

Response
to a Special Report of the Faculty to the Board
on the Discussion on Faith and Justification

January 3, 1978

At its meeting on May 24-25, 1977, the board voted to place in my hands the faculty evaluative report concerning its discussions on the doctrine of justification with the request that I respond to it in its meeting of February, 1978. Since the opportunity to respond in writing prior to the board meeting was also offered, I am presenting herewith a written response to the faculty report.

The board also voted to furnish to me any other correspondence or reports received by the board in reference to the discussion of justification without any request for a response. Apart from a letter to the board dated May 18, 1977, signed by Messrs. Godfrey, Hughes, Knudsen, Kuschke, Miller, and Robertson, and another dated May 23, 1977, signed by Messrs. Dillard, Frame, Gaffin, Van Til, and Woolley, no other correspondence or reports have been furnished to me.

The faculty is to be commended for its patience in the pursuit of its discussion of justification, and for the balanced report of its discussion to the board. The report unfolds in four parts and I would like to comment on each of these parts, devoting fuller attention to the four areas of difficulty identified in Part IV. In the course of this discussion I shall have occasion to advert to the salient criticisms presented by Messrs. Godfrey et al. These criticisms in their central thrust have previously been taken up and answered by the communication of Messrs. Gaffin, et al.

Part I of the faculty report is an attempt to state briefly my concerns, and I consider it to be a fair summary which should not be overlooked as we consider the areas of difficulty mentioned in Part IV. I would want to add that in turning away from "easy believe-ism," I am concerned that we do not swing over into legalism or neonomianism. This polarity can be overcome by fuller attention to the structure and dynamic of the covenant relation between God and man. In the covenant, grace is not limited in its sovereignty or graciousness by the conditions laid down for the enjoyment of divine blessing and favor; nor does fulfillment of these conditions imply meritorious self-righteousness in any sense. This covenant dynamic is illustrated in passages like Genesis 18:17-19 and Deuteronomy 7:6-11 in the Old Testament, and John 6:44-47 and I Corinthians 10:1-13 in the New.

Part II draws attention to the resources of the Reformed faith to which I have appealed in grappling with the concerns mentioned in Part I. In the foreground among these resources is the doctrine of covenant grace, as indicated in the previous paragraph. To appeal to the resources of the Reformed faith in its distinctive genius appears to me to be the proper way for a Reformed theologian to proceed. This method is to be distinguished from that of modernists and even some professedly Reformed theologians whose appeal has been to Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy resulting in a new scholasticism in which Kant, or Heidegger, or even Marx, have taken the place of Aristotle.

Part III is significant in its recognition that there continue to be legitimate questions which must be raised with reference to the Reformed doctrines of justification, faith, and good works. The last word was not spoken in the 16th or 17th century, even in so crucial an area as the application of redemption including the doctrine of justification. We have not yet exhausted the teaching of the Bible in the formulation and exposition of these basic doctrines. We are confessionally committed to the possibility of the correction and development of our Reformed system of theology.

Part IV introduces four remaining areas of difficulty. These can be taken up in the order in which they appear, with special attention to the second area.

A. The first area of difficulty has to do with my use of the term justification to refer not only to an act of God at conversion but also to refer to a state following conversion and to the open acquittal on the day of judgment. The report does not say that such usage is per se wrong, or contrary to Scripture and Confession. Nor does it say that "justification" can only refer to an act of God at conversion though that may be the implication of saying that justification is a "fixed technical term" whose use in some other sense would be confusing.

The report expresses a legitimate concern when it says that the various uses of the term ought to be distinguished and that a failure to make such distinctions may prove confusing to persons accustomed to using the word in one way only.

However, there are three observations which need to be made.

First, the fact is, that "justification" has been used in a number of senses throughout the history of Reformed theology beginning with Calvin who spoke of justification as progressive and not simply as a definitive act at conversion (Institutes, III, 14). Later theologians of the classic period distinguished between the "justification of the ungodly" and a subsequent "justification of the godly" (H. Heppel, Reformed Dogmatics, E. T. 1950, p. 562). A. G. Honig, former Professor of Dogmatics in Kampen, devotes several pages of his Handboek van de Gereformeerde Theologie (1938) to arguing that there are only five justifications rather than the nine proposed by Abraham Kuyper (pp. 593-596). In the light of this history, it is not possible to say that justification is "a fixed technical term applicable only to the initial pronouncement of pardon, acquittal, and righteousness at the beginning of the Christian life," as the faculty report suggests.

Second, the Westminster Confession uses the term in more than one sense when it speaks of justification as a state as well as an act (XI, 5); and the Bible itself introduces another sense when it uses the language of justification to refer to an act of God on the Day of Judgment (Matt. 12:37; Rom. 2:13; Gal. 5:5; II Tim. 4:8). My usage reflects the usage of the Confession and the Scripture.

Third, the insistence that "justification" can be used in only one sense will confuse Christians who find the word used in other senses in the Bible, in the Confession, and by the theologians. This also is a pastoral concern that must be taken into consideration in the formulation of the doctrine of justification. We must not only distinguish the various senses as the faculty report observes, but we must also show why it is eminently fitting that we have one word for these various senses.

B. The second difficulty pertains to the use of the language of requirement, necessity, and purpose to describe the relation of repentance and new obedience to justification. The difficulty is exemplified in four quotations which have, in my judgment, come to assume far too prominent a place in the discussion. These statements, or parts of statements, have been abstracted from their context and have been regarded as definitive formulations in terms of which the line of thinking I have sought to develop must finally be judged.

I would like to make clear that I do not regard the particular wording of these statements as sacrosanct, and am ready to grant that the wording may be misleading or objectionable. When this criticism was voiced in the course of the faculty discussion, I prepared "A Statement on the Doctrine of Justification" (April 15, 1977) with a view to clarification and the removal of misunderstanding and objections. The faculty has not taken exception to this document. (This "Statement" was appended to the faculty report, and appears on pp. 41, 42, of the May 24-25, 1977, Minutes of the Board.)

I would like to point out that the four statements quoted all appear in the context of an argument to show that according to the Westminster standards, justifying faith is obedient faith. This is the central thesis, and this thesis has not been called into question by the faculty report. That justifying faith is obedient faith is not only the position of the Westminster standards, it is also the position of leading Reformed theologians throughout the history of Reformed theology. In Appendix A I have assembled a number of citations in demonstration of this fact.

