition and grace from the Catholic tradition. Furthermore, Receptive Ecumenism identifies distinct gifts that each tradition or church brings to the ecumenical table. Perhaps especially the focus on human sinfulness in the Reformed tradition and on sanctification in the Catholic tradition could be seen as particular gifts to be offered in ecumenical exchange where each has

something to offer to the other. In ecumenical discussion, these gifts can be offered and received for the mutual edification of everyone at the ecumenical table.

In conclusion, I believe a better ecumenism today is one that more fully balances the truth of the one Christian church within the reality of its diversity. In the end, genuine ecumenical reconciliation might be less about creating full visible unity of the churches, and more about enabling a deeper understanding and greater respect amongst the churches. This is a different, more limited goal from the theological and ecclesial convergence model sought in earlier ecumenism, but it need not be seen as a defeat of ecumenism. Instead, Receptive Ecumenism realistically apprehends the remaining areas of stubborn difference and disunity in the Christian church. We need to admit that there are differences between the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions, including issues of important doctrines like justification. Understanding these differences and respecting the larger framework from which they emerge is itself a victory for ecumenism. Perhaps in the process we will, as Dulles hopes, attain a fuller vision of Christian truth.

Bibliography

- Anglican Catechism (1553). In *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*. Volume 2. Translated by James T. Dennison. Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008. 14-42.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Second edition (1920). newadvent.org. Accessed February 2013. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.
- Augustine. "On the Sermon on the Mount." In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Edited by Philip Schaff. Translated by William Findley. newadvent.org. Accessed October 2013. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/16011.htm>.
- "St. Augustine to St. Sixtus, Letter 194." Translated by Wilfred Parson. romancatholicism.org. Accessed June 2013, <http://www.romancatholicism.org/jansenism/augustine-194.htm>.
- Aune, David. "Recent Readings of Paul Relating to Justification by Faith." In *Rereading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification*, edited by David Aune, 188-245. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.
- Bainton, Roland. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950.
- Barth, Karl. "A Letter to the Author." In *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*, lxvii-lxx. Louisville: John Knox Press, 2004.
- Barth, Markus. "The Challenge of the Apostle Paul." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (Win 1964): 58-81.
- Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*. Volume 1. Edited by John Bolt. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*. Volume 2. Edited by John Bolt. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*. Vol. 3. Edited by John Bolt. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*. Vol. 4. Edited by John Bolt. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Beeke, Jonathan. "Martin Luther's Two Kingdoms, Law and Gospel, and the Created

- Order: Was there a Time when the Two Kingdoms were Not?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 73 (2011): 191-214.
- Belgic Confession (1561). In *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*. Volume 2. Translated by James T. Dennison. Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008. 425-449.
- Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Benedict XVI. "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Leaders of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches." (7 Jan. 2006). vatican.va. Accessed January 1013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/january/documents.
- "The Ministerial Office and the Unity of the Church." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (Win 1964): 42-57.
- Blacketer, Raymond. "'The Three Points in most Parts Reformed.'" *Calvin Theological Journal* 31.1 (April 2000): 37-65
- Blocher, Henri A. "The Lutheran-Catholic Declaration on Justification." In *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, edited by Bruce McCormack, 197-217. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Bohemian Confession (1535). In *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*. Volume 1. Translated by James T. Dennison, Jr. Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008, 300-338.
- (1573). In *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*. Volume 3. Translated by James T. Dennison, Jr. Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008, 323-391.
- Bouwsma, William. *John Calvin: A Sixteenth –Century Portrait*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Burgess, Joseph and Jeffrey Gros. "Introduction." In *Building Unity: Ecumenical Dialogues with Roman Catholic Participation in the United States*, edited by Joseph Burgess and Jeffrey Gros, 373-374. New York: Paulist Press, 1989.
- Bush, John and Patrick Cooney. "Journey in Faith: Forty Years of Reformed-Catholic Dialogue: 1965-2005." usccb.org. Accessed April 29, 2013. <http://old.usccb.org/seia/journey.shtml>.
- Calvin, John. "Acts of the Council of Trent with Antidote." In *Selected Works of John Calvin*, Volume 3, edited and translated by Henry Beveridge, 17-188. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983.

