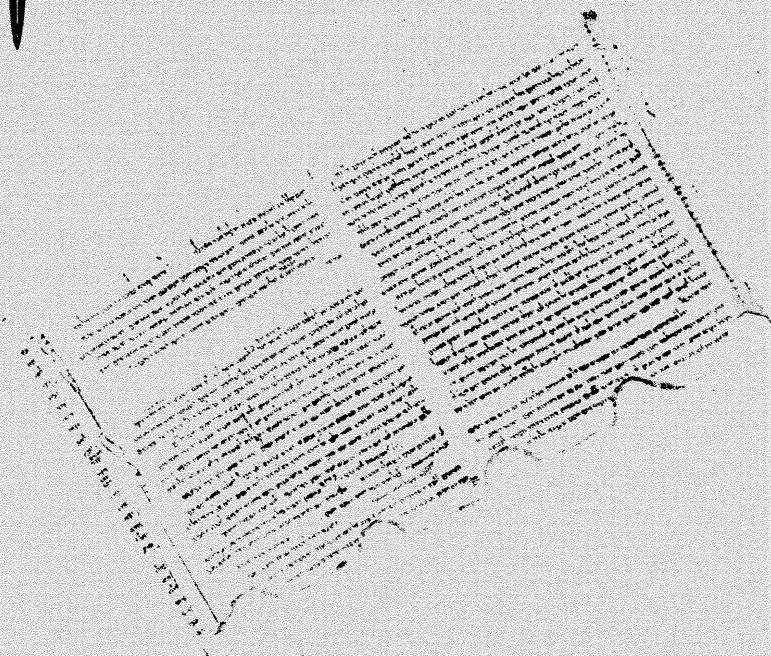


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THE LUTHERAN THEOLOGY OF CERTITUDE

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The Lutheran Study Center
The Evangelical Lutheran Church
-- Synod of France and Belgium

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1980 REFORMATION LECTURES

by The Rev. Dr. Wilbert Kreiss

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

1. Calvin and conservative Reformed theologians can also speak of the real and even the substantial presence of Christ's body and blood in the holy sacrament, so that the use of the same terminology is often misleading. But there is one shibboleth (Jud. 12:6), that is, one touchstone of the biblical doctrine of the Holy Supper, the answer to the question: "What do unbelievers receive when they come to the Lord's table?" If you get the answer: "Even unbelievers receive Christ's body and blood, but they receive them to their judgment," you may be sure that your partner is a good Lutheran. The "communio indignorum" is the shibboleth of the true doctrine of the sacrament.
2. So, in the same way, we may say that the doctrine of the certitude of salvation is the shibboleth or the touchstone of true biblical theology. It leads us directly into the heart of the gospel, into the center of Christian faith, to the point where Scripture tells us how the sinner is justified and saved. Ask a theologian to articulate his understanding of the certitude of salvation, and you will immediately know whether his soteriology, his doctrine of salvation with all that it includes (redemption, objective and subjective justification, grace, and election), is truly biblical. So the doctrine of the certitude of salvation may be called the second shibboleth of Lutheran theology.

3. This is not a purely theoretical question aimed to give theologians the possibility to speculate and exercise their personal sagacity. There is no more existential problem than this in the life of a human being. When God has, through the preaching of the Law, broken a proud heart, stricken a proud soul and destroyed the innate "opinio legis" (the will of self-justification), and when the sinner becomes conscious of his injustice and misery, when he realizes that he is absolutely unable to do anything to repair his sins and to redeem himself, he cannot but ask the question: "How may I, poor and lost sinner, stand before the holy God and find grace?" And when he is told by the Gospel that Christ was delivered because of his sins and that He rose from the dead because of his justification, that he should therefore believe in Him, he has to face another question: "Have I the right to believe the promises of the Gospel? Who testifies to me that I am personally affected by what God did in His Son, that He wishes to forgive my sins and wants my salvation?" And who will tell the Christian suffering under the feeling of his weaknesses, oppressed by his sins, his denials and his unfaithfulness, that God, instead of rejecting him, continues to love him and to work for his salvation? These are questions the unbelievers don't worry about. But a broken, repentant and believing heart cannot escape them and wishes, needs, and requires clear biblical answers.

4. That's the field of biblical truth where we as Lutheran Christians and theologians have something unique to tell and to confess in our church and in the world around us. The doctrine of the certitude of salvation is a sad chapter in the history of dogmatics. It has known the same lot as the doctrine of justification, and is directly at stake as soon as one of the two following errors is committed: the first one being any kind of

denial of the sufficiency and the perfection of Christ's redeeming work, with its logical consequence that the grace of God manifested in Jesus Christ is not the only foundation of our salvation and that the sinner is not justified by faith alone, but also by something else, whatever it may be, and the second the affirmation that Christ did not redeem the whole of mankind, that God does not want to save every man, that He offers His grace only to a few elect, with its necessary corollary that no one can a priori trust the promises of the Gospel.

5. Before we treat our subject, may we be precise about something else and state clearly that the Holy Spirit alone can help us grasp this wonderful truth. What we shall have to say will remain some kind of Chinese for everyone who has not experienced God's work in Law and Gospel, who has not learned in some way to tremble before the most holy requirements and the terrible verdict of the Law and rejoice in the love and infinite mercy that is revealed in the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen. It is in a proper distinction of Law and Gospel that the biblical doctrine of the certitude of salvation takes its place, and that Lutheran theology becomes actually a theology of certitude. But this proper distinction of Law and Gospel is an art that transcends human reason and of which natural man is totally incapable. It has to be studied in the school of the Holy Spirit, now, tomorrow, and as long as we live in the flesh.

LECTURE I

THE CERTITUDE OF REDEMPTION AND RECONCILIATION

6. The Christian religion is the religion of certitude. A brief look at a concordance shows us how often terms like "certitude," "assurance," "firm," "to know," "to believe," "to be convinced," etc., are used in the Bible. The religion of Christ crucified, which is for natural man "a stumbling block" and "foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:14), differs from all other religions in that it alone can impart to its followers the certitude of God's grace and salvation. This fact is consistent with its material principle, the Gospel of justification by grace, for Jesus' sake and through faith. There are basically two religions in the world: on the one hand all the pagan religions, which are religions of the Law, even if they happen to speak about God's mercy and love, for they all teach the "opinio legis," salvation through human works, dignity and merits, and on the other the Christian religion, which is the religion of the Gospel, as Fr. Pieper emphasized in such a wonderful way in the prologomena of his Dogmatics. And as often as a church turns its back on the pure Gospel, it invariably falls back into the "opinio legis" of the natural man, which is the common denominator of all types of paganism. This holds true, for example, with the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant Synergism of every kind. Only a correct distinction of Law and Gospel can preserve the integrity of biblical

soteriology. As soon as men are required to do something for their salvation, be it in the form of a synergistic preparation, decision or cooperation in conversion, or of good works cooperating with God's grace in the justification, they cannot but found their salvation on themselves at least partially. And that's incompatible with the scriptural doctrine of Christian certitude. In different ways Roman Catholic theology and Billy Graham's gospel deprive the repentant sinner of this wonderful biblical pearl.

7. Christian certitude is rooted in the promises of the Gospel:

The Lord, Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6.7).

As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live (Ezekial 33:11).

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

8. To say that Christian certitude is founded on the promises of the Gospel means to say that it is based on Christ's work of redemption and its fruits, as it is proclaimed, proposed and offered in the Gospel, and as it is preached or visibly

administered in the sacraments. Thanks to the Lord -- because we would be lost if it were not so -- the certitude of salvation has absolutely no basis in ourselves, in our faith, our piety or our feelings, as fervent as they may be, nor in our Christian works. It is based exclusively on what Christ Jesus has done for us sinners. Therefore Jesus is presented by the Bible as the heart and center of the Gospel, the unique foundation of salvation and of the Church. That is why we do not play with words when we state that we are saved not because we believe, but because Christ has redeemed us. Scripture says:

Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste (Isaiah 28:16).

9. This statement is a key phrase in the message of the apostles. They were evidently convinced that what Isaiah prophesied had been fulfilled seven centuries later in Christ and His redeeming work. For that reason they quote and apply it to Him in their preaching (Cf. Rom. 9:32.33; 1 Peter 2:5.6). Or, to quote another well-known text:

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11).

10. But Scripture tells us also why and how Jesus is the foundation of our salvation, and therefore of the certitude of salvation.

11. Roman Catholic theology states: "Gratia est donum supernaturale gratis a Deo per merita Christi homini lapso concessum ad redemptionem in nobis perficiendam sive ad vitam aeternam assequendam," which means: "grace is a supernatural

gift graciously and through Christ's merits bestowed by God on fallen man, in order to realize in us redemption or to obtain eternal salvation" (Bernard Bartmann, Précis de Théologie Dogmatique, 1944, II, 15). That is to say that Christ, instead of really redeeming all mankind, has through His death merited for us the gift of grace, a kind of supernatural assistance which is infused in the heart of the believers and enables them through due cooperation to realize their redemption. Redemption has still to be achieved. On the other hand, many Protestant theologians speak of the forgiveness of sins as if that is still to be realized; they place it after conversion, instead of before: Christ didn't achieve it, but only made it possible through His atoning death, and it is up to conversion to change this possibility into a fact. Doctrines like these have direct consequences on the certitude of salvation. So I think it is necessary to show clearly how Christ's work is the foundation of Christian certitude, or to articulate the certitude of redemption and reconciliation.

12. Mankind has been, through Christ's active and passive obedience, effectively and totally redeemed; that means that all sins of all men have been atoned for, that the world has been actually reconciled with God and, through non-imputation of sins or imputation of Christ's merits and justice, objectively justified by the Lord. God has passed, in favor of all men, a sentence of acquittal according to which they are all pardoned. Remission of sins is therefore objectively present and proclaimed and bestowed in the Gospel. So Christian certitude is first of all the certitude of effective redemption and reconciliation.

Christ's Active Obedience

13. Christ's vicarious satisfaction includes both His active and His passive obedience. Since Scripture insists particularly on His passive obedience, we shall not lose too much time with His active obedience. Nevertheless it must be clearly stated that the active obedience belongs to his ministry as High Priest. Every man has a twofold obligation: to accomplish God's will and observe His commandments, and to endure His wrath and malediction in case of transgression. Atoning for their sins will not be sufficient to allow sinners to live. Saint Paul states:

Therefore, as by the offence of one (δὲ ἑνὸς παραπτώματος) judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one (δὲ ἑνὸς δικαιοσύματος) the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience (διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἑνός) many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one (διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἑνός) shall many be made righteous (Romans 5:18.19).

14. The apostle opposes here offence or transgression and "act of justice" (and not "justice," so the KJV), disobedience and obedience. So Christ's act of justice is the exact opposite of Adam's transgression as it has been imputed by God to all mankind. As Adam's disobedience brought us death and condemnation through God's imputation, so Christ's obedience and perfect fulfillment brought us justification and life.

15. Or, to quote another text:

For they (the Jews), being ignorant of God's

righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth (Romans 10:3.4).