If justifying faith is obedient faith, the question arises, What is the relation between the obedience implied in "obedient faith," and justification? With this question we touch the nub of the problem as it has come to discussion within the faculty. Several observations are in order.

1. It is of the utmost importance to begin by noting the faculty acknowledgment of, and concurrence in, what I have sought to stress again and again in the course of our discussions, namely, that the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone is the exclusive ground of justification, forgiveness, and acceptance with God. This is the heart and core of the Reformed doctrine of justification, and in this the Reformed doctrine differs radically from the doctrine of Rome. For Rome, justification (understood as subjective, moral transformation in distinction from the Reformed view of justification as declaratory, forensic act) is at every stage, in whole or in part, the reward for human merit, whether congruent merit or condign merit. In the Reformed view neither faith, nor the obedience which invariably accompanies it, is the ground of forgiveness of sins or of acceptance with God. As I said in my April 15 "Statement," "The ground of justification or the reason or cause why sinners are justified is in no sense to be found in themselves, but is to be found wholly and exclusively in Jesus Christ and in his mediatorial accomplishment on their behalf."

A difficulty arises at this point from the fact that some participants in the discussion are unable to conceive that the faith which justifies can be an obedient faith, without making the obedience implied in obedient faith a ground or cause in us of our justification. By way of response, it should be noted that when we are justified by faith, faith itself is not the ground or cause of justification. By the same token, obedient faith is not the ground or cause of justification, nor is the obedience implied in obedient faith. A careful reading of the citations from Reformed authors in Appendix A will make this point transparently clear.

The same point is made in the Westminster Confession with respect to repentance (Ch. XV). Repentance is defined as a grieving for and hatred of sin, a turning from sin unto God, and a purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments (Sect. 2). The Confession then says that this repentance is "not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof." Nevertheless, it is "of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it." Pardon of sin belongs to the essence of justification (WCF XI, 1). The Confession teaches that repentance which includes a purposing and endeavoring to walk with God in all the ways of his commandments is necessary for the pardon included in justification, but it is neither the ground nor the cause of pardon. To put it in other words, God does not forgive unrepentant sinners. He does not forgive sinners irrespective of repentance. God forgives repentant sinners, not because of their repentance, but because of the substitutionary atonement of Christ whose benefit becomes theirs in the way of penitent faith.

In this, I am fully agreed with, and am simply reproducing the teaching of John Murray. Professor Murray's discussion is reproduced in Appendix B.

In order to cope with the teaching of the Confession on the subject of repentance unto the forgiveness of sins, Messrs. Godfrey et al. have adopted the expedient of distinguishing between one kind of repentance which is unto the forgiveness of sins, and another kind of repentance which flows from justification. Such a distinction is without foundation in the Scripture, or in the Confession, or in Reformed theology. A similar though not identical distinction was employed by Lutheran theology in line with its own conception of the application of redemption (see Appendix C). At this point there is a marked difference between Lutheran and Reformed theology of which the Lutheran theologians themselves are well aware. The Lutheran theologians were unable to define repentance which is unto the forgiveness of sins as the Reformed defined it.

2. The faculty report takes the position that the obedience alluded to in the formulation, justifying faith is obedient faith, is an obedience which always accompanies the faith which justifies.

The letter of May 18, 1977, signed by Messrs. Godfrey, et al., occupies different ground, however, in that the obedience does not always accompany justifying faith, but only accompanies it after faith has justified. This was evident in the disjunction insisted on in the discussion between justifying faith (LC 72) and saving faith (WCF XIV, 2). It is evident in the distinction insisted upon between two kinds of repentance, one of which is prior to justification and the other subsequent to justification. It is also evident in the insistence recurrent throughout the discussion that WCF XI, 2b must mean that in the person who has been justified, faith is subsequently accompanied by all other saving graces and works by love. In terms of the position of Messrs. Godfrey, et al., it is not really possible to defend the thesis that justifying faith is obedient faith. Hence serious objection was raised by some in the faculty discussions concerning the language of Turretin and Bavinck cited in Appendix A, and at least one member of the faculty expressed objection to the language of Professor Murray cited in Appendix B.

3. Although it is perfectly true, that obedience to Christ accompanies justifying faith as the faculty report states, the question may be raised whether this formula rises to the level of saying that justifying faith is obedient faith. As is evident from the citations in Appendix A, the Reformed theologians did not

argue simply that obedience accompanies faith so that faith, in effect, could be conceived of as true and living faith, or as justifying faith, apart from or in abstraction from the obedience which invariably accompanies it. They argued rather, that while obedience was not of the essence of faith, nevertheless, without it faith was not living faith. It was dead, and therefore could not justify or save. Because of this argument it was all the more imperative for the Reformed theologians to stress what the faculty report is concerned to emphasize, and what I reiterated in my April 15 "Statement," namely, that faith does not derive its power to justify from obedience. In the language of Turretin, love is not coefficient with faith in justification.

The point here is well illustrated by the way in which Professor Murray relates repentance to pardon and justification in clear contrast to the way in which Messrs. Godfrey et al. have handled the same topic as noted above.

4. A major criticism voiced in the communication of Messrs. Godfrey, et al., is that the four statements quoted in the faculty report "fail to make the proper distinction between justification and sanctification." Since this letter was sent after my April 15 "Statement" had been written and discussed, I conclude that the criticism is relevant to the basic thesis as well, that justifying faith is obedient faith.

The Larger Catechism, Qu. 77, defines precisely what the proper distinction is between justification and sanctification. "Wherein do justification and sanctification differ? Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other it is subdued: the one doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection."

From the beginning, and repeatedly throughout the discussions I have drawn attention to this question and to the fact that I have not in any way contravened the teaching of the Larger Catechism at this point. No one to my knowledge has denied this claim or called it into question. Yet the criticism persists that I have not made "the proper distinction" between justification and sanctification. I can only conclude that in the judgment of Messrs. Godfrey, et al., the Catechism itself has failed to make, or at least has come short of making, "the proper distinction" between justification and sanctification.

No attempt has been made to define what this proper distinction is, nor to demonstrate its validity by reference either to the Scripture or the Confession.

5. The letter of Messrs. Godfrey et al. cites the same four passages from my October study paper that are found in the faculty report, and immediately observes that "these statements are contrary to Romans 3:28 ("we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law") and to Galatians 3:11-12 ("But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith, but he that doeth them shall live in them.").