- *2 Corinthians*. Electronic edition. Calvin's Commentaries. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998.
- "Calvin's Reply to Sadoleto." In *A Reformation Debate*, translated by Henry Beveridge and edited by John Olin, 49-94. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated F. L. Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.
- Canons of Dort (1618-1619). In *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 122-145. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 1988.
- Carey, Patrick. "American Catholic Ecumenism on the Eve of the Vatican II, 1940-1962." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 28.2 (Spring 2010): 1-17.
- *Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ: A Model Theologian, 1918-2000*. New York: Paulist Press, 2010.
- Case-Winters, Anna. "Joint Declaration on Justification: Reformed Comments." In *Concord Makes Strength: Essays in Reformed Ecumenism*, edited by John Coakley, 88-98. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Cassidy, Edward. "Forward." In *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation on Justification* by John Radano, xii-xv. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- "The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*: A Significant Ecumenical Achievement." In *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration on Doctrine of Justification*, ed. William G. Rusch, 86-98. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003.
- "Cardinal: Ecumenism Still Strong." evangelist.org. Accessed January 2013. <http://www.evangelist.org/archive/htm2/0322cass.htm>
- Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994.
- Christian Reformed Church Synod 1967. "Report of the Committee on Ecumenicity and the World Council." In *Acts of Synod 1967*, 379-485. Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1967.
- Catholic League. "History." thecatholicleague.blogspot.com. Accessed March 8, 2012. <http://thecatholicleague.blogspot.com/p/our-history.html>.

“Church and Justification: Understanding the Church in Light of the Doctrine of Justification.” In *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level 1982-1998*, edited by Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer, and William G. Rusch, 485-565. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

Churches Uniting in Christ. “Churches Uniting in Christ” (home page). [churchesunitinginchrist.org](http://www.churchesunitinginchrist.org). Accessed January 2013.
<http://www.churchesunitinginchrist.org/>.

The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide? Edited by Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Dominus Iesus* (6 Aug. 2000). vatican.va. Accessed January 2013.
http://vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

---- “Response to some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church.” vatican.va. Accessed January 2013.
http://vatican.va/roman_curia/congregation/cfaith/documents/rc_com_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsa-quaestiones_en.html.

---- “Response of the Catholic Church to the Joint Declaration of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation.” vatican.va. Accessed January 2013.
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents.

Cullmann, Oscar. “All who call on the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (Win 1964): 1-21.

---- *Unity Through Diversity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.

Del Colle, Ralph. “Ecumenical Dialogues: State of the Question.” *Liturgical Ministry* 19 (Summer 2010): 105-114.

De Witte, Pieter. *Doctrine, Dynamic, and Difference: To the Heart of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Differentiated Consensus on Justification*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2012.

---- Review of *Engrafted into Christ: A Critique of the Joint Declaration* by Christopher Malloy. *Louvain Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (2010): 414-416.

DeYoung, Kevin. *The Hole in our Holiness*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2012.

Dorman, Ted. “Forgiveness of Past Sins: John Wesley on Justification.” *Pro Ecclesia*

10.3 (2001): 275-294.

Dooyeweerd, Herman. *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*. Translated by John Kraay. Toronto: Wedge Publishing, 1979.

Douglas, Richard M. *Jacopo Sadoletto 1477-1547: Humanist and Reformer*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.

Duffy, Stephen. *The Dynamics of Grace*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993.

---- *The Graced Horizon*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992.

Dulles, Avery. "Ecumenism and Theological Method." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Win 1980): 40-48.

---- "Justification in Contemporary Catholic Theology." In *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, edited by H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, 256-277. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985.

---- "On Lifting the Condemnations." *Dialog* 35.3 (Sum 1996): 219-220.

---- "Saving Ecumenism from Itself." *First Things* 178 (Dec. 2007): 23-27.

---- "The Two Languages of Salvation: The Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration." *First Things* # (Dec 1999): 25-30.

Edwards, Denis. "Receptive Ecumenism and the Charism of a Partner Church: The Example of Justification." *Lutheran Theological Journal* 43.3 (Dec. 2009): 167-177.

Ehrenström, Nils. "Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work 1925-1948." In *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 543-596. London: S. P. C. K., 1967.

Fahey, Michael A. Review of *Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning* ed. by Paul Murray. *Theological Studies* 71.1 (Mr 2010): 238-240.

