
Part III: Village Groups

As you study and discuss each of the following chapters, consider what is most important for the LWF as a communion of churches to be **saying** and **doing** in this area.

(Share your proposals with your church's Assembly delegates and/or with the Assembly Content Coordinator: kbl@lutheranworld.org)



A. God's Healing Gift of Justification



With the signing of the Joint Declaration, renewed ecumenical attention is being given to the doctrine of justification. What is the relationship between justification, healing and “new creation”? In what ways is salvation as forgiveness of sin, liberation from bondage and spiritual healing especially needed today? How does this speak to peoples deepest spiritual yearnings? What difference do factors such as context and gender make? How can congregations proclaim and live this out more fully?

Is it worth it?

We may wonder about the reason for living, about the worth of it all—when standing at the grave of a loved one or when working the fields under a scorching sun, when we have lost a job, or are ravaged by disease. The question can emerge with a groan from the bottom of our conflicted soul, with any breath that we take, any birthday that we celebrate, any time our stomachs growl with emptiness, or when faced with tragic sights such as children scavenging through rubbish.

The question surfaces with a new impetus in the face of the tremendous contrasts separating people on our planet. To be able to consume, to carry on a lifestyle

in tune with the latest trends, to enjoy leisure time with loved ones, even to have a meal a day, becomes a great question mark in the ocean of poverty in which we live. Economic crises can make it feel as if the bottom had dropped out of everything. Those of us who are excluded have lost any hope, any foothold even to ask the question: Are we worthy of anything? The question is always there; it must be seized, articulated, freed from the drowsiness of our poverty and illusions of our wealth.

What happens when that question arises? Will we be able to patch up the gorge or mend the rift that opens up? Are we able to stabilize the quake it unleashes? When things begin to open, break, shake and slide, what do we hold on to? We can become incredibly destructive when no answer looms on the horizon. We begin destroying first ourselves, then the neighbor and finally nature. Or it may be the other way around. The illusion of seeking worth by destroying the “other” is a constant theme in the human drama.

How does this question of the worth of living arise in your life or context?

The message of justification

In the face of questions such as these, the Lutheran tradition has always held fast to the testimony of God’s saving action in Christ, usually referred to as justification by grace through faith. Luther spoke of this doctrine as the article by which the church stands or falls. It carried a vibrant message for a world on the brink of collapse. But, today, when

How has the message of justification spoken, or not spoken, to you?

our churches speak of justification, it is often merely a dull drone. People who still listen to the church and its sermons wonder: What do we have to be justified **from** or **for**? They do not necessarily expect that the doctrine of justification will answer all the questions that trouble them, but the way in which we speak of justification may not even come close answering the most basic question: Is it worth it? The answer of justification by grace through faith seems to come “out of the blue,” an unsolicited answer to a nonexistent question, a piece of history with no anchor in our present.

The rich message of this doctrine flourishes when addressed to our human struggles to live faithfully—from the doubts that crop up in the light of modern biotechnologies, to the wounds that we have inflicted on the mountains, forests, rivers and seas, to the hurt of hunger and unemployment, to the increasing doubts about our place in a globalized economy which exalts the successful instead of rescuing the failing. The many concerns that we hear daily on the radio, TV, or in casual conversations are undergirded by questions that strip naked the human venture: What are we doing? What gives us the right to do so? How far should we go? Why is this happening to us?

The doctrine of justification points us toward an answer that has to come from somewhere else. As a community of faith, can we grasp the powerful yet hidden presence of God in the midst of all this? This requires us to give a name to the modern crosses that we experience. For it is at the foot of the cross that the message of justification becomes meaningful.

The question about God and salvation undergirds our different experiences in today’s pluralized world. God is the Redeemer as well as the Creator and Sanctifier of life. As Luther knew, the experience of God conceals itself in and through other experiences, in what ap-

pears as the opposite of God’s majesty and glory. This means that God can speak to us amid doubts about the “truth” of our faith, in our loneliness, in our despair over a broken marriage, when we feel impotent in the face of powerful economic forces, when we lack self-esteem, in our frustration with an unfaithful church. These moments and places can open up space where God is acting and make us participants in God’s own creation. God is present particularly there where creation hurts most. Suffering is a sign that healing is required, not a temporary cure, but the everlasting healing of God’s gracious presence.