The expressions used in the study paper were: "obedience to Christ" (twice); "new obedience;" and "repentance" (twice). If these expressions are understood

as the equivalent of the Pauline expressions "deeds of the law," "the law," and "the law (which) is not of faith," then, of course, the four citations flatly contradict the teaching of Paul. Some members of the faculty do insist that the expressions in the study paper can only be understood as the equivalent, or as the functional equivalent, of the Pauline expressions in Rom. 3:28 and Gal. 3:11-12.

It was never my intention to affirm what Paul explicitly condemns. The expressions quoted from the study paper do not overlap at any point with the expressions quoted from Paul. In fact, they are mutually exclusive conceptions that are in view. For example, obedience to Christ is the exact opposite of the law which is not of faith. Those whose boast before God was the deeds of the law were precisely those who did not repent of sin (Rom. 2:17-29).

The four citations are not to be interpreted as teaching that justification is by faith and also by the works of the law, so that our justification depends partly upon what Christ has done for us, and partly upon what we can do for ourselves. A fair reading of the statements in context shows that they were set down in explication of the thesis that justifying faith is obedient faith. Obedient faith is neither the ground nor the cause of our justification. If it were, it would be the equivalent of the works of the law and stand condemned. On the contrary, obedient faith lays hold of the ground of justification which resides wholly in Christ. Paul says that the works of the law (circumcision; and even uncircumcision!) do not avail for justification; what avails is faith working by love (Gal. 5:6). Paul can say this without contradicting what is written in Gal. 3:11-12 and Rom. 3:28. According to James 2, faith which is not obedient faith is dead. How, then, can it justify?

Messrs. Godfrey, et al., have failed to make the necessary distinction between the works of the law and the obedience of faith, or obedience to Christ. For this reason their letter suggests that works of the law do contribute to one's sanctification. Machen is correct, however, when he says that works of the law "are intended to acquire merit in order that God's favor may be earned" (What is Faith?, 1925, p. 204). Such works not only contradict justification by faith, but also are in no sense the result of God's sanctifying work. (They are as inimical to sanctification as they are to justification.)

The works of the law are the product of the flesh. They are born of the effort of sinful, fleshly man to supply for himself his own ground of justification apart from the work of Christ. They are not of the Spirit of God who sanctifies. To walk according to the flesh is one thing; to walk according to the Spirit is something quite different. The one is death; the other is life (Rom. 8:1-9; cf. Gal. 4:21-31).

We must add that when works, supposedly done in faith, are made to serve as the ground or cause of justification, they are not works of faith, but works of the law. As such they lead to death and stand condemned by Paul.

Paul's gospel warns sinners to abandon altogether the works of the law which serve only to mask the fact of sin, but neither atone for it nor remove it. The way of the works of the law is the way of self-deception against which Paul warns in Gal. 6:7, 8. It is the way of the suburbanite who appeals to a drawerful of medals he received in Sunday School, or to the fact that he is as good as, if not better than, his neighbors—all in order to avoid humbling himself before God in confession and repentance, and to avoid seeking the compassion and mercy of the Redeemer. The

works of such a man are not done to please God, though he may even claim this as did the Pharisees. They are done to bolster the false hope that there is really no wrath of God under which he stands condemned. They are done to please himself.

Paul's gospel announces justification to the ungodly, but it is justification by faith. Precisely because it is by faith, it is utterly incompatible with impenitence and ungodliness. The gospel from of old was, "As I live! declares the Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11). When the Jews finally rejected this plea on the lips of Jesus, the Messiah, God himself turned from Israel, and caused this gospel to go to the Gentiles "declaring to men that all everywhere should repent because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:30, 31). Paul is the pre-eminent spokesman for this gospel; it is his calling to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles (Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 16:26). By the power of the Spirit of God, the gospel call effects what it calls for.

6. Does the thesis that justifying faith is obedient faith contradict LC 71 which says, "requiring nothing of them for their justification but faith"? To answer this question it is necessary to note the point of LC 71 as a whole: How is justification an act of God's free grace? LC 71 says, in effect, that although justification requires the satisfaction of Christ and so costs God something, as far as we are concerned, it is free grace for nothing is required of us by way of an atonement for sin, or by way of "good works" on the ground of which we can make ourselves acceptable to God. All that is required of us is that we receive what Christ has done for us. This reception is by faith, and the definition of faith is spelled out in LC 72 with a focus on its distinctive and characteristic features.

When we go on to say, as we must, in terms of WCF XI, 2, and XV, 3, that this faith is the kind of faith which turns from sin and works by love, we are not contradicting LC 71; for the obedience implied in obedient faith is not intended to atone for sin or supply a ground of acceptance with God. It is simply that the faith "wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and word of God" (LC 72) is a living and active faith.

In the course of the faculty discussions, LC 71 has been harmonized with WCF XI, 2 and XV, 3 by arguing that works are added to faith after faith has justified, and that one kind of repentance comes before justification, and another kind after justification. I do not find this reading of XI, 2 and XV, 3 tenable in the light of Gal. 5:6 and James 2:14-26, and the biblical teaching on repentance unto forgiveness. It is out of harmony with the interpretations of Shaw and A. A. Hodge (see October study paper, pp. 10, 11) and Murray (see Appendix B). The preferable harmony is achieved if we simply recognize that the faith required by justification is a penitent faith. We must guard against two things: 1) supplementing faith with works contrary to Rom. 3:28; and 2) abstracting faith from its working character, contrary to Gal. 5:6.

7. In the theological tradition of which Westminster Seminary is a part, we have been very careful to guard against supplementing faith with works, contrary to Rom. 3:28, and rightly so. But have we been as careful to guard against an attenuated and abstract conception of faith such as is frequently found in modern evangelicalism? Luther worked with such an abstract conception (at least at certain points), and this

led him to reject the canonicity of James and Hebrews. The Reformed faith does not have such a conception and therefore is in a position, not merely to tolerate, but to embrace James and Hebrews as gospel truth.

The faculty report warns of the danger that to lay emphasis on the obedience of the obedient faith required for justification can be misconstrued as legalism and neonomianism. This warning is certainly warranted. But it is equally imperative to warn that a failure to recognize and affirm that the faith required for justification is an obedient faith can be misconstrued as cheap decisionism and antinomianism. The Reformed faith is balanced; it guards against both errors. The balance is admirably exhibited in WCF XI, 2, "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love." The Westminster divines cited both Rom. 3:28 and Gal. 5:6 in support of this section of the Confession.