Fesco, J. V. *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine*. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008.

First Helvetic Confession (1536). In *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*. Volume 1. Translated by James T. Dennison. Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008. 343-352.

Fitzgerald, Thomas. *The Ecumenical Movement*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004.

- Forde, Gerhard. "The Critical Response of German Theological Professors to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." *Dialog* 38.1 (Winter 1999): 71-71.
- Formula of Concord (1517). bookofconcord.org. Accessed February 2014.
<http://bookofconcord.org/sd-righteousness.php>.
- Galvin, John P. "The Invitation of Grace." In *A World of Grace*, edited by Leo J. O'Donovan, 64-75. New York: Crossroad, 1984.
- Geneva Confession (1536/37). In *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*. Volume 1. Translated by James T. Dennison. Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008. 395-401.
- Gibaut, John. "Faith and Order at 100." oikoumene.org. Accessed April 20, 2013.
<http://oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/faith-and-order-at-100>.
- Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute. "A Brief History." [Geii.org](http://www.geii.org). Accessed March 2012. http://www.geii.org/wpcu_brief_history.htm.
- Gros, Jeffrey, Eamon McManus, and Ann Riggs. *Introduction to Ecumenism*. New York: Paulist Press, 1998.
- Hampson, Margaret. *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought*. New York: Cambridge, 2001.
- Hart, D. G. "The Reformer of Faith and Life." In *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, & Doxology*, ed. Burk Parsons, 43-53. Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008.
- Healey, Nicholas M. Review of *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, edited by Paul Murray. *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13.4 (2001): 480-482.
- "The Heidelberg Catechism." In *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 12-77. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 1988.
- Hietamäki, Minna. *Agreeable Agreement: An Examination of the Quest for Consensus in Ecumenical Dialogue*. London: T & T Clark, 2010.
- Horton, Michael. *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- "The Crisis of Evangelical Christianity: Reformation Essentials." *Modern Reformation*. Vol. 3.4 (July/August 1994): 12-19.

- “The Principle Article of Salvation.” In *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, & Doxology*, edited by Burk Parsons, 201-220. Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008.
- Jensen, Robert. “On the Vatican’s ‘Official Response’ to the Joint Declaration on Justification.” *Pro Ecclesia* 7.4 (Fall 1998): 401-404.
- John Paul II. “Address of John Paul II to the Representatives of the Dutch Reformed Church.” (21 March 1986). vatican.va. Accessed January 2013.
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1986/march/documents.
- “Greetings of the Holy Father John Paul II to the 'World Alliance of Reformed Churches.’” (21 March 1986). vatican.va. Accessed January 2013.
http://vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2000/jul-sep/documents.
- Johnson, Robert. "What is Reformed Theology?" reformedtheology.org. Accessed April 28, 2013. <http://reformedtheology.org/SiteFiles/WhatIsRT.html>.
- Kasper, Walter. “Foreword.” In *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): vii-viii.
- “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: A Roman Catholic Perspective.” *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration*, edited by William G. Rusch, 14-22. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003.
- *That They May Be One*. New York: Burns & Oates, 2004.
- Klug, Eugene. “Luther on Law, Gospel, and the Third Use of the Law.” *Springfielder* 38.2 (Spring 1974): 155-169.
- Küng, Hans. *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*. Translated by Thomas Collins, Edmund Tolk, and David Granskou. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
- “The Historic Contingency of Conciliar Decrees.” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (Win 1964): 109-111.
- “Preface.” In *The Future of Ecumenism*. New York: Paulist Press, 1969.
- “Toward a New Consensus in Catholic (and Ecumenical) Theology.” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Win 1980): 1-17.
- “Why I Remain a Catholic.” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Win 1980): 141-147.

Lane, Anthony. *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment*. New York: T&T Clark, 2002.

---- “A Tale of Two Imperial Cities: Justification at Regensburg (1541). In *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, edited by Bruce McCormack, 119-145. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.

Latourette, Kenneth Scott. “Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council.” In *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-194*, edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 351-402. London: S. P. C. K., 1967.

The Lausanne Articles (1536). In *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*. Volume 1. Translated by James T. Dennison, Jr. Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008. 340-341.