16. The Jews are said to be unable to obtain God's righteousness as it is revealed in the Gospel, because they endeavor to establish their own righteousness through their own works and merits. But what man cannot achieve by trying to keep the Law, Christ has achieved through His perfect obedience, and for this reason He is the end of the Law for the justice of all those who believe in Him and so have His righteousness imputed to them.

17. And finally, when Paul states that

When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law (γενόμενος ὑπὸ νόμου) (Gal. 4:4),

he wants to make clear that Christ has been put under the Law and all its obligations in the same way that we are: He was not only required to endure its malediction for all the sins that He bore, but also to fulfill all its demands. G. Stoeckhardt puts it this way: "The Law under which was Israel, is the total sum of all that God requires from men, especially from Israel. To this Law Christ was submitted, and He took it on Himself, fulfilling all its commandments. This very obedience served our redemption" (Lehre und Wehre, 1896, p. 137). This truth is solemnly confessed by the Lutheran Church in the Formula of Concord:

18. Since Christ is not man alone, but God and man in one undivided person, He was as

little subject to the Law, because He is the Lord of the Law, as He had to suffer and die as far as His person is concerned. For this reason, then, His obedience, not only in suffering and dying, but also in this, that He in our stead was voluntarily made under the Law, and fulfilled it by this obedience, is imputed to us for righteousness, so that, on account of His complete obedience, which He rendered His heavenly Father for us, by doing and suffering (*agendo et patiendo*), in living and dying (*in vita et morte*), God forgives our sins, regards us as godly and righteous, and eternally saves us (Trigl., S.D. III, 15.16).

19. With this statement the Lutheran Church rejects the false doctrine of Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), Georg Parsimonius (Lutheran superintendent, 1525-1576), Joh. Piscator (Reformed theologian, 1546-1625) and Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), who declared that, since Christ was true man and subjected to the Law, He was under the obligation to fulfil it, so that His keeping of the Law could not be imputed to mankind. The Law requires both, fulfilment and punishment. A thief is not innocent and just because he has been punished for his theft. Jesus could not save us through His sole active obedience. On the other hand, had His sole passive obedience, that is, His sacrifice on the cross, been imputed to us, He would have put us in the situation that took place before the fall, that is, under the obligation to achieve salvation through our obedience and active fulfilment of the Law. But Jesus has not only purchased for us forgiveness of our sins, but also delivered us from the obligation to obtain salvation through our personal obedience (Rom. 10:3.4; 8:3.4). And that is the very point I would like to make here. If Jesus had just died for our sins, we could have the comforting assurance that they are forgiven by

God. But He would not be the end of the Law for the justice of all those who believe in Him, in so far as the Law would still be the way on which we would have to achieve our salvation. Justification would remain justification by works, and this would exclude the joyful certitude of God's grace and salvation.

20. The Law would still be our παιδαγωγός, our schoolmaster (Gal. 3:24), and Jesus could not say: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Christ's Passive Abedience

21. Let us now treat the other part of Christ's priestly work, His passive obedience. It is on this part of His work that Scripture insists the most, probably because it reveals more than anything else His abundant love and mercy. We shall examine it under the threefold aspect of redemption, reconciliation and justification.

REDEMPTION:

22. Two different acts belong to Christ's passive obedience: the imputation to his person of the sins and guilt of mankind and his submission to the punishment merited by them.

23. 1) Scripture teaches that the sins and the guilt of all men have been transferred or imputed to Christ. We do not distinguish between the imputation of sins and the imputation of guilt, since guilt (reatus culpae) is nothing else than the sin as far as God imputes it to its author. Man is guilty before God when God considers him

as responsible for his sins. This was the case with Christ:

The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness (1 Peter 2:24).

Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many (Heb. 9:28).

24. This means that Christ was made personally responsible for all our sins, and went so far in His exinanition and humiliation that, when He died on the cross, He didn't even realize that the sins He bore were foreign sins; He was intimately convinced that He had Himself committed them. Therefore He complains in the messianic psalm, Ps. 40:12: "Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me."

25. 2) Scripture also teaches clearly that Christ endured God's wrath and was subjected to the punishment merited by sinful mankind, and that this punishment was executed on Him. He bore the malediction of the Law:

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, for it

is written: Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree (Gal. 3:13).

He was delivered for our offences (Rom. 4:25).

When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly... God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6.8).

He gave himself for our sins (Gal. 1:4).

Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust (1 Pet. 3:18).

Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed... The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:4-6).

The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead (2 Cor. 5:14).

He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:14).

Christ also hath loved us and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor (Eph. 5:2).

26. In most of these passages Scripture uses the Greek preposition ὑπέρ (with the genitive case) which expresses that what Christ did, He did in our stead and for our sake. In the words of institution of the Holy Supper, Jesus uses another preposition, περὶ (genitive case), in exactly the same sense:

*This is my blood of the new testament,
which is shed for many for the remission
of sins (Matt. 26:28).*

27. There is yet another preposition which states this fact in an even clearer way: ἀντί (genitive case), for it means precisely that Christ took our place, enduring what we were supposed to endure and paying the ransom for our sins:

*The Son of man came not to be ministered
unto, but to minister and to give his life
a ransom for many (λύτρον ἀντί πολλῶν)
(Matt. 20:28).*

28. The same idea is expressed by the compound noun ἀντιλύτρον:

*There is one God and one mediator between
God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave
himself a ransom for all, to be testified
in due time (1 Tim. 2:5.6).*

29. The use of the verbs δίδωμι, παραδίδωμι, τέθημι in the active form when God is said to have delivered His Son, in the passive form when Jesus is said to have been delivered, and in the middle or reflexive form, when He is said to have offered Himself on the cross, as well as the use of the prepositions ὑπέρ, περὶ, and ἀντί, characterizes Christ's sacrifice as a vicarious satisfaction for all the sins of mankind. This is confirmed by the

use of the sacrificial terminology of the Old Testament: Christ offered on behalf of men the one atoning sacrifice which was prefigured by all the sacrifices of the old covenant. Cf. especially Heb. 7 and 9. His work on the cross is defined as a propitiation for the sins of all mankind:

(Christ) Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (ἱλαστήριον) through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God (Rom. 3:25).

He is the propitiation for our sins (ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν), and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

30. Scripture has many ways to state the same truth.

Whether it teaches that through the shedding of Christ's blood we have forgiveness of our sins (Heb. 9:22; Matt. 26:28; Eph. 1:7; 7:14), or that our consciences have been purified by His blood (Heb. 9:14; 1 John 1:7), or that He purchased His church with His blood (Acts 20:28), or that we are redeemed by His blood (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18; Rev. 5:9), etc., the point that the Bible wants to make is that Jesus Christ, true God and man, has through His obedience unto the death of the cross actually and totally satisfied God's justice that required the punishment of all sinners.

31. This truth is most important for the Christian's certitude of salvation. The doctrine of salvation depends on the right understanding of the consequences of Jesus' vicarious satisfaction. Whosoever denies this central point of Christian faith or mutilates Christ's vicarious satisfaction by questioning one or the other of its

effects can by no means teach the biblical truth concerning forgiveness or justification. All errors taught or believed in the external Christianity concerning soteriology are direct consequences of a false understanding of Christ's priestly work. They all deprive men of the true knowledge of salvation and lead them on a false way, on which salvation ceases to be the exclusive work of Christ and sinners are asked to cooperate with God's grace. The result is the denial of the "sola gratia" and the "soli Deo gloria" and the assumption that certitude of salvation through faith is impossible.

RECONCILIATION

32. To state with Scripture that the sins of mankind have been effectively atoned for and expiated by Christ's death on the cross means to say that they have objectively lost the power to accuse and condemn men. The curse of the Law, the malediction and punishment required by God's holy will as it is revealed in the Law, having been endured by His Son, God renounced effectively all His just requirements, and His wrath was appeased. So, "a parte Dei" Christ's vicarious satisfaction brought forth a change in God's attitude toward the world. He has been objectively reconciled with the world through the death of His Son, whether or not men believe it. To say that God accepted what His Son did on the cross means precisely that the sins of mankind lie no more between men and God as a condemning power. They have lost the authority to require men's condemnation. In other words, God is objectively reconciled.

33. This is not a theologoumenon nor a pure logical deduction or assumption. It is the very teaching of Scripture:

God was in Christ, reconciling the world (κόσμον καταλλάσσω) unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them (μη λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν), and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19).

34. Lenski is correct when he says that "the instant Christ died the whole world of sinners was changed completely. It was now a world for whose sin atonement had been made and no longer a world with unatoned sins... His atonement and the reckoning are valid for the universe of men" (Romans, p. 353). But he misses the point when he declares that "God needed no reconciliation, nothing to change him, for God is love -- why should he change? . . . Never is it said that we or that Christ reconcile God, make him thoroughly other. He was never or needed to be made other" (op cit., p. 352). It should not be forgotten that Scripture speaks in an anthropomorphic way. Considered "per se," God is immutable; He never changes and needs no change. It is also true that He is love and has always been love. But He is also a righteous God whose justice must be satisfied. When Scripture states that God has been reconciled by Christ's death, it is not to mean that a change happened in His heart, that His justice was changed in love, but that His justice, coexisting with His love, ceased to require men's condemnation. Paul says that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. This means that since Jesus' death there is no more alienation between God and men, nothing preventing the Lord from offering them the forgiveness and salvation which He intended for them in His love. We may perhaps hesitate to say that something changed in God, fearing that this could be a denial of his immutability; then we should at least state that God's reconciliation in Christ's death means that

through this death men were put in a state in which God ceased to consider them as His enemies. To interpret 2 Cor. 5:19 in a durative way, as does Lenski, and contend that the reconciliation witnessed to by Paul is a process which goes on whenever sinners are brought to faith (Lenski, 2 Cor., p. 1046) and that the men whose trespasses are not imputed are individuals as far as they are subjectively reconciled through faith, is to miss the point and to forget that the two present participles ("reconciling the world" and "not imputing their trespasses unto them") are subordinated to the imperfect "God was in Christ." With this imperfect "God was in Christ" Paul can by no means refer to a continuous act of God in the history of mankind, otherwise we should contend with Paul that this act has now ceased, that subjective reconciliation had been definitively accomplished at the time when he wrote these words. The kosmos which has been reconciled with God is the whole world of sinners to whom the sins have ceased to be imputed at the very moment when God acted in Christ on Golgatha. And reconciliation having been objectively achieved, Paul's and all preachers' mission is to proclaim this reconciliation in the Gospel.

35. It should be noted also that Paul puts our reconciliation in direct relation to Christ's death, without mentioning our personal faith, when he states:

For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Rom. 5:10).

And when he says

We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement (δὲ οὖν νῦν καταλλαγὴν ἔλαβομεν) (Rom. 5:11),

he presents reconciliation as an objective gift which is presented to men and received by faith. He says also that

God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3),

using the historical aorist Κατέκρινεν, which refers to what God has done when Christ died on the cross.

OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION:

36. Confessing the objective reconciliation of God is nothing else than stating that in Christ's death all mankind has been objectively, whether men believe it or not, justified. If our sins have been atoned for and really expiated, if the verdict of the law which condemns sinners has been effectively abrogated, this means positively that God has passed on all mankind a sentence of grace, forgiveness and absolution. That is what Paul means when he says that the world has been reconciled in that their trespasses were not imputed to them (2 Cor. 5:19). Or to say it in a positive way: The whole mankind has been objectively justified by God. Therefore the apostle can write:

Christ was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification
(The Greek text says διὰ τα παραπτώματα ἡμῶν . . . διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν, placing our

justification before Christ's resurrection and stating that this objective justification was the very cause of His resurrection.) (Rom. 4:25).