When colleagues who agree with the central thesis that justifying faith is obedient faith warn, nevertheless, that the four citations from the October study paper noted in Part IV, B, of the faculty report contain objectionable elements and may be misleading in the direction of legalism, I can understand, appreciate and profit from this criticism, and am prepared to amend the language accordingly. At the same time, I would ask that the statements, as they appeared in the study paper, be seen in the context of the central thesis that justifying faith is obedient faith, and in the context of my April 15 "Statement" which elaborates upon this thesis. I would also ask that they be read in the light of my effort to understand the application of redemption in terms of the dynamic of covenant grace.

C. The third area of difficulty pertains to the question of the priority of faith to justification. The faculty report concurs in the concerns that led me to call into question the priority of faith to justification, grants that the elimination of priority meets these concerns, and notes the advantages that accrue. It should be noted in particular that neither the faculty report nor I hold that a longer or shorter period of faith and repentance precedes the act of justification at conversion.

At the same time, the report notes the way in which Scripture argues from faith to justification and speaks of this as "some kind of 'logical priority'." I agree with the faculty report at this point, and the report has noted various ways in which this agreement is implied in my study paper.

Both the faculty report and my study paper are concerned to avoid an unacceptable kind of priority, and to accept a warranted kind of priority. The difference is that in my judgment, the term, logical priority, is so ambiguous and liable to misunderstanding that I thought it better to avoid the term. The faculty report does not define what this logical priority is, but refers to it only with a notably vague expression: "some kind of 'logical priority'."

Instead of saying that there is a logical priority of faith to justification, is it not simpler, more direct, and in the interests of good communication just to say that justification is by faith, or that faith is unto justification? "Priority" in the order of the application of redemption almost unavoidably conveys the notion of a temporal priority, but no parties to the discussion want such a temporal priority.

In the history of Reformed theology, the question of priority was much debated and good theologians were found arguing for the priority of justification to faith as well as for the priority of faith to justification. As Murray notes, "The next question we may discuss is the relation of faith to justification. There is difference of judgment on this question among orthodox theologians, some holding that justification is prior, others the reverse" (Redemption--Accomplished and Applied, 1955, p. 102). (See Appendix D).

Most theologians took a middle-of-the-road position, speaking of one justification with both an active sense (justification prior to faith) and a passive sense (faith prior to justification). I believe we can overcome the awkwardness of such a formulation by recognizing the foundation of justification in union with Christ which also marks the beginning of faith as a manifestation of new life in Christ. In terms of union with Christ, the problem of sequence and priorities then recedes into the background.

Justification is by faith. There can be no question about that. But in making this affirmation, Paul's interest was not to teach that there is "some kind of 'logical priority'" of faith to justification, though this may be a legitimate inference from his teaching. His point was that faith, and not the works of the law, is the divinely ordained way of justification. Justification is by faith, not by the works of the law.

D. The fourth area of difficulty has to do with the question, What is excluded by "alone" in the formula, "faith alone"? There is no difference in substance between the faculty report and the October study paper on this matter. The faculty report does not object to the point developed in the study paper that the confessional formula, by faith alone, excludes justification by a method of merit or self-righteousness such as characterized the Pharisees in biblical times and Roman Catholicism to the present time. The faculty report also recognizes my agreement with the faculty's concern that faith in its peculiar character and office be distinguished from the other Christian graces. The difference, if there is one, is simply a matter of emphasis.

"Faith alone" is not an expression found in the Bible (except where it is rejected in James 2:24), but it has been used in the Confession to express a biblical truth, the truth found in such passages as Rom. 3:28, Gal. 2:16, and Phil. 3:9. In these and similar passages, the emphasis, it seems to me, does not fall on the peculiar office of faith as resting upon Christ or trusting in Christ, as distinct, for example, from patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, and the like. The emphasis is on faith as the way of justification by grace, as opposed to justification by the self-righteousness of the works of the law. The argument in Rom. 4:16 is especially clear. Paul does not argue here that justification is by faith because faith is extraspective whereas the other virtues are not. Rather, justification is by faith that it might be in accordance with grace, as opposed to justification by the law which is neither of faith nor of grace.

If we go on to ask about the distinctiveness of faith, then, of course, we must say as I did in my April 15 "Statement," that "the office of faith is to abandon all self-righteousness and to rest upon or apprehend the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone as the exclusive ground of forgiveness and acceptance by God." Faith is, indeed, extraspective. It is not my desire or intention to suppress this point or relegate it to the background. Rather, the argument of the October study paper was precisely that the distinctiveness of faith as accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ and his

righteousness enabled Paul to set the way of justification by grace through faith so powerfully over against the rejected way of justification through meritorious self-righteousness. (See pp. 33, 34. "Faith by its very definition is the rejection of self-righteousness, and an active resting upon Christ in obedience to his gracious call," p. 34.)

Norman Shepherd

Appendix A

Citations from Reformed theologians on the
Relation Between Faith and Works

Calvin, Institutes, III. 11. 20.

"We, indeed, acknowledge with Paul, that the only faith which justifies is that which works by love (Gal. 5:6); but love does not give it its justifying power. Nay, its only means of justifying consists in its bringing us into communication with the righteousness of Christ."

Ibid., III. 16. 1.

"Thus it appears how true it is that we are justified not without, and yet not by works, since in the participation of Christ, by which we are justified, is contained not less sanctification than justification."

Calvin, Commentary on Gal. 5:6.

"It is not our doctrine that the faith which justifies is alone. We maintain that it is always joined with good works. But we contend that faith avails by itself for justification. The Papists themselves, like murderers, tear faith to pieces, sometimes making it informis and empty of love, and sometimes formata. But we deny that true faith can be separated from the Spirit of regeneration. When we debate justification, however, we exclude all works."

Walaeus, as cited by Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics, p. 561.

"When we say that we are justified per solam fidem, by that we do not mean empty faith:—but we are dealing with living faith effectual through love, although it does not borrow from love the power to justify."

Turretin, Institutes, Loc. XVI, Qu. 8 ("Does Faith Alone Justify?")