Leuenberg Church Fellowship. “Who Are We?” leuenberg.net. Accessed March 2012. <http://www.leuenberg.net/node>.

Long, D. Stephen. “The Way of Aquinas: Its Importance for Moral Theology.” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 19.3 (2006): 339-356.

Lose, David. “Luther & Calvin on Preaching to the Human Condition.” *Lutheran Quarterly* (Sept 1, 1996): 281-318.

Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. “The Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective.” lms.org. Accessed November 2013. <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=339>.

Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. vatican.va. Accessed January 2013. http://vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html.

Lutheran World Federation. “Ecumenical Relations.” lutheranworldfederation.org, Accessed December 2013. <http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/ecumenical-relations>.

Lutheran World Ministries and Bishops’ Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*. Edited by H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph Burgess. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985.

MacArthur, John. “Man’s Radical Corruption,” In *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, & Doxology*, edited by Burk Parsons, 129-140. Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008.

- Malloy, Christopher. *Engrafted into Christ: A Critique of the Joint Declaration*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
- “Malta Report.” In *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, edited by Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer, 168-189. New York: Paulist Press, 1982.
- Mattson, Brian. *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology & the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.
- McBrien, Richard. "Dominus Iesus: An Ecclesiological Critique." Lecture given at the Centro Pro Unione, Thursday, 11 January 2001. sedos.org. Accessed February 2013. <http://sedosmission.org/old/eng/McBrien.htm>
- McCormack, Bruce. “*Justitia aliena: Karl Barth in Conversation with the Evangelical Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness.*” In *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, edited by Bruce McCormack, 167-196. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.
- "What's at Stake in the Current Debate over Justification? The Crisis of Protestantism in the West." In *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debate*, edited by M. Husbands and D. Treier, 81-117. Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004.
- McFarland, Charles. *Steps Toward the World Council: Origins of the Ecumenical Movement as Expressed in the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work*. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1938.
- McGrath, Alister. *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- McNeil, John. *Introduction to Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.
- Meehan, Christopher. *Pursued by God: The Amazing Life and Lasting Influence of John Calvin*. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2009.
- Meeter, Henry. *The Life of John Calvin*. Grand Rapids: Calvin College, 1957.
- Morerod, Charles. Review of *Engrafted into Christ: A Critique of the Joint Declaration* by Christopher Malloy. *Thomist*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (July 2007): 500-503.
- Murray, Paul. “ARCIC III: Recognizing the Need for Ecumenical Gear-change.” *One in Christ* 45 (2011): 200-211.

- "Faith and Order & Receptive Ecumenism." *One in Christ* 43/2 (2009): 184-194.
- "Preface." *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, edited by Paul Murray. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- "Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning—Establishing the Agenda." In *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, edited by Paul Murray, 5-25. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- "St. Paul and Ecumenism: Justification and All That." *New Blackfriars* 91 (2010): 142-170.
- Needham, Nick. "Justification in the Early Church Fathers." In *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, edited by Bruce McCormack, 25-54. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Noko, Ishmael. "Forward." In *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation on Justification* by John Radano, xvi-xviii. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- O’Gara, Margaret. "Receiving Gifts in Ecumenical Dialogue." In *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, edited by Paul Murray, 26-38. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Oberman, Heiko. "Luther and the Via Moderna: The Philosophical Backdrop to the Reformation Backdrop." *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* Vol. 54, No. 4 (Oct 2003): 641-670.
- Olin, John C. "Introduction." In *A Reformation Debate*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966. 7-26.
- Örsy, Landislas. "Authentic Learning and Receiving—A Search for Criteria." In *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 39-51.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. "Theses to the ‘Joint Declaration’ About Justification." *Pro Ecclesia* 7.2 (Spring 1998): 135-137.
- Parker, T. H. L. *John Calvin: A Biography*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975.
- Paul IV. "Ecclesiam Suam." (6 Aug. 1964). In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.
- "Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*" (1 Jan 1967). vatican.va, Accessed May 2013, [ttp://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_)

constitutions/documents/hf_p-vi_apc_19670101_indulgentiarum-doctrina_en.html.

Peterson, William. "The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: Soteriological and Ecclesiological Implications from an Anglican Perspective." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38.1 (Winter 2001): 50-63.