37. In Romans 5:12 ff., Paul traces a parallel between Adam and Christ, contending that as Adam brought forth for the whole world, through one sin, death and condemnation, so Christ through His single act of justice obtained for the same world, and that means for all men, justification and life:

Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (Rom. 5:18.19).

38. If this parallel is to mean something, we have to give to Christ's vicarious satisfaction the same extent that we give to Adam's sin, and to teach universal justification through Jesus' death as we teach universal condemnation through Adam's sin.

39. The Lutheran Confessions do not articulate the doctrine of objective reconciliation and justification as did the dogmaticians of Lutheran orthodoxy. They want to show how man is subjectively reconciled and justified, developing the biblical soteriology in opposition to the Roman heresy and certain forms of error that had emerged in post-Reformation Lutheranism. And Lutheran theology could probably ignore the concept of objective reconciliation and justification, provided that it is clearly stated that forgiveness is a really existing blessing, which is objectively offered in the Gospel, that it actually precedes

faith. It should be clearly said that faith, far from realizing forgiveness of sins, accepts it. Lutheran theology teaches that forgiveness is not a fruit or consequence of faith, but an actual gift of God presented in the Gospel to be believed and received by faith. That is what the Lutheran Confessions state, when they teach, for example:

The Gospel freely offers, for Christ's sake, to us who have been vanquished by sin and death, reconciliation, which is received not by works, but by faith alone ("promissio offert nobis... gratis reconciliationem propter Christum, quae accipitur non operibus, sed sola fide") (Apology IV, 44, Triglotta p. 133).

Since however we are not justified by the Law (because no person can keep it), but receive remission of sins and reconciliation ("sed remissionem peccatorum et reconciliationem accipiamus") by faith for Christ's sake,... it follows necessarily that we are justified by faith in Christ" (Apology III, 38, p. 167).

40. The Formula of Concord speaks of faith

whereby the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, whence we receive and have forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, sonship and heirship of eternal life ("unde remissionem peccatorum, reconciliationem cum Deo, adoptionem in filios Dei et hereditatem vitae aeternae consequimur") S.D. III, 25, p. 923). Cf. also Triglotta 170, 61; 204, 176; 206, 189.

41. The Formula of Concord witnessing to Christ's obedience, states that He is our justice, a justice that is proclaimed by the Gospel to be

imputed to faith and received by it:

Since it is the obedience as above mentioned not only of one nature, but of the entire person, it is a complete satisfaction and expiation for the human race, by which the eternal, immutable righteousness of God, revealed in the Law, has been satisfied, and is thus our righteousness, which avails before God and is revealed in the Gospel, and upon which faith relies before God, which God imputes to faith ("Ea obedientia est illa nostra justitia, quae coram Deo valet et in evangelio reveleta seu monstrata nobis est") (S.D. III, 57, p. 935).

42. This cannot be rightly understood without the background of objective reconciliation and justification. So no one should say that this doctrine reflects another theology of Christ's work than that which the Lutheran Church confesses in the Book of Concord.

43. It cannot be the purpose of this paper to present the whole antithesis to the doctrine of Christ's vicarious satisfaction as it developed throughout the centuries, from false conceptions of His work to a total denial of the redemption. Some indications should be sufficient to establish that every attack on this center of the Gospel jeopardizes severely or completely the certitude of salvation.

1) The theory of the ransom paid by Christ to Satan: (Origen (185-254), Gregory of Nyssa - circa 394), and other Church Fathers of that period.

2) The theory of Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109): refutation of the aforementioned theory in

his "Cur Homo," but denial of the satisfying virtue of Christ's active obedience. He tried to establish that Christ's satisfaction was rationally necessary and explainable. He does not consider Christ's death an atonement for the sins of mankind, but a kind of price He had to pay to safeguard God's honor. He ignores such central truths as expiation. God's wrath, curse and punishment. He defended also the awkward idea that Christ had to die because a certain number of men had to take the place of the fallen angels.

3) The theory of moral influence of Peter Abelard (1079-1143). This theory which opposed Anselm's doctrine, is shared by many modern theologians. Christ's death has no atoning value. He died only to show men that nothing prevents God from forgiving sins, provided they come to Him with a repentant heart. Christ's death has a certain influence on the life of the believers and brings forth their subjective reconciliation with the Lord.

4) Whereas Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) defends a satisfying doctrine of Christ's redeeming work, Peter Lombard (100?-1160) rejected the idea that His death appeased God's wrath. Duns Scotus (1265?-1308) tried to find a middle way between the doctrine of vicarious satisfaction and its denial. He taught that Jesus' death was not necessary, but that God decided to accept it as a sufficient sacrifice for men's redemption. It is the theory of acceptation ("acceptilatio") which found its way in that part of Catholic scholasticism which is called nominalism. This idea was especially emphasized by one of the latest representatives of this school, William Ockam (1300?-1347), whose doctrine can be summarized as follows: Christ's merits are an element of His

human nature. They are for that reason as much limited as human nature can be. "Per se" His work of redemption could not redeem the world. But God accepted it as sufficient. So the value of His sacrifice rests on God's will. It is not in itself a means of salvation, but became such because it pleased God to consider it as such. Furthermore God restricted the virtue of Christ's work to those whom he decided to save. So Christ's sacrifice is subordinated to the election. It is easy to understand why Luther, considerably influenced by W. Ockam, could not overcome His doubts until he discovered the truth. Christ's work being not sufficient in itself, but only received as such by God for the sake of the elect, Luther was confronted with that other question: Am I elected to eternal life? Instead of moving from his redemption and justification to his election, he had to go the other way: to be assured of his election and then to conclude that Christ was also His Savior. Such a reasoning, of course, can only give birth to doubt and despair. His friend and confessor, John Staupitz, had, in times of great distress, to show him that if he wanted to be comforted and to overcome his doubts, he should do the contrary: go to Christ, look at Him, accept Him as his Redeemer whose blood, according to the Gospel, cleanses every believing sinner from all his sins, and then conclude that he was, as God's child, elected to eternal life and an heir of heavenly salvation. This example should be sufficient to show how a genuine biblical doctrine of redemption and reconciliation is an indispensable part of the Christian certitude of salvation.

5) On the other side we have Calvin and many orthodox Calvinists, who restrict Christ's redeeming work to the elect. According to the doctrine of the double predestination ("remina

praedestinatio"), God in His eternal and immutable council decided whom He would accept unto salvation and whom He would intend to condemnation" (Institution de la Religion Chretienna, III, 21, 7). The Lord wanted the fall of man, in order to establish and demonstrate both His justice and His love. His justice is manifested by the condemnation of those He decided before the foundation of the world to reprove, and His love by those He decided to save graciously. The American Reformed theologian, Louis Berkhof, writes: "The Reformed position is that Christ died for the purpose of actually and certainly saving the elect, and the elect only. This is equivalent to saying that He died for the purpose of saving only those to whom He actually applies the benefits of His redemptive work" (Systematic Theology, p. 395). Berkhof tries then, through a false exegesis of the biblical statements testifying to universal grace in Christ, to show that this grace is intended only for the universe of the elect, the total number of those whom God wants to save. This of course is a terrible distortion of biblical truth. Here, too, nobody can rely on the objective promises of the Gospel and build on Christ's atoning death the certitude of his salvation. Here, too, the believer has first to be convinced of his election before he can conclude that Christ is his Savior. He has no right to apply to himself what the Gospel says concerning Jesus' work, unless he is intimately convinced that God wants his salvation. If I am not elected by God unto eternal salvation, Christ is not my Savior and did nothing for me. That's the logical consequence of Calvin's doctrine. He felt himself constrained to confess: "Horribile dictu!"

6) The theory of the example: Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), and all Socinians, the fathers of modern rationalism, taught that there is nothing like a punishing justice of God requiring the penalty of

the sinner. God can forgive without expiation. Jesus saves men through His example. Redemption is self-redemption through love and sanctification. Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), all rationalists, existentialists, demythologizers, etc., take up this heresy and teach something like: Christ's life and death are intended to reveal to us God's fatherly feelings, to show us that we don't have to fear Him (denial of God's punishing justice and wrath), but that we can achieve salvation through a sincere "imitatio Christi." The doctrine of vicarious satisfaction is presented as a bloody theology, unworthy of God's love. Theodor Haring, Emil Brunner, Paul Althaus and many others teach the same with some variants. Others, like Hugo Grotius (1538-1645) and the Arminians, deny the necessity of the atonement for the opposite reason: His satisfaction was not necessary, but God decided to accept His death as such a satisfaction. He could have decided to save men without it, but He wanted to display the sacred character of His law, in order to reveal His justice as He governs the world.

44. All these doctrines, whatever their particularities may be, jeopardize the certitude of salvation, as soon as you maintain with the Holy Scripture that there is a sovereign justice of God which requires the punishment of sin. Whether you deny vicarious satisfaction, that is the reality of an atonement of sins by Christ, or limit it to a certain category of men, you cannot have the conviction and assurance that you are OK with God, that Christ has put you effectively in a state in which your sins can no more condemn you, where you need just rely on Christ through faith to have them effectively and totally forgiven. Even Rome, whose doctrine of justification, that is, of subjective reconciliation, is completely antibiblical, as we shall see in the next chapter, retains its official

doctrinal formulation of Christ's work of redemption contrary to what Scripture clearly teaches. Bernard Bartmann writes in his Dogmatics: "By Christ's redemptive act, this negative relation has been modified through a change in the redeemed, not in God. God himself is in His essence, as in His feelings, immutably inclined toward good and holiness, as He hates evil and impiety. If man leaves the sphere of impiety to enter that of holiness, God's love wraps him up, as his own injustice had wrapped him up before. Man changes his relation to God; God is always the same, as He eternally loves good and hates evil" (Précis de Théologie Dogmatique, I, 438). "We are theoretically redeemed, but not really, as long as we, as members of His mystical body, are not through faith and repentance related to the obedience and the love of our Head and do not partake His feelings" (p. 439). Then he goes on to explain that, in order to be really redeemed, the believer has to assure himself against God's punishments through satisfying works (p. 440).

45. So the Lutheran Church with its clear biblical doctrine of redemption faces the Catholic Church, Calvinism and Liberalism, and has something very specific to teach on this topic, and therefore also has something very specific to say about the certitude of redemption and reconciliation. It is our duty to appreciate this wonderful treasure to its real value, to keep it faithfully, renouncing every compromise, and to confess it with zeal and joy.