VI. 3. The question is not, whether solitary faith, that is, separated from the other virtues, justifies, which we grant could not easily be the case, since it is not even true and living faith, but whether it alone concurs to the act of justification, which we assert: as the eye alone sees, but not when torn out of the body. Thus the article alone does not determine the subject, but the predicate, that is, faith only does not justify, but faith justifies alone: the coexistence of love in him who is justified is not denied, but its coefficientcy or cooperation in justification.

4. The question is not, whether the faith which justifies works by love, because otherwise it would not be living but dead; but whether by which it justifies, or in the act itself of justification it is to be considered under such a relation which we deny.

XVI. Although the whole force of justifying on the part of man is in faith, as to the act of apprehension, so that other virtues contribute nothing to it with faith; it does not follow that faith can justify when they are absent as well as when they are present, yea, even when the opposite vices are present; because it is one thing to justify without virtues, that is separated from them, which we deny; another for it to justify alone, but not separated from them. As it does not follow, the hand alone writes, the eye alone sees; therefore, as such when torn from the head and

the other members as in the body; the sole force of respiration is in the lungs; the lungs can respire torn out from the liver and other viscera, equally as well as when connected with them, which everyone sees to be absurd. There are hundreds of things of this kind, which have a certain proper efficacy and effect, which still, when separated from their adjuncts, lose all their power. Natural potencies are connected as to existence, but disjoined as to operation. Light and heat in the sun are most closely connected together, but still the light alone illuminates, the heat alone warms. Although, therefore, the other virtues do not justify with faith, still faith cannot justify in their absence, much less the opposite vices being present; because faith cannot be true, unless in connection with the virtues, which if they do not contribute as to justification, still contribute to the existence and life of faith, which the presence of vices would destroy.

Murray, Redemption—Accomplished and Applied (1955), pp. 160f.

"Justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone."
Faith alone justifies but a justified person with faith alone would be a monstrosity which never exists in the kingdom of grace. Faith works itself out through love (cf. Gal. 5:6). And faith without works is dead (cf. James 2:17-20). It is living faith that justifies and living faith unites to Christ both in the virtue of his death and in the power of his resurrection."

Bavinck, Gereformeerde Dogmatick (4th ed.), IV, 206f.

Preceding the citation given below, Bavinck had considered the question agitated in the classic period of Reformed theology whether faith preceded or followed justification. Reputable theologians were found on both sides of the issue. Bavinck notes, however, that the majority followed the middle road by recognizing a distinction between justification in an active sense (justification preceding faith) and justification in a passive sense (justification following faith). Bavinck holds to it and describes three advantages in maintaining the distinction between active justification and passive justification. The third is as follows:

"Thirdly, the distinction mentioned makes it possible for us to conceive of faith at the same time as a receptive organ and as an active power ((werkzame kracht)). If justification in every respect comes about after faith, faith becomes a condition, an activity ((werkzaamheid)), which must be performed by man beforehand, and it cannot be purely receptive. But if the righteousness, on the ground of which we are justified, lies wholly outside of us in Christ Jesus, then it can obviously only become ours through our childlike acceptance of it. "Remission of sins is the thing promised on account of Christ. Therefore it cannot be accepted except by faith alone, for a promise cannot be accepted except by faith alone" ((Augsburg Confession)). Faith is therefore not a causa materialis or formalis, it is not even a condition or instrument (causa instrumentalis) of justification, for it stands in relation to justification not as, for example, the eye to seeing or the ear to hearing; it is not a condition, upon which, nor an instrument or organ, through which we receive this benefit, but it is the acceptance itself of Christ and all his benefits, as he offers himself to us through word and Spirit, and it includes therefore also the consciousness, that He is my Lord and I am his possession. Faith is therefore not an instrument in the proper sense, of which man makes use in order to accept Christ, but it is a sure knowledge and a solid confidence which the Holy Spirit works in the heart and through which He persuades and assures man that he, not withstanding all his sins, has part in Christ and in all his benefits.

"But if this faith is saving faith, then it cannot be a notitia historiae ((historical knowledge)) or a nudus assensus ((bare assent)); it is at bottom a living and active ((werkzaam)) faith, and it does not stand opposed to all work ((alle werk)) in every respect. It forms a contrast with the works of the law in a double sense, namely therein, that these ((works)) can be neither the causa materialis nor the causa instrumentalis of justification. It also stands opposed to the works of faith ((justitia infusa, obedientia, caritas)) the moment these are to any degree viewed as the ground of justification, as forming as a whole or in part that righteousness on the ground of which God justifies us; for that is Christ and Christ alone; faith itself is not the ground of justification and thus also neither are the good works which come forth from it. (But faith does not stand opposed to work, if one were to mean by that, that only a dead, inactive faith ((een dood, werkeloos geloof)) can justify us. For the quarrel between Rome and the Reformation did not have to do with whether we are justified by an active or inactive faith, or by a living or a dead faith. But the question was, just as it was for Paul, whether faith with its works, or whether faith apart from its works, justifies us before God and in our consciences. And further, faith does not stand opposed to the works of faith, in so far as these, as the fruit of faith are used by the Holy Spirit as a means to assure the believer of the sincerity of his faith and thus of his salvation. In this sense faith itself is a work, John 6:29, the best work and the principle ((beginnel)) of all good works. Therefore the Reformed also said that it is indeed fides sola, quae justificat, fides tamen, quae justificat non est sola ((faith alone which justifies, but however, the faith which justifies is not alone)), and they spoke in addition to the justificatio peccatoris ((justification of the sinner)) also of a justificatio justi ((justification of the righteous)). In this sense also Paul and James are not in contradiction to each other. It is indeed not right to say that Paul speaks only of the justificatio peccatoris and James of the justificatio justi. Rather, both deny that the ground of justification lies in the works of the law, and both recognize that faith, living faith, faith that includes and brings forth good works ((het geloof, het levend geloof, het geloof, dat goede werken insluit en voorbrengt)) is the means by which the Holy Spirit assures us of our righteousness in Christ. In this there is only this difference, that Paul contends against dead works and James declaims against dead faith. The faith that justifies is the assurance wrought in our hearts by the Holy Spirit of our righteousness in Christ. And therefore, not the more passive, but the more lively and the more powerful it is, so much the more does it justify us. Faith works together with works and is perfected by works, James 2:22."

Machen, What Is Faith?, 1925, p. 204.