How can we raise our questions from these places that hurt the most, from these experiences that seem pointless, from these moments in which we have felt worthless, from the turbulence of our lives shattered by forces beyond our responsibility and control? Some of us may conceal these experiences out of shame or fear; others may embrace today’s popular causes in order to gain some prestige, or to placate the guilt about how we live. Still others may honestly recognize and face the wounds in their lives and in the lives of those around them, yet expect to be quickly restored and “propped up” so as to continue enjoying a full and rich life. The question is whether we are willing to let God touch us in the core of our being, in the marrow of our bones, in the shadows of our minds and crevices of our feelings, in the web of our relationships.

Share with each other how these kinds of questions emerge for you.

To be healed is nothing less than letting Christ take shape in and among us. It is letting the Holy Spirit enter our lives, healing all that hinders us from being whole, integral and grateful creatures of our Creator. This is another way of talking about the core of the gospel,

namely, that God sets creation aright in Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of all creation. To speak openly of what needs to be set aright gives a clearer picture of what God intends for creation. To do so, our language about justification needs to be transformed or healed.

Transforming our understandings of justification

The way in which the doctrine of justification has usually been formulated has been blamed for many things: from being an outdated formulation intelligible only to medieval Christians to an open apology for doing nothing; from being a dead symbol to promoting spiritual apartheid from other faiths; from unilaterally reducing the biblical richness to being oblivious to worldly issues.

There is some truth to these allegations, caused in part by shortcomings in the witness of the Lutheran churches. For example, in Nazi Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer denounced a pseudo-Lutheranism that preached forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptized without regard to discipline and distributed communion without confession of sin. He called this a “cheap grace,” a grace without discipleship, without the cross, a grace without Jesus Christ, the source of grace. The corollary was that the central and liberating message of the Reformation—the justification of the sinner—degenerated into the justification of sin and the fallen world with all its injustices. Costly grace without discipleship equals cheap grace.¹

With this type of critique came the renewed realization that the central tenet of the Reformation contains the heart of what Christianity is all about. In the Joint Declaration this has now been affirmed by both Lutherans and Roman

Catholics. Bonhoeffer insisted that the problem is not the doctrinal formulation as such, which is a radical formulation that goes to the core of our relationship with God. Rather, the problem is in us, in the tricks we play to make God's saving act in Christ as innocuous as possible. For example, we subtract from the reality of justification our vital involvement in what God is doing. It is as if we wanted to be varnished with a declaration, but not transformed by an incarnation. Fortunately, we have learned that the doctrine of justification does not excuse us from actively following Christ. Discipleship is an integral dimension of God's saving act in Jesus Christ. Grace and discipleship belong to the very dynamism of God's triune life.

Bonhoeffer's criticism raises a further question. Are our difficulties with the doctrine of justification due to Lutheran attempts to sever every conceivable connection between creation, good works and salvation? Why this obsession? Why divorce discipleship from its vital connection with God's saving action? Justification often appears as a boulder crushing everything beneath it. So much weight has been put on the formula that we have forgotten what it stood for, and the spirit and ethos that it once expressed. The issue at stake is not the technical language of justification, but the matter to which it points. The doctrine of justification is just one way of expounding on the central theme of the New Testament—God's saving work in Jesus Christ.²

In what other ways would you talk about the significance of God's saving action in Christ?

The doctrine of justification must be expanded if we are to appreciate, for example, how the praxis of Christians is relevant for society and for God's plans for the world. Caring for creation is also car-

ing for God's reign. This need for more expansive, social understandings of justification is reflected in efforts to join it with other terms—justification **and** justice, justification **and** sanctification, justification **and** liberation, justification **and** creation, and in this Assembly, justification **and** healing. A dry forensic language is not sufficient for speaking about God's love and concern for creation. These conjunctions provide some relevance to the doctrine, connecting it with other experiences. The "and" has become as critical as the doctrine itself. It opens the window for spelling out what justification means for our lives and the life of the whole creation. Further, this suggests how our lives should be transparent to the message of justification. Once the language of justification is thus relocated, it begins to disclose that which did not seem to be there before.