46. I think there is no theologian in the world who could as well as Luther seize the full range, display all the marvelous benefits of Christ's death and base on it with a victorious faith his certitude of salvation. To quote just one text:

Therefore, when I feel in the conscience the bite of the snake, because of the sin, I look at the brazen snake, Christ on the cross. Here I find another sin against my sin which accuses me and wants to devour me. This other sin which is in the flesh of Christ and takes away the sin of the whole world, is almighty; it condemns and devours my sin. And so is my sin, that it may no more accuse and condemn me, condemned by sin (Rom. 8:3), that's by Christ crucified "who has been made to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). I find death in my flesh, a death which strikes and kills me, but I have another death against my death, which is the death of my death, which crucifies and devours my death. All this is not done by the Law or works, but by Christ crucified, on whose shoulders is the whole evil of mankind, law, sin, death, devil, hell, who all die in him, because he kills them by his death. But we must grasp this benefit of Christ with a strong faith, because... nothing else is required from us than faith which has to grasp and to believe that my sin and my death have been condemned and destroyed in the sin and death of Christ (Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, Saint Louis IX, 216.217).

LECTURE II

THE CERTITUDE OF PRESENT GRACE AND JUSTIFICATION

47. The certitude of salvation includes the personal assurance of the repentant sinner that he has found grace before God and that all his sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ. It is the possession of the Christian who confesses, concerning the Holy Spirit: "... in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers" (Small Catechism, 3rd Art.). He knows for sure that his sins can no more condemn him, and this knowledge fills his heart with peace, joy and hope. This certitude has nothing to do with presumption, and Scripture itself describes Christians as people who are assured of grace and forgiveness:

We know that we have passed from death unto life (1 John 3:14).

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we also have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:1.2).

Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26).

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16).

48. This certitude is such that on it the apostles base their admonitions to sanctification:

Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:32). (Cf. also Col. 3:1-5; Titus 2:11-13; 1 John 3:2.3).

It is wrought by the Holy Ghost and has nothing to do with the fleshly security of him who thinks he is just before God through his works and personal merits.

49. Man has found grace before God when his sins no longer separate him from the Lord, when they no more condemn him, because they are no more imputed to him. To speak of present grace and forgiveness means therefore to speak of justification, and here, too, the Lutheran Church has something wonderful and specific to say. We define justification by faith as the gracious imputation to the believer of the justice of Christ, or, to say it in other words, of the general sentence of acquittal and justification that God has passed on the whole world, when His Son redeemed it by shedding His blood on the cross.

Justification by Grace

50. Together with the Dogmaticians of the Lutheran Orthodoxy we consider grace the "causa efficiens justificationis," that is, as that which moved God to offer us forgiveness and salvation as a free gift. By "grace" we translate the Greek concept of χάρις, which is firmly rooted in the Old Testament ^{10.} Although it may here and there mean "beauty," "loveliness," "gratitude," "offering," in the "sedes doctrinae" of justification it always denotes the unmerited grace or mercy of God, what Dogmatics

defines as the "gratuitus favor Dei propter Christum." It precisely defines the meaning of the adverb "freely" in Rom. 3:23,24: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"; it is opposed to "debt" in Rom. 4:4: "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt," and to "works" in Rom. 11:6: "And if by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work." When Scripture says that man is "justified freely by his grace" (Rom. 3:24), "for by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8,9), "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace," (Gal. 5,4), "that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7) -- when Scripture speaks this language, it wants to establish that God, in justifying sinners, is not moved by their efforts, their dignity and merits, and all that they do to achieve righteousness, but only by His loving heart and infinite mercy.

51. We reject therefore the Roman Catholic definition of justifying grace, according to which "grace is a supernatural gift which God offers us because of the merits of Christ in view of our eternal salvation" (B. Bartmann, op. cit., II, 15), or to quote Ludwig Ott: "Saving grace is something supernatural which God infuses in the soul" (Grundriss der Dogmatik, p. 294). And the Council of Trent states: "If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost,

and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God, let him be anathema" (Session VI, Canon 11). Man has to prepare himself to receive this grace: "If any one saith, that man's free will moved and excited by God, by assenting to God's exciting and calling, nowise cooperates towards disposing and preparing itself for obtaining the grace of justification..., let him be anathema" (Session VI, Canon 4). It is with the help of this grace, with this supernatural assistance, that the believer is asked to cooperate and thus to realize his justification. Such a concept of "gratia infusa" allows Rome to introduce works in the process of justification and to define it in a completely anti-scriptural way. Justifying grace or the grace of justification is never infused in the heart of men. It is an attribute of God which stays in His heart and moves Him to justify those who are totally incapable and unworthy of justification.

Justification by Christ

52. It is based on Christ's work of redemption, as we have seen in the preceding chapter. God, because of His righteousness, could not and would not save sinners, had Jesus Christ not offered a perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world. For this reason we confess that Christ's obedience is the "causa meritoria justificationis." Therefore man is said to be justified "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood" (Rom. 3:24.25), "by his blood" (Rom. 5:9), "by Christ" (Gal. 2:17).

The Essence of Justification

53. There is still a very important question that needs to be answered, if we want to speak about the certitude of justification. It is the question: What is in fact justification? What happens when God justifies a sinner? Justification is a forensic or judicial act by which God declares the unrighteous just. A philological study of the Hebrew and Greek verbs rendered in the English language by "to justify" (δικαίω, and קָדַשׁ in the Hiphil) makes this very clear. The Hiphil קָדַשׁ means literally to declare that something or someone is in agreement with the requirements of the law, be this law human or divine (Ex. 23:7; Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15; Isaiah 5:23). Most of these passages contrast "to justify" with "to condemn," a fact which proves that both words belong to the judicial terminology. The use of δικαίω in the New Testament confirms this fact (Matt. 12:37; Luke 7:29; Rom. 3:4). In theological language δικαίω asserts that the requirements of the Law as a condition of life are fulfilled concerning a specific individual:

Through this man (Jesus Christ) is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses (Acts 13:38,39).

54. Justification (δικαίωσις) is therefore the act by which God acquits a man, declares him in agreement with His Law, innocent and righteous. Such a man possesses thus the justice of God, that which allows him to stay before his Creator and Judge.

55. To justify means to forgive, which meaning also shows the forensic character of justification. In fact, to forgive sins means, "a parte Dei,"

to cover them or not to impute them:

Even as David also describes the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin (Rom. 4:6-8).

56. In this very important statement justification is identified with forgiveness of sins, and imputation of justice is equated with non-imputation of sins. This also holds true with the above-mentioned text of Acts 13:38,39, and with Rom. 5:18,19:

Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

57. Forgiveness and justification, or non-imputation of sins and imputation of Christ's justice are the two aspects (the one being negative and the other positive) of the same act of God. This makes clear that forgiveness is not, as Rome contends, the suppression and abolition of sins, but solely their covering. Sins remain in the heart and life of the justified, but are no more imputed, which means that justification is not the internal change or renewal of the believer, but the imputation to him of Christ's justice which takes place by faith, without works:

If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed

God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works (Rom. 4:2-6).

58. Luther rendered the Greek verb δικαιῶ with "gerecht machen." In Luther's language this could mean nothing else than "to justify, to declare righteous," just as "schlecht machen" means "to declare bad." Whether William Beck in his "An American Translation" meant the same when he used the verb "to make righteous," is a question I cannot answer here. I should therefore read again and carefully analyze his article on δικαιῶ which was published in Christian News some months ago. I am sure I could not without severe restrictions subscribe to all that is said there. The least I would say is that a Lutheran translation of the Bible should avoid every word that could be misinterpreted and use the clearest terminology possible. Justification by imputation alone, without and before the internal renewal of the sinner is too precious a pearl to be given up or even stated in a misleading way, and no compromise is possible on this point.

59. The Lutheran Confessions teach on the one hand that man is justified by faith without the works of the Law:

Now we will show that faith and nothing else justifies. Here, in the first place, readers must be admonished of this, that just as it is necessary to maintain this sentence: Christ is Mediator, so it is necessary to

defend that faith justifies, without works
(Apology, IV, 69, Triglotta, p. 141).

60. They reject the Roman Catholic doctrine of the "fides caritate formata," the false teaching according to which faith justifies as far as it is formed by love and receives from love its justifying power (Apology IV, p. 141), and maintain that the use of the "particulae exclusivae" is necessary (l.c.). They also identify justification and remission of sins:

To attain the remission of sins is to be justified, according to Ps. 32:1 (Apology IV, 143).

61. They are also very clear when they state that justification is the imputation of Christ's justice which alone makes us righteous before God:

Accordingly, we believe, teach and confess that our righteousness before God is this very thing, that God forgives us our sins out of pure grace, without any work, merit or worthiness of ours preceding, present or following, that He presents and imputes to us the righteousness of Christ's obedience, on account of which righteousness we are received into grace by God and regarded as righteous (Formula of Concord, Epitome III, 4, Triglotta p. 793).

We believe, teach and confess that according to the usage of Holy Scripture the word "justify" means in this article to absolve, that is, to declare free from sins (l.c.).

62. It is true that the Apology often speaks of regeneration and vivification in the article of justification. When it does so, it identifies

regeneration or vivification and justification and does not employ these words in the usual wider sense of renewal and sanctification (Triglotta, p. 792).

63. In opposition to Holy Scripture, Rome teaches that justification is the gradual result of cooperation between God and the sinner. With the help of the infused grace, man is required and able to realize it. This justification not only is forgiveness of sins or the imputation of Christ's righteousness, but also is achieved by forgiveness and sanctification. The Council of Trent declares: "If anyone saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified, in such wise as to mean that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to the obtaining the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will, let him be anathema" (Session VI, Canon 9). "If anyone saith that it is by Christ's justice itself that men are formally just, let him be anathema" (Canon 10). "If anyone saith that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them, or even that the grace whereby we are justified is only the favour of God, let him be anathema" (Canon 11). "If anyone saith that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works, but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof, let him be anathema" (Canon 24). Or, to quote B. Bartmann: "Justification consists not only in the remission of sins, but also in a true internal renewal and sanctification" (Précis de Théologie Dogmatique II, 95). This means, in other words, that man is justified by faith and works.

God's grace manifested in Jesus Christ and accepted by faith is not the only foundation of justification and salvation, but this justification rests both on what God has done and continues to do and on what man is required to do.

64. The Roman Catholic Church is therefore entirely consistent when it contends that "nobody can, without a divine revelation, be assured by faith that he is in a state of grace, and so nobody has to believe that" (B. Bartmann, II, p. 125). "If anyone saith that it is necessary for everyone, for the obtaining the remission of sins, that he believe for certain and without any wavering arising from his own infirmity and disposition, that his sins are forgiven him, let him be anathema" (Canon 13). This is a total denial of the certitude of salvation. A certitude of salvation which rests, as little as it may, on human works and merits, is an impossibility. No believer can therefore, even at the very moment when he dies, rest entirely on Jesus and His sacrifice and confess with assurance: All my sins are forgiven, I am wholly cleansed in Jesus' blood and shall therefore be saved. He knows that he will have to stay in purgatory and endure a certain amount of temporal punishments for sins for which he has not satisfied during his life. Even a contemporary Catholic catechism like Rey-Mermet's "To Believe," published in 1977, changes not a single iota in this doctrine. This is the terrible "monstrum incertitudinis" Luther had to fight against during his whole life. Just one text to illustrate this: "When we were monks, we got nothing through our mortification, because we were not ready to admit our sins and impiety; we knew nothing about original sin and didn't understand that unbelief too was a sin. More than that, we believed and taught that we had to doubt God's grace and mercy. The more we ran and wanted to find Christ, the more He turned away from us.