"All that is clear from what has already been said. But it is quite inconceivable that a man should be given this faith in Christ, that he should accept this gift which Christ offers, and still go on contentedly in sin. For the very thing which Christ offers us is salvation from sin--not only salvation from the guilt of sin, but also salvation from the power of sin. The very first thing that the Christian does, therefore, is to keep the law of God: he keeps it no longer as a way of earning his salvation--for salvation has been given him freely by God--but he keeps it joyously as a central part of salvation itself. The faith of which Paul speaks is, as Paul himself says, a faith that works through love; and love is the fulfilling of the whole law. Paul would have agreed fully with James that the faith of which James speaks in our passage is quite insufficient for salvation. The faith that Paul means when he speaks of justification by faith alone is a faith that works."

Appendix B

Murray on Repentance Unto Life

The following are notes taken by Robert B. Strimple in the course on the Westminster Confession of Faith given by John Murray.

Chapter XV. Of Repentance Unto Life

The very title here is significant. It is a repentance unto life and therefore to be distinguished from that sorrow of the world which is unto death, because it does not spring from a true hatred of sin and forsaking of it but rather from an apprehension of the penal consequences of sin. It does not lead to life because it does not apprehend the mercy of God in Christ.

I. The Necessity of Repentance

a. Necessary to Salvation. Sec. 3. It is not the ground of pardon nor is it the cause of pardon. When the Confession says it is not to be rested in as any satisfaction for sin or any cause of the pardon thereof, that statement is directed against the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance, according to which satisfaction must be made for temporal ill-desert for all post-baptismal sin.

In opposition to that position the Confession says that pardon is the act of God's free grace and by implication that the ground is the satisfaction of Christ. Nevertheless, the burden of this section is to the effect that repentance is a condition of pardon. The Confession is careful to refrain from calling repentance the instrument of pardon or even the means of pardon, because, as you will remember, in Chapter XI the Confession had insisted that faith is the alone instrument of justification. That chapter made clear that pardon of sin is included in justification.

Faith is the one instrument of justification which includes the remission of the judicial condemnation of all sin--past, present, and future. But that faith is not the only condition of salvation. It is to be noted that in this chapter the accent falls upon the pardon of sin as that which accrues from repentance. In that respect the Confession reproduces the emphasis of Scripture itself, for repentance is represented in Scripture as unto the remission of sins; and it is particularly the grace of remission that is attached to repentance, the remission that is included in justification and the remission which is continually administered to the believer as he humbles himself, confesses his sin, begs pardon, and renews his faith and repentance.

b. Necessary that it be preached. Sec. 1. Apparently at the time of the Assembly there was need for emphasis on that truth just as there is in our situation today. It needs to be underlined because of the tendency to make faith and faith alone the one condition of salvation. It is according to the gospel to set forth faith as the alone instrument of salvation, but it impoverishes the gospel to forget that it is not the sole condition of salvation.

Appendix C

Lutheran Theologians on Repentance

Th. Engelder, et al., Popular Symbolics, St. Louis: Concordia, 1934, pp. 214, 215.

The Roman Catholic sacrament of penance, as we should expect, was rejected by Zwingli, Calvin, and their followers. With great earnestness they preached heart repentance. But they did not keep themselves entirely free from error on this vital subject. Instead of teaching that repentance consists of contrition or terror with respect to one's sins, on the one hand, and of faith, on the other, they define repentance as occurring when the "old man" dies and the "new man" arises, acts which are the fruits of repentance and not to be confused with repentance itself. The Heidelberg Catechism says, Qus. 88-90: "Of how many parts does the true repentance or conversion of man consist? Of two parts: the death of the old and the arising of the new man. What is the dying of the old man? It is to feel heartily sorry over one's sin and to hate and flee it more and more. What is the arising of the new man? To rejoice heartily in God and to have the wish and desire to live according to His will in all good works." In a number of confessional writings that have emanated from, and have been endorsed by, Reformed church-bodies, we find a lack of clearness in the use of the word repentance. Calvin in the Geneva Catechism, chap. on Faith, speaks of repentance in terms which should be used only of those that have been converted, because he includes in his description hatred of sin and love of righteousness, attitudes which are not found in the unregenerate. See also Calvin, Inst. III, 156-160. The Westminster Confession says (XV, 1): "Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the Gospel as well as that of faith in Christ."

Heinrich Schmid, The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, E.T., n.d., pp. 468-469.

The sources cited are: The Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Ap. Conf.), 1530; John Gerhard (Grh.), 1582-1637; Philip Melancthon (Mel.), 1497-1560; and David Hollaz (Holl.), 1646-1713.

Ap. Conf. (V, 28): "We maintain that repentance consists of two parts, viz., contrition and faith." Grh. (VI, 234): "The number of leading divisions of the heavenly doctrine, by the ministry of which the Holy Spirit proclaims true and saving repentance and produces it in the hearts of men, is the same as the number of essential parts of repentance. There are now two general classes of heavenly doctrine by which the Holy Spirit preaches and produces repentance, viz., the Law and the Gospel. Therefore there are two essential parts of repentance. The connection of the major premise is plain, because each of these two doctrines produces its peculiar and proper effect in converting man; these two effects, although different from each other, nevertheless concur harmoniously to the production of the one common end of repentance. The Law produces pain, by manifesting the atrocity of sin and the anger of God against it, and accusing man on account of his transgression. The Gospel offers to terrified and contrite man Christ, the Mediator, who died on the altar of the cross for our sins."

The Ap. Conf. adds further (V, 28): "If any one desire to add a third (part), namely, fruits worthy of repentance, that is, a change of the whole life and conduct for the better, we will not oppose;" and Mel. (Loc. c. Th., II, 4): "The parts are contrition and faith. New obedience ought necessarily then to follow; if any one desire to

call this a third part, I have no objection." From the times of Grh. (VI, 245) it was more explicitly stated: "That, properly and accurately speaking, good works do not constitute a part of repentance." Holl. (1147): "New obedience is not a part but an effect of repentance." But (1148): "New obedience inseparably follows repentance, and cannot be severed from it even in the case of the dying."

Appendix D

Active and Passive Justification

L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, rpt. 1965, pp. 516-517.

The question as to the sphere in which justification occurs, must be answered with discrimination. It is customary to distinguish between an active and a passive, also called an objective and a subjective, justification, each having its own sphere.