Luther's own theological thinking never collapsed under the solitary weight of the doctrine of justification. His rich biblical perspective was more holistic. Justification was employed as the indicative voice of what God has done for us through Christ: God has made us participants in Christ's righteousness.³ The doctrine of justification was a means of expressing that the Word comes **from** God, and is more than a word **about** God.⁴ Luther was able to put such an emphasis on justification because it was central to a radical re-conception of God and God's intimate involvement with creation. Luther's formulation of the theology of the cross, which stands at the center of his understanding of the Trinity, is what gives such power to our justification in Christ.

Our participation in this Word, through faith, places us ecstatically "in Christ."⁵ This holistic and trinitarian understanding contrasts with a classical Lutheran forensic interpretation. Through faith, believers receive Christ and his work, and not primarily some

convictions, beliefs or assertions about God and salvation. (These, however, are present in how we understand the nature of faith.) In other words, faith signifies an entire life that is oriented and accompanied by the Holy Spirit. The faith that justifies unites us in such a manner to Christ that we can no longer speak of salvation or justification as our own achievement. As Paul reminds us, “it is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

Our good works, therefore, are not “ours”; they belong to God. They are part and parcel of what God does in the world for the benefit of God’s creation. This is the most radical assault on the claim to private property, in this case, the private property of one’s own works. Justification “raptures” us from the clouds of our own “righteousness” into the only real world that God has made for us (see the Bible studies from Revelation). Created life itself is given back to us as a total gift, not as a toiling burden. In this sense, faith in creation is restored and creation is delivered from its bondage and wounds.⁶

The doctrine of justification conveys the Word **from** God rather than **about** God. Thus, it depends on a triune perspective of God’s being and action, as well as on a view of creation that sees it as the future abode or dwelling place for God in communion with all of God’s creatures.⁷ In this way, justification becomes a powerful message that transforms lives. Further, it opens up our experiences and engagements as places that “are worth it,” places claimed by the sacred for our life in the world. The doctrine of justification is located within the triune dynamism that makes God “God.” Otherwise, we may correctly repeat the classical and orthodox formulation, but at the cost of cheapening the costly grace signified by Christ’s incarnation. Whatever leads to a cheapening of this grace needs to be rectified or healed.

How do you respond to these understandings of justification that pertain to all of creation, and not only individual sinners?

Helsinki, the Joint Declaration and the voices of plurality and contextuality

This “healing” is an important aspect of today’s debate, which is not about whether justification is central, but how it is relevant in daily lives. Not only Lutherans but also our ecumenical partners will reflect on the nature and scope of this doctrine. The signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* between the Roman Catholic Church and the LWF stands as a critical milestone in the ecumenical world. It has spurred a renewed discussion about the relevance and implications of this doctrine within and among these and other churches. A main objective of this Declaration was to state officially that the sixteenth-century doctrinal condemnations in the area of justification no longer apply to the teaching of the two partners. But, the *Official Common Statement* also calls for ongoing attempts to

interpret the message of justification in language relevant for human beings today...with reference both to individual and social concerns of our times.⁸

This is an important item on the ecumenical agenda. As Lutherans, we have much to contribute here because of how we have struggled deeply with this issue in our history. The 1963 LWF Assembly in Helsinki, for instance, attempted to re-examine, re-formulate and restate the doctrine of justification in relation to the experience of “modern man” [*sic*] in a secularized world. At the time, the document “Christ Today” was associated with a



was that this “man” [*sic*] was defined in a thoroughly Western and male-centered way, which spoke only to some parts of the LWF. A second problem was that neither contextuality nor plurality were sufficiently recognized as a dynamic component of the theological reflection.

The Helsinki Assembly signaled the beginning of a paradigm shift, of a widening search for language relevant to contemporary experience. Furthermore, it encouraged other Lutheran voices, particularly from the South, to introduce social-analytical tools for discerning the experiences that had to be critically correlated with the doctrine of justification. The emphasis was not only placed on discerning the preconceptions that we bring to the interpretation of the doctrine, but also on clarifying the different social locations and experiences from which different interpretations arise and to which they must speak. These were the first signs of a genuine pluralism and a wider comprehension of the human situation and predicament. In the ongoing process of LWF theological reflection¹⁰ after Helsinki, the traditional “sages” of Western academia, with their particular understanding of the human experience, began to be considered as **one** voice among many.

passionate debate over different interpretations of the doctrine and its relevance for that time. Instead of being adopted, this document was received and sent to the Commission on Theology for further consideration, formulation and publication, which occurred a year later, under the title “Justification Today.”