When I had confessed and celebrated the mass, I couldn't find peace of heart. Indeed, conscience cannot find true and sure comfort in works (W² II, 467).

Justification by Faith

65. Justification is, as we have seen, remission or non-imputation of sins, or, which is the same, the imputation of Christ's justice. The role of justifying faith still needs to be defined. We reject the Roman Catholic doctrine of the "fides caritate formata," because it maintains that faith is, as far as it brings forth good works, the foundation of justification, and we reject all false conceptions which declare that faith is in one way or the other the cause of justification. To state that faith works justification and salvation, that man is justified and saved because of his faith is a denial of Christ's work of redemption. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and not faith, is the only basis and cause of eternal life. If Christ has really atoned for the sins of mankind and reconciled the world with God, if the Lord has really, at the very moment when His Son died on the cross, declared that His justice was satisfied and objectively justified all sinners, if remission of sins and salvation are real gifts which are actually present and bestowed in the Gospel, faith can be nothing else than a means of justification, what Lutheran theology calls the *ὄργανον ληπτικόν*, the means by which the repentant sinner becomes partaker of the benefits of Christ's redemption. The Formula of Concord is very clear on this point:

Faith justifies not for this cause and reason that it is so good a work and so fair a virtue, but because it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the

holy Gospel; for this must be applied and appropriated to us by faith, if we are to be justified thereby (F.C., S.D. III, 13, Triglotta p. 919).

66. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession states in the same way:

Faith saves because it apprehends mercy or the promise of grace, even though our works are unworthy... Not that faith helps because of its worth, but because it trusts in God's promises and mercy (Apology III, Triglotta p. 215).

67. Therefore Scripture states that man is justified $\delta\iota\alpha\ \pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\epsilon\upsilon$ (because of faith, on the basis of faith). To say that man is justified by faith means to say that he is justified by Jesus Christ whose merits and justice he appropriates by faith. Faith in itself has no justifying power; it justifies only through its object, through Christ Jesus who by faith becomes my personal Redeemer.

Formula of Concord:

We believe, teach and confess that faith alone is the means and instrument whereby we lay hold of Christ, and thus in Christ of the righteousness which avails before God, for whose sake this faith is imputed to us for righteousness, Rom. 4:5 (F.C., Epitome III, 5, Triglotta p. 793).

68. Although faith is never alone, but always produces God pleasing works, it justifies alone, as the dogmaticians used to say: "Fides nunquam sola, sed justificat sola!" Although the works are always present with justifying faith, their very

presence is not required for justification. Luther went even so far to say that faith cannot justify "nisi sit sine ullis etiam minimis operibus" ("unless it is without works, even the smallest.") Faith justifies not because it brings forth love and good works, but because it apprehends Jesus Christ. The Lutheran Church had to reject in the Formula of Concord the error of Georg Major and even Philip Melancthon who stated the contrary and asserted that the presence of works was necessary for justification and salvation. In his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, the young Luther stated in 1515/1516 that the Christian is "simul justus et peccator" ("at the same time righteous and sinner"). A wonderful formulation. He is sinner "intrinsece," in himself, according to his being, and righteous "extrinsece," "per reputationem," "per imputationem," "per justitiam alienam," that is considered from outside, through a foreign justice, the justice of Christ which is imputed to him by faith.

The Assurance of Justification

69. Since Christ's justice is perfect, for the sins of all men are totally atoned for, and since faith justifies only as a means and instrument, it follows that the repentant and believing sinner can have the joyful assurance that he is entirely justified. The consequence of the "simul justus et peccator" is the "totus justus et peccator." The Lutheran doctrine safeguards the certitude of present grace and justification. Its effect is the exact contrary of what Rome teaches. Some statements of the Lutheran Confessions will illustrate this:

The imputation of the righteousness of the Gospel is from the promise; therefore it is always received by faith, and it always must

be regarded certain that by faith we are, for Christ's sake, accounted righteous. If the regenerate ought afterwards to think that they will be accepted on account of the fulfilling of the Law, when would conscience be certain that it pleased God, since we never satisfy the Law? (Apology III, 43, Triglotta p. 169).

Faith alone, which looks upon the promise and knows that for this reason it must be regarded as certain that God forgives, because Christ has not died in vain, etc., overcomes the terrors of sin and death (Apology, Triglotta, p. 163).

We believe, teach and confess also that notwithstanding the fact that many weaknesses and defects cling to the true believers and truly regenerate, even to the grace, still they must not on that account doubt either their righteousness which has been imputed to them by faith, or the salvation of their souls, but must regard it as certain that for Christ's sake, according to the promise and immovable Word of the holy Gospel, they have a gracious God (F.C., Epitome III, 6, Triglotta, p. 793 s.).

The Denial of Justification

70. The Roman Catholic Church not only makes the certitude of justification impossible, but officially rejects it and denies its legitimacy. This denial of certitude is in the logic of its system. But it is also in the logic of every theology which denies the objective reconciliation and justification. The Reformed theologian Heinrich Hepppe states on almost every page in his

chapter on Christ's work that He submitted Himself to the will of His Father for the sake of the elect, that He took on Him the guilt of the elect, that these were crucified with Him, that He atoned for them (Reformierte Dogmatik, pp. 358-360). Since Christ did not die for all men and redeem all sinners, the Christian cannot base his certitude of justification on the Son of God, His redemptive work and the universal promises of grace of the Gospel. He has no objective foundation, but has to rely on what he feels and on the experience of the grace. Therefore H. Heppe writes: "The certitude of salvation of the believers is founded on the testimony of the Holy Ghost; it is the conviction based on the experience of grace working in them" (Reformierte Dogmatik, p. 462).

71. But what happens when the believer in time of distress and despair is told to rely on what he feels and experiences? How can the experience of God's grace in his heart comfort him, when the heart itself accuses and condemns him, when he has no objective foundation, no objective and universal promise of God to rely on? The Reformed doctrine is in the final analysis a theology of subjectivism, where the voice of the regenerated conscience becomes the criterion of faith and assurance. But, as Scripture says, "he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Prov. 28:26).

72. Synergism, with its denial of the objective reconciliation and its contention that man has to cooperate in one way or the other with the Holy Spirit, that he has to decide for Jesus, to prepare and to dispose himself for regeneration, renders true certitude of justification impossible. Instead of saying that remission of sins has been objectively merited by Jesus for all men and is graciously offered in the Gospel, it presents it as the result of conversion, as that which moves

God, for the sake of Christ and on account of His death, to be gracious and to save. Faith is no more a simple means of appropriation, but a "causa movens," something which changes God's heart and determines Him to be gracious. It does not simply seize Christ's forgiveness, but makes it possible. It justifies on account of some intrinsic value. It is again a theology of subjectivism which mutilates biblical soteriology and gives the assurance of grace and justification a false basis.

73. To proclaim that Jesus Christ has really done everything that is required for the redemption, justification and salvation of lost sinners, that through His death the world has actually been reconciled with God, that forgiveness of sins is offered in the means of grace, in the Gospel and the sacraments, and presented to every man in order to be received by faith and believed, and that every sinner who repents and believes becomes by grace alone and through faith, effectively and completely, partaker of all the benefits of Christ's work and has the right to confess that he is redeemed, justified, a child of God and an heir of eternal salvation, because God declares all this in His Word -- to proclaim this wonderful message is the great privilege of the Lutheran Church. To defend it against all errors through a correct distinction of Law and Gospel and to spread it with much joy and confidence, knowing that the Holy Spirit will act through it and make out of it the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes (Rom. 1:16), is and will always be her most holy mission.

LECTURE III

THE CERTITUDE OF ELECTION AND FINAL SALVATION

74. According to Reformed theology, no Christian can be assured that Jesus Christ has redeemed him and is his Savior, as long as he has no certainty about his personal election. He finds this certainty in the testimony of the Holy Spirit and the experience of God's grace operating in him. From the certainty of his election he concludes the certainty of his redemption, justification and final salvation.
75. According to Lutheran theology, the Christian finds in the promises of the Gospel the assurance that Christ is his Savior. He finds also in these promises the certitude that, since he relies entirely on Jesus, his sins are effectively forgiven and he is a justified sinner. But what about his election? Can he be assured that God elected him unto eternal life and will bring him through perseverance to this glorious goal? That is the question we shall try to answer according to Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.
76. We may define election as the eternal decree whereby God, before the foundation of the world and prompted by His grace in Christ Jesus, decided to call, justify, sanctify, keep and preserve, by the means of grace, according to the counsel of His will, all those whom He has chosen from fallen mankind and predestinated to eternal glory.

Eternal Decree

77. That election is an eternal decree is witnessed to by Paul, when he states that God elected the believers

according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9),

according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus, our Lord (Eph. 3:11),

or that

he has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).

Election by Grace Alone

78. It is an election of grace and not of works; that means that God's grace alone has prompted Him to choose a certain number of men and to lead them through faith in Christ Jesus to eternal life:

He hath saved us. . . not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 1:9).

... that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth (Rom. 9:11).

... having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will (Eph. 1:5).

79. Election rests on God's will alone:

... in Christ also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11).

And this will is determined by His grace alone. It is the wonderful will of salvation which prompts God to pardon men who have merited nothing else than His wrath and eternal condemnation. In this way we may speak with Calvin, of God's absolute decree, which means that it is wholly independent from men's works, merits and attitude. That is the great scriptural truth on which Augustine insisted so much in his fight against Pelagius. The Formula of Concord is very clear on this point, when it rejects as a false doctrine

that not only the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ, but also in us there is a cause of God's election, on account of which God has elected us to everlasting life (Epitome XI, 20; Triglotta, p. 837).

The Denial of Sola Gratia

80. Confessional Lutheran theology rejects with the Formula of Concord the doctrine according to which election took place "intuitu fidei," or "ex praevisa fide," that is, that God decided to elect unto eternal life those of whom He knew that they would accept His Gospel, believe and persevere in their faith unto death. This was the error of the second generation of Lutheran dogmaticians (J. Gerhard, J. Quenstedt, D. Hollaz, J. W. Baier, etc.) which came up again in the controversies in which the Missouri Synod was involved during the last century. The error resulted from an attempt

to conciliate the "gratia universalis" (the fact that God, according to what He says in Scriptures, wants to save every man) and the fact that all are not elected. The answer to the question: "Why are not all elected?" is then: "Because the attitude of many toward the Gospel is of such a nature that God decided not to elect them." God knew that they would not repent or that they would fall again and not persevere. It is another way of saying that salvation is not solely in God's hands, that it depends in some way on man's attitude. If a certain man is not elected and does not therefore obtain eternal life, it is in the last analysis his own fault. But if this were true, I could on the contrary conclude that, if I am an elect and finally saved, it is due to the fact that God knew that I would have during my life a proper and adequate attitude toward Christ and His Gospel. And if election is, at least partly, in my hands, my whole salvation rests finally on myself, an idea which is totally contrary to biblical soteriology. And this would mean that I would have to find in myself, at least to a great extent, a basis for my certitude of salvation.