1. ACTIVE OR OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION. This is justification in the most fundamental sense of the word. It is basic to what is called subjective justification, and consists in a declaration which God makes respecting the sinner, and this declaration is made in the tribunal of God. This declaration is not a declaration in which God simply acquits the sinner, without taking any account of the claims of justice, but is rather a divine declaration that, in the case of the sinner under consideration, the demands of the law are met. The sinner is declared righteous in view of the fact that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. In this transaction God appears, not as an absolute Sovereign who simply sets the law aside, but as a righteous Judge, who acknowledges the infinite merits of Christ as a sufficient basis for justification, and as a gracious Father, who freely forgives and accepts the sinner. This active justification logically precedes faith and passive justification. We believe the forgiveness of sins.

2. PASSIVE OR SUBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION. Passive or subjective justification takes place in the heart or conscience of the sinner. A purely objective justification that is not brought home to the sinner would not answer the purpose. The granting of a pardon would mean nothing to a prisoner, unless the glad tidings were communicated to him and the doors of the prison were opened. Moreover, it is exactly at this point that the sinner learns to understand better than anywhere else that salvation is of free grace. When the Bible speaks of justification, it usually refers to what is known as passive justification. It should be borne in mind, however, that the two cannot be separated. The one is based on the other. The distinction is simply made to facilitate the proper understanding of the act of justification. Logically, passive justification follows faith; we are justified by faith.

A Further Response
to a Special Report of the Faculty to the Board
on the Discussion of Faith and Justification

March 1, 1978

At its meeting on February 9 and 10, 1978, the board passed a motion requesting the undersigned to present to the faculty and board by March 1, 1978, an amended formulation which eliminates the "objectionable elements" and "misleading statements" in accordance with the comments in par. 2, lines 4 and 5, p. 8, of my January 3, 1978, Response to the board. In the Response I wrote: "When colleagues who agree with the central thesis that justifying faith is obedient faith warn, nevertheless, that the four citations from the October study paper noted in Part IV, B, of the faculty Report contain objectionable elements and may be misleading in the direction of legalism, I can understand, appreciate and profit from this criticism, and am prepared to amend the language accordingly."

This offer was made on the background of two statements. The first is found in the faculty Report, May 17, 1977, p. 1: "On the basis of all available information the faculty has concluded that certain of Mr. Shepherd's statements on the subject of justification require further consideration and modification to avoid obscuring the teaching of Scripture and of the Westminster Standards." The second statement appears in the letter to the board of May 23, 1977, signed by Messrs. Dillard, Frame, Gaffin, Van Til and Woolley: "Some of us believe that Mr. Shepherd has made certain statements during the course of the discussion, particularly in the October 1976 study paper, that are unclear and misleading."

In what follows, I shall comment on each of these four statements and propose a modified wording.

1. Concerning the citation from p. 24 of the October Study Paper: "It is simply that in order to reach the heavenly city, we must enter upon the path of faith, repentance, and obedience to Christ; and we must stay on that path in order to reach the goal which is our justification and eternal life."

From the discussion I understand the problem here to arise from the fact that justification is understood most commonly to refer to God's declarative judgment at conversion. The statement would then appear to suggest that prior to this act a sinner must render obedience to Christ, so that in some fashion works become a contributing cause to his justification contrary to the biblical teaching that justification is not by the works of the law.

However, in my Study Paper at this point, justification was being used in an eschatological sense for the open acquittal (LC 90; SC 38) of the believer on the Day of Judgment in the consummation of all things. I believe that Matthew 12:37, Romans 2:13, and Galatians 5:5 provide warrant for this usage. The statement does not express, nor was it intended to express, the view that acts of obedience to Christ are necessary prior to the justification of the sinner at conversion. In order to make this point clear, I would offer the following amended formulation of the first part of the paragraph in which the quoted statement appears:

If we bring together at this point what we have observed concerning the word, or the external call of the gospel, the sacraments, both Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and now concerning discipline, one consistent picture emerges with respect to the Confession's teaching on the means of grace and marks of the true church. It is simply that in order to be acquitted on the Great Day of Judgment in the consummation of all things at the end of the age, we must enter upon the path of faith, repentance, and obedience to Christ; and we must stay on that path in order to stand in the final judgment and ultimately enter into eternal life. Because of the faithfulness of our covenant God, we know and are fully assured that the goal is not only attainable but ours already. In entering upon that path at conversion, the children of God receive and have imputed to them the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ through faith in him for their justification; they are adopted as Sons of God, and are definitively sanctified. They are saved; but it is also true that they must endure to the end to be saved. (Psalm 1:4-6; Matthew 7:21; 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13; Luke 13:3, 5; 21:19; John 15:5, 6; Romans 6:16, 22; I Corinthians 6:9-11; 10:5, 6, 12; Galatians 6:7-9; Hebrews 3:6, 14; 6:10-12; 10:22-27, 36-39; 12:11-14; James 2:14). Yet even in the final judgment, the ground of the believer's acquittal and acceptance by God remains what it was from the moment of his conversion; the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to him and received by faith.

2. Concerning the citations from pp. 19 and 22 of the October Study Paper (Since the citation from p. 22 refers back to the statement cited from p. 19, these will be considered together.): p. 19, "...faith coupled with obedience to Christ is what is called for in order to salvation and therefore in order to justification;" p. 22, "Thus, faith and new obedience are in order to justification and salvation."

The problem here would appear to be the implicit denial that at conversion a sinner believes and is justified. The statements are understood to suggest that prior to justification there must be both faith and works and that works are a contributing cause to our justification contrary to the biblical teaching that justification is not by the works of the law.

This, however, is not my meaning. The "in order to" in these two statements refers to inevitable and necessary correlation, not to temporal priority.

At conversion the sinner believes and faith alone receives the righteousness of Christ for his justification. Prior to his conversion he neither believes nor obeys Christ. At conversion the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him and is received by faith.