Piper, John. "What We Believe about the Five Points of Calvinism." [desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). Accessed February 2013. <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/what-we-believe-about-the-five-points-of-calvinism>.

Pius XII. *Humani Generis* (12 Aug 1950). In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.

Radano, John A. *Lutheran and Catholic Reconciliation on Justification*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

---- "Report on World Alliance of Reformed Churches-Catholic Church Relations." *L'Osservatore Romano* (Rome, Italy). 31 March 2004.

Renick, Timothy. "Second Chance for Thomas." *The Christian Century* (Aug. 23, 2005): 22-26.

Rede, M. J. "Beatific Vision." In *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (2nd edition), edited by Berard Marthaer, 168-177. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2003.

Reeder, Harry. "The Churchman of the Reformation." In *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, & Doxology*, edited by Burke Parsons, 55-70. Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008.

Reformed-Roman Catholic International Dialogue, first phase (1970-1975). "The Presence of Christ in Church and World." warc.jalb.de. Accessed April 29, 2013. http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file/31.pdf.

---- Second phase (1984-1990). "Towards a Common Understanding of the Church." warc.jalb.de. Accessed January 2013. http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file32.pdf.

---- (North America), "The Unity We Seek," in *Building Unity: Ecumenical Dialogues with Roman Catholic Participation in the United States*, edited by Joseph Burgess and Jeffrey Gros, 387-417. New York: Paulist Press, 1989. .

Riddlebarger, Kim. "There Have to be Differences Among Us: Why the Evangelical Notion of Unity Stifles the Christian Mind." *Modern Reformation*. Vol. 3.4 (July/August 1994): 14-17.

- Root, Michael. "Aquinas, Merit, and Reformation Theology after the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." *Modern Theology*. Vol. 20.1 (Jan 2004): 5-21.
- "The Jubilee Indulgence and the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*." *Pro Ecclesia* 9.4 (Sept 1, 2000): 460-475.
- Rouse, Ruth. "Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Movement." In *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 307-349. London: S. P. C. K., 1967.
- Runia, Klaas. "The CRC and the WCC." In *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church*, edited by John Kromminga. Grand Rapid: Baker, 1983.
- Saarinen, Risto. "Unity, Catholicity, and Identity: The Unity Statements of the World Council of Churches and their Reception in *The Nature and Mission of the Church*." In *Receiving 'The Nature and Mission of the Church': Ecclesial Reality and Ecumenical Horizons for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Michael Fahey and Paul Collins, 11-20. New York: T&T Clark, 2008.
- Sadoletto, Jacopo. "Sadoletto's Letter to the Genevans." In *A Reformation Debate*, translated by Henry Beveridge and edited by John Olin, 29-48. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- Second Helvetic Confession (1566). In *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*. Volume 2. Translated by James T. Dennison. Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2008. 810-881.
- Smith, Collin. *Calvin's Doctrine of Justification in Relation to the sense of Sin and the Dialogue with Rome*. Master's thesis, London Bible College, Sep. 1993.
- Sullivan, Francis. *Salvation Outside the Church?* New York: Paulist Press, 1992.
- Sweeny, James. "Receptive Ecumenism, Ecclesial Learning, and the 'Tribe.'" In *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, edited by Paul Murray, 333-345. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Swidler, Leonard. "Dialogue: The Way Toward Consensus." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Win 1980): iii-viii.
- "Naming' Ultimate Reality." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48.1 (Win 2013): 1-4.
- "Nobody Knows Everything about Anything!: The Cosmic Dance of Dialogue." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 45.2 (Spring 2010): 175-177.