The Denial of the Universality of Grace

81. But when Calvin speaks of an "absolute decree" of God, not only does he want to state that election is in no way conditioned by God's foresight, by what He knew about our attitude during our life, but His concern is to make clear that there is no causal relation between election and Christ's redemptive work. Christ is the "instrumentum electionis," but not the "Causa electionis." The Formula Consensus Helvetica of 1675 (Art. 5) states: "Christ is also involved in this gracious decree of divine election, not as a meritorious cause (non ut causa meritoria), or as the foundation

that precedes election itself (vel fundamentum ipsam electionem praecedens), but as the 'eklektos,' the elect (1 Pet. 2:4.6), ... whose precious merit God decided to use to confer upon us salvation, without injuring his righteousness." According to Calvin's "supralapsarian view," God wanted and decided Adam's fall; it belongs to the predestination. By a sovereign act of His will He decided to provoke the fall. Calvin writes: "I confess that it is by God's will that all the children of Adam have fallen into the present misery in which they are now kept" (Institution de la Religion Chrétienne, III, 23, 4). This gave God the possibility both to reveal his righteousness by deciding to forsake the great majority of them in sins, death and condemnation, and to put forth His infinite mercy by saving some of them. And to this He chose Christ, His Son, whom He asked to atone for the sins of the elect. So, Christ is only the means He chose to save the elect after He had predestinated them unto eternal life.

Election Through Christ

82. According to Holy Scripture Christ's sacrifice is more than just a kind of appendix to God's predestination: it is a very part of predestination itself, and the Bible in no way restricts the benefits of His death to the elect. We are saved

according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus, our Lord (Eph. 3:11).

according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9).

He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him (Eph. 1:3.4).

It should be evident from Scripture that Christ's work concerns all men, that He atoned for the sins of all mankind.

Election Through the Work of the Holy Spirit

83. On the other hand, conversion, justification, sanctification through the Holy Spirit is not presented as a simple means to carry out election, but as an element of election itself:

He hath saved us and called us with an holy calling..., according to his own purpose and grace (2 Tim. 1:9).

We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

God is said to have

predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself (Eph. 1:5).

And when Scriptures say,

As many as were ordained to everlasting life believed (Acts 13:48),

this is to mean that conversion and faith is an integral part of election. Whoever has been elected, has been elected to accept the Gospel, to believe in Jesus Christ and thus become God's child and an heir of eternal salvation. Believers have the right to believe that they have been ordained there-to, that God has "from the beginning chosen" them "to salvation" (2 Thess. 2:13).

Election and the Means of Grace

84. Therefore God's election is intimately bound to the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments; it includes the means of grace:

God from the beginning hath chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, whereunto he called you by our Gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2: 13.14).

85. And it is "according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself" that God has "made known unto us the mystery of his will" (Eph. 1:9). Whereas Calvin taught that God does not want the salvation of all men, but decided before the foundation of the world to condemn a certain number of them, dissociating the decree of predestination from Christ's redemptive work, the Lutheran Church confesses:

Christ, as the only-begotten Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, has announced to us the will of the Father, and thus also our eternal election to eternal life, namely when He says, Mark 1:15: "Repent ye and believe the Gospel; the kingdom of God is at hand." Likewise He says, John 6:40: "This is the will of him that sent me, that everyone which seeth the Son and believeth on him may have everlasting life.: And again (John 3:16): "God so loved the world," etc.

This proclamation the Father wishes all men to hear and desires that they come to Christ; and these Christ does not drive from Him,

as it is written John 6:37: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

And in order that we may come to Christ, the Holy Ghost works true faith through the hearing of the Word...

Therefore, whoever would be saved should not trouble or harass himself with thoughts concerning the secret counsel of God, as to whether he also is elected and ordained to eternal life, with which miserable Satan usually attacks and annoys godly hearts. But they should hear Christ who is the Book of Life and of God's eternal election of all of God's children to eternal life: He testifies to all men without distinction that it is God's will that all men should come to Him who labor and are heavy laden with sin, in order that He may give them rest and save them, Matt. 11:28 (Formula of Concord, S.D. XI, 67-70, Triglotta, p. 1085).

The Certitude of Election

According to the Teaching of the Bible

86. If, according to Calvinistic theology, a sinner wants to know whether Christ died also for him, he must first make sure that he is an elect. Now, having no objective basis for this assurance, he has no other possibility than reflection on his personal experience. If he feels the Holy Ghost is working in his heart, if he may duly consider himself as regenerate, he has the right to conclude that God wants his salvation. We may easily guess what he will feel in times of doubt, distress and despair. This kind of doctrine expresses by no means the biblical theology of certitude.

87. Whereas in Calvin's theology the doctrine of predestination has to shed light on the work of Christ and has to determine whether or not I am personally affected by what Jesus did and suffered and by his saving death, Lutheran theology teaches the contrary and confesses that "the gracious election of God has been revealed to us in Christ, out of whose hand no man shall pluck us, John 10:28; 2 Tim. 2:19" (Formula of Concord, SD XI, 90, Triglotta, p. 1093). The cross of Golgotha is thus the mirror of God's heart. Here every repentant sinner finds the comforting certitude that he is an elect.

88. Everything that God does during my life to call, convert, justify, edify, strengthen and sanctify me through faith in Christ is included in His eternal decree of election. Paul states in his wonderful way:

We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. 8:28-30).

89. Election is a kind of chain whose first and last links are in the realm of eternity. I was not near to God before the foundation of the world and I am not a witness of what He decided. I cannot seize the "Deus absconditus" and by way of speculation determine whether or not He elected me to eternal life. Nor am I beyond death, among those who live in His heavenly kingdom, to ascertain

through the joyful experience of salvation that I am an elect. I live in this world, and in this world I am bound to the "Deus revelatus," to what God says to me in Scripture. But Paul states that those who are predestinated are called, those who are called are justified, and those who are justified are glorified. Resting on God's promises, I have therefore as a believer the right to argue: If God has forgiven my sins and justified me by faith, because He wants to lead me to eternal life, He did so because I have been elected by Him thereunto. My present justification belongs to the realization in this time of the world of His eternal decree of predestination. God has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, forgiven me all my sins, and He will maintain me in the true faith until the end of my life, because He wants my salvation and has in all eternity decided to lead me there.

Election and Perseverance

90. The certitude of election is thus founded on the promises of the Gospel; it is a certitude of faith, identical with the certitude of salvation. But what about those who fall and will perish because of that? Were they wrong when they believed that they were predestinated to eternal life and that God would grant them the gift of perseverance?

91. The answer of Calvinism to this question is well known. It teaches the "gratia inamissibilis" (grace that cannot be lost), since God "seriously" calls and regenerates only the elect, and the work of the Holy Spirit is irresistible. An elect may lose the exercise of faith, but not faith itself. Even the "peccata enormia" cannot make an elect fall out of grace. Therefore a man

to whom the Holy Spirit testifies that He is working in his heart knows with an absolute certainty that he is predestinated to eternal life, and thus he has an absolute certitude of perseverance. This position is untenable as the whole Calvinistic doctrine of predestination is untenable. It leads to despair or to carnal security. The Lutheran Church teaches that grace can be lost, but also that an unfaithful Christian can again, through repentance, find the way to Jesus:

Since our election to eternal life is founded not upon our godliness or virtue, but alone upon the merit of Christ and the gracious will of his Father, who cannot deny himself, because He is unchangeable in will and essence, therefore, when His children depart from obedience and stumble, He has them called again to repentance through the Word, and the Holy Ghost wishes thereby to be efficacious in them for conversion. And when they turn to Him again in true repentance by a right faith, we will always manifest the old paternal heart to all those who tremble at his Word and from their heart turn again to Him, as it is written Jer. 3:1 (F.S., SD XI, 75, Triglotta, p. 1087).

92. Synergism on the contrary teaches that man can through an adequate attitude and a good disposition contribute to his conversion and cooperate with God to the end to persevere in faith. But since perseverance depends both on God's grace and his personal disposition, he can never be sure that he will be faithful unto the end. This doctrine is already in itself a denial of Christian faith, for Christian faith, as Franz Pieper says, "is born and maintained only vis-a-vis the 'sola gratia Dei'" (Christliche Dogmatik, III, p. 114). Whosoever

seeks justification by the Law and trusts in his works, merits and personal strength, has already fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4).

93. Concerning perseverance the Bible states:

You are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 5:4).

I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one (John 10:28-30).

... being confident of this very thing that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6).

94. It is true that Paul admonishes us:

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12),

and this text has often been employed by the synergists against the certitude of perseverance. But Paul himself makes clear that this is not possible, when he adds immediately:

for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).

95. For this reason the Lutheran Church rejects both errors, Calvin's doctrine of the absolute certainty of perseverance of those who have become

certain of their election, and the synergistic denial of any certitude of perseverance. She holds that every true Christian can be assured that God has called him and granted him forgiveness of his sins, because He is intending to save him as one of His beloved elect. This assurance involves necessarily the certitude of perseverance, and this certitude is a certitude of faith based on the promises of the Gospel and on the knowledge of God's faithfulness. The fathers of the Formula of Concord confessed.

... that God will also strengthen, increase and support to the end the good work which He has begun in them, if they adhere to God's Word, pray diligently, abide in God's goodness and faithfully use the gifts received. That finally He will eternally save and glorify in life eternal those whom He has elected, called and justified. And indeed in this counsel, purpose and ordination God has prepared salvation not only in general, but has in grace considered and chosen to salvation each and every person of the elect who are to be saved through Christ, also ordained that in the way just mentioned He will, by His grace, gifts and efficacy, bring them thereto, aid, promote, strengthen and preserve them (SD XI, 21-23, Triglotta, p. 1069).

96. The Bible's admonitions against apostasy do not militate against the certitude of perseverance. They concern not the new man whom the Holy Ghost has begotten in the Christian through faith, but the old Adam. They are a part of the Law which the best Christian still needs, because he is still a sinner and always in danger of turning his back on God, of walking again on the broad

way that leads to condemnation. On the other hand we have defined the certitude of salvation, present and future, as a certitude of faith based on the divine promises of the Gospel. Christian certitude is always related to these promises through which the Holy Spirit accomplishes his work of salvation, and Christians know for sure that they will obtain eternal life as long as they will rely on them. As long as they allow God to work in their heart and life through His Gospel, they CANNOT fall from grace and become lost. "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" (Rom. 10:11). The fear of apostasy is already a lack of faith, a questioning of God's grace and faithfulness. But this is something which has to be--and can be--overcome through a confident use of the means of grace.

97. On August 8th, 1545, Martin Luther wrote a wonderful letter to an unknown Christian who was tormented by questions concerning his election and final salvation; in this letter he says:

It is not our duty to know what God wanted to keep secret. This was the apple into which Adam and Eve bit and which brought death to them and to all their children, because they wanted to know what they were not supposed to know. Just as murder, theft, and blasphemy, it is a sin to speculate on these things. It is the work of Satan, as all other sins. Instead of that, God has given us his Son, Jesus Christ, whom we should remember every day and to whom we should look as in a mirror. For outside of Christ there is only danger, death and devil, but in him everything is peace and joy. Whosoever is constantly tormented by the predestination wins nothing else than fear. Therefore avoid and flee these thoughts that look

like Satan's temptation in paradise, and, instead of that, look at Christ. May God keep you! (W² X, 1748 s.).