Faith, however, is not simply the act of a moment. It is an ongoing reality in the life of the believer. He is not simply one who has believed, but one who believes--he is a believer (Hebrews 11:1ff.). Similarly the act of justification at conversion results in a state of justification or a state of having-been-justified. In this state the believer continues to rest upon Christ alone for justification. Being in, and remaining in Christ, he is not under condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

Further, faith is the result of God's sovereign regeneration of the sinner, and in the words of Professor John Murray, "Regeneration is such a radical, pervasive, and efficacious transformation that it immediately registers itself in the conscious activity of the person concerned in the exercises of faith and repentance and new obedience" (Redemption--Accomplished and Applied, 1955 ed., pp. 128, 129; 1961 ed., pp. 104, 105). The regenerate man is no longer flesh, but spirit (John 3:6). Whether repentance and new obedience be viewed as the concomitant of faith, or the fruit of faith, or the evidence of faith, without them, faith is dead. It neither is, nor was it ever a true, genuine, justifying, or saving faith. In this sense, justifying faith, which alone of all the virtues bestowed by the Spirit at conversion receives the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ for justification, is, nevertheless, an obedient faith.

The argument in the paragraph on p. 19 from which a part of a sentence has been cited, as noted above, proceeded from the confessional affirmations that none are to be baptized until they profess faith in and obedience unto Christ (WCF 28/4; LC 166; SC 95) and that baptism is a sign and seal of ingrafting into Christ and partaking of the benefits of Christ including regeneration and remission of sins (WCF 28/1; LC 165; SC 94). It would be impossible to exclude justification from the benefits of Christ partaken of in union with him.

Since faith is the bond of union with Christ from the side of the believer, it would have been sufficient for the standards to have asked simply for a profession of faith in Christ as the necessary condition in adults for the proper administration of baptism. Instead, they ask for a profession of "faith in Christ, and obedience to him." The intention of this formula is to secure the assurance that the baptismal candidate is professing a faith which is true and genuine, the only kind of faith by which a believer abides in Christ and continues to partake of his benefits (I John 3:23, 24). However the obedience is related to faith, whether as concomitant, as fruit, or as evidence, there is an inevitable and necessary correlation between faith and obedience which is simply a humble walk with the Lord (Micah 6:8) on the one hand, and union with Christ and the enjoyment of the benefits of that union on the other.

In order to clarify the language of the Study Paper, I would offer the following amended formulation of the latter part of paragraph 2, p. 19:

There is one profession to be made of both faith and obedience. It is a profession of total commitment of the whole man, body, soul, mind, and strength, to Christ in response to preaching which does, or ought to call for such a response. When one considers that the profession is the audible expression of the heart with a view to the sign and seal of ingrafting into Christ and the appropriation of the benefits of saving grace, one can easily see how obedient faith is viewed as a necessary, but certainly not meritorious, condition for being in a state of salvation and thus in a state of justification.

I would offer the following amended formulation of the first part of the last paragraph on p. 22:

We could at this point reiterate what was observed in connection with the observance of baptism and the prerequisite of a profession of faith and obedience. Baptism signs and seals our ingrafting into Christ and participation in his benefits including justification and salvation itself. Thus, obedient faith is a necessary condition for being in a state of justification and salvation.

3. Concerning the citation from p. 15 of the October Study Paper: "What is necessary for this justification is not faith-alone, but faith and repentance. But the catechisms say more. There is also required the diligent use of the outward means of grace."

Presumably the difficulty here is again that the language is understood to imply that not only works (spoken of here as repentance) but also the use of the means of grace (word and sacraments) are required as prerequisite to, and as contributing to the justification of the sinner at conversion. This, however, is not my meaning.

To be noted is the precise formulation of the citation under consideration: "What is necessary for this justification. . ." (emphasis added). The justification in view is the one described in the last clause of the preceding sentence: "that they might escape the wrath and curse of God due to them because of their sin." The quotation from p. 15 may therefore be amended to read:

What is necessary that men might escape the wrath and curse of God due to them because of their sin is not faith exclusive of repentance, but faith and repentance. The catechisms say more. There is also required the diligent use of the outward means of grace whereby Christ communicates to them the benefits of redemption.

The point here is simply what is expressly stated in SC 85: "What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin? To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption." Virtually the same words are used in LC 153.

The next three questions of the Shorter Catechism, 86, 87, 88, identify what is meant by faith, repentance, and the diligent use of outward means, respectively, referred to in Q. 85. Faith is defined as "a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him Christ alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel" (86). Repentance is defined as a saving grace whereby a sinner "doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience" (87). The outward means of grace are Christ's ordinances, "especially the word, sacraments, and prayer" (88).

The doctrine to which the Seminary is committed holds that to escape the wrath and curse of God due to the sinner because of his sin, faith and repentance as defined in Qs. 86 and 87 are required of him. The language of requirement at this point is not that of the undersigned, but that of the catechisms.

The question may be raised whether it was misleading to have used the word justification to refer to escape from the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin. Does escape from the wrath and curse of God due to us by reason of the transgression of the law bring us into the sphere of justification as the Study Paper suggested? Toward an answer to that question, I would offer the following observations: 1. Escape from the wrath and curse of God cannot naturally be understood as descriptive of regeneration, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, assurance, or glorification. 2. The faith described in SC 86 as required for this escape is identical with what is described in LC 72 as "justifying faith." 3. Wrath and curse are the penalty due to us for sin (SC 84). This penalty Christ bore when he died upon the cross. This obedience of Christ is imputed to us in justification so that our sin is forgiven and we are acceptable to God. Because our sin is forgiven and we are acceptable to God, we escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for our sin. 4. Wrath and curse describe the judicial liability accruing to us from sin. Justification is a judicial benefit and includes the annulment of the judicial condemnation arising from sin. 5. What must be said of justification must also be said of escape from the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin: it is not by law, nor by works, nor by the works of the law, nor by works done in righteousness; it is by grace through faith.

A further question may be posed whether the escape from wrath and curse is viewed as occurring at conversion, after conversion during the life of the believer, or at the final judgment. The catechisms do not answer this question specifically. The catechisms are practical in their instruction and simply make clear what is required of us in order to receive the described benefit. They do this immediately after noting, however, that "every sin deserveth God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come" (SC 84). As long as men continue unrepentant and unbelieving, they cannot know themselves to be free from the wrath and curse of God.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize, as I hope this amended formulation of the four controversial statements has made clear, that in these statements or in anything else I have written or said, I have never intended to say that works, however conceived, contribute, whether as ground or instrument or in any other way, to the justification (forgiveness of sins, imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness) of the sinner at conversion. Rather, all I have said about good works in relation to justification is to stress that living or obedient faith is necessary and integral to a believer's continuing in the ongoing state of justification which the Christian life is.

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NS:mlk
March, 1978