- “Purpose of the Journal of Ecumenical Studies.” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (Win 1964): iii-v.
- Sytsma, David. “Herman Bavinck’s Thomistic Epistemology: The Argument and Sources of His *Principia* of Science.” In *Five Studies in the Thought of Herman Bavinck, A Creator of Modern Dutch Theology*, edited by John Bolt, 1-49. Lewiston: Edwin Mellon Press, 2011.
- Tatlow, Tissington. “The World Conference on Faith and Order.” In *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 403-441. London: S. P. C. K., 1967.
- TeSelle, Eugene. “Nature and Grace in the Forum of Ecumenical Discussion.” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* Vol. 8.3 (Sum 1971): 539-559.
- Thomas, Derek. “Who was John Calvin?” In *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, & Doxology*, edited by Burk Parsons, 19-30. Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008.
- Council of Trent. *Cannons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*. Translated by Rev. H. J. Schroeder. St. Louis: B. Herder, 1941.
- “Canons on the Sacrament of Baptism.” Seventh Session, 3 March 1547. In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.
- “Decree of Reception of the Sacred Books and Apostolic Tradition.” Fourth Session, 8 April 1546. In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.
- “Decree on Justification.” Sixth Session, 13 January 1547. In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.
- “Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist.” Thirteenth Session, 11 October 1551. In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.
- “Decree on Original Sin.” Fifth Session, 17 June 1546. In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.
- “Decree on the Sacraments.” Seventh Session, 3 March 1547. In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.
- “Decree on the Vulgate and on how Scripture is to be Interpreted.” Fourth Session, 8 April 1546. In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.
- “Decree Concerning Purgatory,” Twenty-Fifth Session, 3 December 1563. In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.

- "Doctrine Concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass," Twenty-Second Session, 7 September 1562. In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.
- "Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance." Fourteenth Session, Twenty-five November 1551. In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.
- Trueman, Carl. "Simul peccator et justus : Martin Luther and Justification." In *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, edited by Bruce McCormack, 73-98. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Truemper, David. "Introduction to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." In *Rereading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification*, edited by David Aune, 29-42. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Vatican Council II. "Decree on Ecumenism." (21 November 1964.) In *The Basic Sixteen Documents of the Vatican Council II*, edited by Austin Flannery, 499-523. Northport, NY: Costello, 1996.
- "Lumen Gentium" (21 Nov. 1964). In *The Christian Faith*. New York: Alba House, 2001.
- Venema, Cornelis. "Calvin's Understanding of the 'Two-fold Grace of God' and Contemporary Ecumenical Discussion of the Gospel." *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 67-105.
- Vos, Arwin, *Aquinas. Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views on the Thought of Thomas Aquinas*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- Wainright, Geoffrey. "The Lutheran-Catholic Agreement on Justification: Its Ecumenical Significance and Scope from a Methodist Point of View." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38.1 (Winter 2001): 20-42.
- Walsh, Michael. *The Cardinals: Thirteen Centuries of the Men Behind the Papal Throne*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Westminster Larger Catechism (1647). In *Book of Catechisms: Reference Edition*. 153-212. Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001.
- Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647). In *Book of Catechisms: Reference Edition*. 134-152. Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001.
- "What is the World Council of Churches?" Oikoumene.org. Last modified 2012. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/who-are-we.html>.

- White, Richard. *Justification in Ecumenical Dialogue: An Assessment of the Catholic Contribution*. Dissertation, Marquette University, 1995.
- Wicks, Jared. "Justification in a Broader Horizon." *Pro Ecclesia* XII.4 (Fall 2003): 473-491.
- Witvoet, Bert. "Synod 2006: CRC ends Condemnation of Roman Catholic Mass." thebanner.org. Accessed June 2013.
<http://www.thebanner.org/news/2011/01/synod-2006-crc-ends-condemnation-of-roman-catholic-mass>.
- Wood, Susan. "Catholic Reception of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." In *Rereading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification*, edited by David Aune, 43-59. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- "Observations on Official Catholic Response to Joint Declaration." *Pro Ecclesia* 7.4 (Fall 1998): 419-426.
- *One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009.
- World Alliance of Reformed Churches. "History." warc.ch/. Accessed March 2012.
<http://www.warc.ch/where/history.html>.
- World Methodist Council. "The World Methodist Council and the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." worldmethodistcouncil.org. Accessed May 2, 2013. http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/justificationworld_methodist_council_and_the_jddj.pdf.
- "Who We Are." worldmethodistcouncil.org. Accessed December 9, 2013.
<http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/about/>.
- Wright, David. "Justification in Augustine." In *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, edited by Bruce McCormack, 55-74. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Yeago, David. "Interpreting the Roman Response to the Joint Declaration on Justification." *Pro Ecclesia* 7.4 (Fall 1998): 404-414.
- "Lutheran-Roman Catholic Consensus on Justification: The Theological Achievement of the Joint Declaration." *Pro Ecclesia* 6.4 (Fall 1998): 449-470.