98. God knows who, among those whom the Gospel invites to salvation in Christ Jesus, will believe and who will not. He knows also who among the converted will persevere and who will not. And He finally knows the total number of the elect who will eternally live in His heavenly kingdom. He is also the only one to know that. There are many questions which find no answer in Holy Scripture. The Formula of Concord does not find enough words to stress a most important truth:

A distinction must be observed with special care between that which is expressly revealed concerning it in God's Word, and what is not revealed. For, in addition, to what has been revealed in Christ concerning this, of which we have hitherto spoken, God has still kept secret and concealed much concerning this mystery, and reserved it for His wisdom and knowledge alone, which we should not investigate, nor should we indulge our thoughts in this matter, nor draw conclusions, nor inquire curiously, but should adhere entirely to the revealed Word of God. This admonition is most urgently needed (SD XI, 52, Triglotta, p. 1079 f.).

Conclusion

99. It was our aim to stress what may be duly considered as the most wonderful aspect of Lutheran Christology and soteriology. What the Lutheran Church teaches about redemption, justification, election, perseverance and final

salvation not only is plainly scriptural, but constitutes a marvelous theology of certitude. This theology, far from being harmful to true Christendom and Christian piety, is the real source of a fervent, dedicated and grateful Christian life. Faith in "solus Christus" and "sola Gratia" can alone produce genuine sanctification. Therefore the apostles regularly introduce their admonitions to sanctification with a reminder of God's grace as it is manifested in Christ (1 Pet. 2:11; Col. 3:1-5; Titus 2:11-13; 1 John 3:2.3). This theology of certitude is also a source of praise and adoration, as becomes evident from Paul's wonderful introduction to his Epistle to the Ephesians (Eph. 1:3 ss) and Peter's introduction to his first epistle (1 Pet. 1:3-5). Furthermore it is a living source of comfort which begets patience and confidence (Rom. 8:17.18.25.35.37; Rom. 5:2-4; 2 Cor. 4:17.18). Finally it allows the Christian to rejoice as death draws near, and to overcome every fear in the last battle, for through faith in the Gospel he greets death as his best friend who allows him to achieve eternal salvation. This theology of certitude makes it possible to confess with Saint Paul:

O death, where is they sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:55-58).

100. A theology which, like the Lutheran one, builds Christian certitude not on the secret and inscrutable will of God, nor on man's behavior, good

dispositions, right attitude, dignity, works and merits, or his feelings and subjective experiences, but solely on Christ's wonderful work of Redemption and the gracious and universal promises of the Gospel of a God who, out of pure love and despite all our sins and indignity, is willing to accept us just as we are and to save us in Christ Jesus -- such a theology is a wonderful gift of our God to a lost world, where so many other theologies challenge His grace and glory. It is truly worthy to be defended against all errors, taught with eagerness and confessed with confidence and joy.

REACTIONS TO THE LECTURES

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I feel that this year's topic for these Reformation Lectures, "The Lutheran Theology of Certitude" was an excellent choice. Not being a member of the committee which made the topic selection, I can only speculate that the choice was made for any number of reasons.

We live in an age in which people are thinking that Roman Catholicism is moving ever closer to Lutheranism. Today, Charismatic subjectivism has "caught on," perhaps especially among young people much as a "rock" tune climbs rapidly to the top of the top forty. Ecumenically minded Lutherans are thinking that all Protestant denominations (Reformed and Lutheran) are basically the same. Such thinking, I am sure, is of great concern to the good professors of Bethany College as well as a concern of mine as a pastor as we receive "feedback" from those we are called to serve.

My response to these fine lectures we have heard is from my station in life which is not that of learned theological professor, but that of lowly parish pastor.

The main task of the call which is mine in the kingdom as parish pastor is to proclaim the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to sinners. It is necessary that I be a student throughout my ministry,

a student of the Word. I am capable of working with the Biblical languages (as are practically all Lutheran pastors), the Hebrew and Greek. I do read theological journals (as do other parish pastors) to grow in my knowledge of the Bible that I may better serve my people; journals which may be regarded by laymen as being "professional, deep, and mysterious."

But I dare not mount my pulpit on Sunday morning and speak in Hebrew and Greek. Neither will I knowingly use terms that are used in the theological journals like "syncretism" or "synergism." (Although I, like most pastors, permit an occasional ambiguous "sanctification" or "justification" slip out without benefit of explanation for the hearers.)

I see, at least in part, my task as proclaimer of the Gospel as a task of digesting the Word and making that Word of God intelligible to my flock. That Word becomes intelligible when; (1) It is spoken in a plain manner understandable to all. (2) It is applied to the real-life situation of the hearers.

Therefore, as a proclaimer of the Gospel of Christ, the parish pastor discovers that communication is an important part of his total ministry be it preaching, teaching, or counseling. The pastor is a communicator of the Gospel.

Doctor Martin Luther, a learned man, clearly recognized the great importance of communicating with the people who make up the flock of God. He once remarked:

"The people can take this home with them, but nobody understands a sermon that is turgid, deep, removed from life.

I spoke about this to Bucer in Gotha and suggested that he and Osiander should refrain from erudite preaching. Philip doesn't need to be instructed, and I don't teach or lecture for his sake, but we preach publicly for the sake of plain people. Christ could have taught in a profound way but he wishes to deliver his message with the utmost simplicity in order that the common people might understand. Good God, there are sixteen-year-old girls, women, old men, and farmers in church, and they don't understand lofty matters! If one can present fitting and familiar comparisons, as Link can do in masterful fashion, the people will understand and remember. Accordingly he's the best preacher who can teach in a plain, childlike, popular, and simple way. I prefer to preach in an easy and comprehensible fashion, but when it comes to academic disputations watch me in the university; there I'll make it sharp enough for anybody and will reply, no matter how complicated he wants to be. Some day I'll have to write a book against artful preachers."¹

Dr. Kreiss began his lecture by stating a great and undeniable truth. "The Christian religion is the religion of certitude."² (emphasis mine) All of the various religious "isms" in the world even if nominally Christian are Law oriented. You must do enough or be good enough to merit forgiveness and salvation. Only true, Biblical Christianity, built on the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ offers the absolute certainty of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. The Lutheran Church - the church built on the Word of God - the church which possesses the blessed heritage of the Lutheran Reformation - does possess that theology of certitude.

But as a Lutheran parish pastor I am concerned about an apparent discrepancy between the theological treasure we Lutherans possess, and the basic theological understanding and faith of the people I and other Lutheran pastors serve.

I refer specifically to the findings of two scientific surveys taken in our conservative midwest among Lutheran people. The results show that apparently many Lutherans have rejected the Gospel of free grace for a "gospel" that is a new Law. It makes of Jesus nothing more than a second Moses. One statistic from the survey conducted in Minneapolis will emphasize my reason for concern. To the question, "The main emphasis of the Gospel is on God's rules for right living:"³, 59% of those questioned responded "Yes." This figure includes both lay and pastor's responses from the L.C.A., A.L.C., and Missouri Synod.

The second study, made in the Detroit area, included in addition to the three synods mentioned above, the W.E.L.S. Since the W.E.L.S. is regarded the most "conservative" of those four Lutheran bodies in the survey, I will quote only that response to the following question; "People are saved by keeping the Ten Commandments."⁴ (Agreeing) W.E.L.S. pastors, 0%. (Agreeing) W.E.L.S. lay members, 46%.

In view of the seeming gulf between clergy and laity (which exists according to the survey of all synods), I ask, are we pastors communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our preaching, teaching, and counseling? Or are we talking about the Gospel rather than proclaiming it; talking about Jesus rather than offering Him? Are we rightly dividing Law and Gospel or merely mixing the two together into a lukewarm slop unfit for man or beast? This is not an indictment of anyone's ministry. I only raise the question.

Statistics in studies such as quoted above are not wholly accurate. Some who are questioned misunderstand the question and answer the very opposite of what they believe. But the percentage of American Lutherans who indicate that they believe in a salvation of works is great enough to say something to Lutheran pastors. Be the fault our very poor communication as pastors and heralds of the Good News, or be it, for whatever fault, the fault of those who hear us Sunday after Sunday - we had better make more earnest effort to reach them all, on their level of understanding, with the Gospel. Christianity is the religion of certitude. Christian certitude is what we must bring to our people.

But perhaps communication (i.e., our choice of words) is not our problem at all. Perhaps we are communicating exactly what is in our hearts; a feeling of uncertainty.

We quote one Lutheran seminary professor's contemporary view of the church and those who serve it;

"We often complain about the sad condition of the Christian church, and rightly so. We servants of the Word also complain about this, but unjustly. "Why should any living mortal, or any man, offer complaint in view of his (own) sins?" (Lm. 3:39, NASB). The only thing that the church of our day, and especially we ministers of the Word lack is faith: living, robust, confident faith - the certainty of faith. Where certainty of faith governs the church, it will prosper. The certainty of faith is the source of all spiritual life, as well as the power for it. "Everything is possible for him who believes." (Mk. 9:23)"⁵

Does this analysis of what is wrong with the church sound like a fair assessment? In all fairness, we should inform you that this observation was made by a Wisconsin Synod professor in 1931 as he surveyed his contemporary church.

Perhaps the Lutheran pastor, in spite of all of his fine Lutheran college and seminary training, is being conditioned by the world to lose that certainty given him by the Spirit through the Word. We live in an ecumenical age. People all around us are saying that all churches have some good to offer. Some Lutheran theologians firmly believe that no church has a monopoly on the truth and to think that one has the truth is presumptuous.

C. F. W. Walther was a man of great faith. He knew where he stood and knew what he believed. The trumpet he sounded gave no uncertain sound. He stood firmly on the Bible. He, time and time again, stated that the Lutheran church is the "true visible church." He could say that because classic Lutheranism brings no more and no less to its people than is offered in Sacred Scripture. Whenever Walther wrote or spoke, he communicated Christian certitude.

We look at St. Paul. His confidence and his certainty he communicated to his people and communicated to us today. He didn't talk about Jesus saying, "I know what I believe." Neither does he give the slightest inkling of doubt saying, "I think I know what I believe." Paul's relationship to Christ is personal and in the person of Christ he has rightly placed all his hope; "I KNOW whom I have believed, and AM PERSUADED that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." (2 Tim. 1:12b)

Then there is Martin Luther. Luther had personally passed along the very painful route from uncertainty to great certainty concerning his own salvation. Read Luther's sermons, tracts, letters of Christian concern to people and hear him confidently urging his listeners to put their trust in Christ. Luther wasn't a "do as I say" preacher. We see him at Worms to where he was summoned to defend his writings. We recall his immortal words with which he defied emperor and pope - laying his life on the line;

"Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures or evident reason (for I believe neither in the Pope nor councils alone, since it has been established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures adduced by me, and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God, and I am neither able nor willing to recant, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. God help me. Amen."⁶

This dangerous position into which Luther willingly placed himself was based on the utter certainty of his faith in Christ. We recall the ministries of Walther, Paul, and Luther and how those ministries were blessed by the Lord. We compare our ministries to theirs - we must do so - and ask, "do we Lutheran pastors of today have that kind of certitude?" Are we communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ from a heart filled with confidence in Christ, thus imparting that very confidence to our hearers?

Dr. Kreiss has very ably shown in his lectures the uncertainties harbored by both Rome and the Reformed. Christianity is the religion of certitude. Lutheran theology is the theology of certitude. The Lutheran pastor is bound by Holy

Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to communicate the pure and unadulterated message of the Gospel to his hearers. "Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling."

The Lutheran pastor ought not only preach sermons of Gospel certainty across the pulpit to his congregation, but also bring that certainty of reconciliation with God in Christ to those who come to the pastor's study with troubled hearts.

Naturally, we cannot deal with the sins of those in our care by ignoring those sins as if God had given ten suggestions rather than the Ten Commandments. Neither are we dealing with mere "guilt feelings" as defined by psychologists, but guilt before God for misdeeds for which one is actually accountable. The impenitent must be made, on the basis of the Law, to see that sin is real, ugly, serious and damning and thus the need for the Savior.

When the sinner comes to the Lutheran pastor's study and is grieving beneath the load of sin, we do not deal with him haltingly as if we knew not for sure if he were among God's elect or not. Jesus Christ lived and died for all - He died to pay for the sins of all who come to us without exception.

Neither do Lutheran pastors have the prerogative to set up certain conditions which must be met before God's forgiveness may be announced in absolution. By our old nature that approach may have some appeal.

Factually, there is nothing "iffy" about the Gospel. There is nothing conditional about the Gospel in the sense that one must meet certain conditions or requirements (be that pain of suffering, having enough faith, or making the right decision, etc.) in order to "qualify" for God's forgiveness.

Rather, Scripture states unconditionally that Christ died for the sins of the whole world (John 3:16 and many other passages) and since that sinner is part of this world Christ died to save, he is forgiven with no "ifs" or other conditions required.

The Lutheran pastor has a wonderful message to bring to his flock and to the world. It is the Good News of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ Jesus which requires no merit or worthiness on the part of the sinner.

The person in the pew of a Lutheran church is entitled to hear the blessed message of God's free grace in Jesus Christ, and to know that in any circumstance of life whether good times or bad, that he is God's child. God's Son died for him that he might live. Nothing can change that, for that is history.

May God keep us faithful throughout our lives to His Son who comes to us with His good gifts in Word and Sacrament, that when our end approaches we may say with the certainty of St. Paul; "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."
(2 Tim. 4:6-8)

Endnotes

1. Luther's Works, Volume 54, (American Edition) (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1967, pp. 383-384).
2. Kreiss, Lecture I, paragraph 6.
3. Merton Strommen, et al, A Study of Generations (Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1972), p. 369.
4. Laurence Kirsten, The Lutheran Ethic, (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1970), p. 157. Strangely, the same W.E.L.S. lay people when asked, "Man is saved by God's grace," responded 83% affirmative (also on p. 157).
5. Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, (Northwestern, Milwaukee, July, 1975), p. 235. The quotation is from an article "Paul, A Model of the Certainty of Faith, Especially for All Servants of the Word," by Professor August Pieper and was originally published in German in the October 1931 issue of the Theologische Quartalschrift.
6. E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times, (Concordia, St. Louis, 1950), pp. 504-505.

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Certainly one must express a debt of gratitude to Dr. Kreiss for his fine exposition of Christian certitude. I could easily spend my reaction time in rehearsing the fine insights and strengths of his three-part essay. The invitation to appear as reactor, however, included a note that such was not my Amt or vocatus. The call, in this case, was accompanied by a note that "more time should be spent on points of disagreement, of possible inadequate treatment, and similar negative factors."

In responding to such an invitation, I would first invite your attention to the following statement-- page 9, paragraph 32, sentence 2, where we read:

The curse of the law, the malediction and punishment required by God's holy will as it is revealed in the Law, having been endured by His Son, God renounced effectively all His just requirements, and His wrath was appeased.

There is no question that God's atonement for sin in Christ cannot be limited in anyway. But, is there a danger, when we so necessarily and joyfully proclaim this treasure of the Gospel, in using language which is not exegetically precise. There is a possible danger, for example, in stating flatly that "God's wrath was appeased."

Several passages come to mind here:

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the son will not see life, for God's wrath abides upon him.

(ἀλλ ἡ ὄργη τοῦ Θεοῦ μένει ἐπ' αὐτόν) The present tense of μένει forthrightly claims that there is a sense in which God's wrath is presently upon unfaith. A wrath which is objective, that is, it is not simply the lack of God's blessing or some self-induced state, but the real, extra nobis, wrath of God which is subjectively upon the person of unfaith.

Romans 1:18 similarly states:

The wrath of God is being revealed (Ἀποκαλύπτεται) from heaven against all the godliness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness . . .

Again, the present tense of the verb, (Ἀποκαλύπτεται), claims that there is a present action of God's wrath upon sinful men.

God's wrath, these passages assert, is operative against men who have been objectively justified in the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the question is in order, as to whether we might not be better advised, to carefully employ the Scriptural vocabulary to describe the universal nature and reality of Christ's atoning work--
δικαιόω - Matt. 12³⁷, καταλλάσσω - 2 Cor. 5¹⁹,
ἴλασμος - 1 John 2², ἀντιῦπτρον - 1 Tim 2^{5,6}.

As Lutherans we support both Scriptural truths: First, as our essayist so concisely states "forgiveness is a really existing blessing, which is objectively offered in the Gospel, that it actually precedes faith (page 20, paragraph 39). Secondly, God is presently pulverizing the rocks of rebellious human pride and unfaith.

Our confessions affirm both truths in brief span. The Apology, Art. IV, paragraph 80, states:

The wrath of God cannot be appeased if we set against it our own works, because Christ has been set forth as a Propitiator, so that for His sake, the Father may become reconciled to us. (Trigg. 143)

Latin:

Ira Dei non potest placari, si opponamus nostra opera, quia Christus propositus est propitiator, ut propter ipsum fiat nobis placatus Pater.

The beautiful summary statement of paragraph 73, page 22, which closes with so fitting a citation of Romans 1:16 would, we are suggesting, be strengthened somewhat by holding the truth of Romans 1:18 close at hand, even as St. Paul does in the opening of his great epistle.

The second question which might be posed is whether, at some point, the Lutheran theology of certitude must clearly spell out subjective implications? If we reduce this dimension severely, do we risk misunderstanding?

The sola gratia principle, as is so eloquently argued in our essayist's study, precludes any concession to a Reformed, Catholic, or secular (the way of liberalism) doctrinal posture. Each, in its own way, enthrones man, and removes certitude.

God has done all in Christ. It has happened prior to and outside of our feeble abilities. Faith itself is purely a gift of grace.

But, having said all that, do we not run the risk of not holding the Gospel imperatives as close as we should to the Gospel. Pauline

paranesis so consistently places the indicative of God's gracious action prior to the imperative of Christian action that there can be no doubting the order of our dogmatics, but, Paul, also holds the two close together in almost organic fashion. The question arises as to whether one can fully appreciate the one without the foil of the other.

A very fine friend, in a lighter moment, stated that: "I must believe in objective justification, it's the only chance I have..." Indeed, it's the only chance any of us has, for I'm sure we would rank our sanctification with him as wearing nothing but the filthy rags of our failures.

I would agree wholeheartedly that each of us is utterly dependent upon the certitude of our objective justification which God worked on the cross.

At the same time I see no Scriptural warrant which would permit us to state this saving truth in such a way that one might regard sanctification as optional.

Perhaps, the point which I seek to convey, is best made exegetically. In Matthew 28:18ff., Jesus begins the great commission with an incisive indicative (ἐδόθη). Our Lord asserts that all power is given to him--in heaven and upon the earth. The aorist passive of δέδωκε surely conveys the action of God the Father. All this has happened, sola gratia, outside of you and me, but it has also happened pro nobis, and because of it, our Lord addresses us with specific injunctions-- For our purpose, the key word in this passage is the οὖν -- "therefore." It is because of the objective justification of mankind

in Christ that what we do does matter.

If it were not for the fact that God had done all well and Jesus had been given all power, we could not rightly hear these injunctions. The οὖν holds justification very close to sanctification.

If the imperative were placed first--as Romanism, liberalism, and Calvinism do--then what we do doesn't matter, for we are truly in the prison of opinio legis.

Again, St. Paul, in I Corinthians 15, after a whole chapter of indicatives which describe Christ's resurrection as the seal of the atoning work-- ἐγήγερατ, ᾤθη -- concludes that chapter with an admonition-- ἐδραῖου, γίνεσθε -- "be steadfast." In this case we find not οὖν, but ὥστε similarly translated "therefore" binding the two solidly together.

In other words, there is always a need for Biblical balance in our doctrinal study. Christian certitude is everything our essayist has said, but one longs for, at times, a bit more commentary which would take into account the οὖν and the ὥστε. Or that would assert compatibility of Christian certitude with such apostolic admonition as:

Therefore, another ὥστε after Paul's ringing statement of Christ's humiliation,

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Phil. 2:12,13.

You, my brothers, were called to be free.
But do not use your freedom to indulge the
sinful nature; rather, serve one another
in love. Gal. 5:13

OR, VERY STRIKINGLY, ST. PAUL'S SELF-ADMONITION:

No, I beat my body and make it my slave so
that after I have preached to others, I
myself will not be disqualified for the
prize. I Cor. 9:27

THE CHRISTIAN CERTITUDE WHICH HAS BEEN SO
FULLY EXPLICATED FOR US IS SIMULTANEOUSLY THE
CHIEF ENEMY OF CHEAP GRACE.

I'm afraid, from a Seelsorge viewpoint, we
need to continually make that point. What God
hath Scripturally joined, must be held together
in the life of the church. How slyly Satan in-
vites us to put our certitude on the spiritual
shelf of our lives instead of using it every day
in the arena to "beat our bodies" and press on
with Paul to "lay hold of the prize."

Without the certitude of redemption and rec-
onciliation, grace and justification, election
and final salvation, there can be no sanctifica-
tion. At the same time, true justification
entails and is ever joined to the life of sanc-
tification which is itself a sola gratia enter-
prise--a pure gift of God's grace.

Phil. 2:13 - "for it is God which worketh in
you both to will and to do of his good
pleasure."

If the $\sigma\lambda\upsilon\varsigma$ and the $\delta\omicron\tau\epsilon$ are ever withdrawn we
quickly fall into the theological trap of Amos'

congregation. They loved the Exodus, the ritual, the day of the Lord--all the gracious statements of convenental status, but they hated the οὖν and the ὡστε. Is it any wonder that Jesus quotes Amos' colleague, Hosea, in saying:

I seek mercy and not sacrifice. Matthew 9:13
ἐλεος θέλω καὶ οὐ θυσίαν

But, of course, it was not our essayist's purpose to treat the bond between justification and sanctification. Indeed, I'm sure that he would concur with his theological friend, John Gerhard, on the indissolubility of the two, when he writes, in the first paragraph of his treatment on good works:

Doctrinae de justificatione perfidem convenienti ordine succedit articulus de bonis operibus. Quamvis enim fide sine operibus justificemur, ac proinde a foro justificationis bona opera sint sejungenda; tamen ver illa et viva fides, perquam justificamur, non est sine operibus, cum beneficia justificationis et sanctificationis regenerationis et renovationis perpetua indissolubili nexu sint conjuncta.

My thanks to the essayist.

* * * * *

A brief third reaction was not available for publication. Ed.