The debate at Helsinki set forth the basic agreement among Lutheran churches on the centrality of justification.⁹ At the same time, it revealed the difficulties in defining the modern experience and its relation to the message of justification. No agreement could be reached on a common language that would speak to the hearts and minds of “the man [*sic*] of today.” One problem

One of the new vistas opened up at Helsinki was pursued in the 1960s and 1970s through the LWF study of the relation of justification and justice in relation to the doctrine of the two kingdoms. In the 1980s and 1990s more explicit attempts were made to link God’s justification and the pursuit of justice. The meaning of justification was discussed in different social and economic contexts. The encounter in Brazil in 1988, published under the title *Rethinking Luther’s Theology in the Context of the Third World*, was a visible attempt to connect justification and justice, taking seriously the contextuality of any theological interpretation. Similar efforts were reflected in a seminar held in connection with the

1992 LWF Council, published under the title *Justification and Justice*.

This theme was picked up again at a consultation held in 1998 in Wittenberg, Germany, under the title, “Justification in the World’s Contexts.” Here there was a clearer focus on the plurality of experiences that include, yet go beyond, the socio-economic aspect. The aim of the diverse presentations was to examine the meaning of justification today in the light of our globalized and plural experiences and societies.

Most recently, the LWF’s concern to explore further the distinct and contextual understandings of justification was pursued at an ecumenical symposium held in 2002 in Dubuque, Iowa (USA). This was an intentional follow-up to the recommendations of the *Joint Declaration*, which called not only for a relevant interpretation of the doctrine, but to relate it to the individual as well as the social concerns of our times. Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians, as well as those from other traditions, together probed key hermeneutical, theological, anthropological, ethical and ecclesial challenges today. Among the participants, the social-cultural differences tended to be more significant than the confessional ones.

In sum, the reception of the *Joint Declaration* in different contexts and ecumenically must be seen as critical developments after Helsinki. It has also been a time for identifying the critical fields and tension points of justification with regard to the personal experience and social realities of today. Between 1963 and today there have been two simultaneous trends. On the one hand, interest in the doctrine of justification has widened, not only among Lutherans, but ecumenically. This has uncovered problems inherent in the formulation of the doctrine as such. On the other hand, there has been increasing pluralism in the socio-ethical consequences to be drawn from the doctrine of justification.¹¹ The tension is not

over whether theology should be contextual, for this is the only relevant way in which theology can be cast today if it is to be significant. Rather, the tension is over different understandings of what the “context” is all about. Contexts are always socially construed and respond to different understandings of what are the central issues.¹² In sum, we have come to understand that our experiences are plural, and that therefore the places from which we understand the meaning of justification vary.

Diversity is the threshold for new vistas and understandings. Through this plurality we can reach new consensus over the healing dimension of justification by grace through faith. The concerns arising from different contexts are tied to the central core of the Lutheran tradition. We may disagree about the appropriateness of juridical and forensic language, we may quarrel about the demands of the medieval situation compared with our time, we may even doubt why we should keep the traditional formula. What is clear, despite our differences, is that the doctrine of justification underscores the unmerited salvation, restoration and healing of the human condition. In other words, it makes of us worthy people living in a worthy environment.

What different contextual understandings of justification are present in your group?

Justification and healing

Exploring new language appropriate for new contexts is a faithful way of pursuing the central Lutheran concern to interpret the gospel. This Assembly is taking an important step forward in relating the gospel to the theme of healing. “Healing” helps to bring out important dimensions of salvation and God’s other actions that traditional language has tended to leave out—the whole bodily

and spiritual reality of persons and their relationships in the world and with all of creation. God's saving action involves wholeness and healing; it is the means through which we receive God's healing.

What can we as a Lutheran communion say today about the meaning of justification? How does it to help give us a new understanding of the "worthiness" of our struggles or relationships with one another and creation?

Luther himself used language of healing in relationship to justification, in discussing the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk10:29-37). In the parable's vivid bodily references, Luther saw the nature of God's saving activity in Christ: God becomes our neighbor. The wounded man is reborn through the gratuitous help of the Samaritan (Christ), who takes up his wounded and hopeless situation. The wounded man represents humanity in general, and Christians in particular. "To be justified" becomes practically synonymous with "to be healed." Luther writes, "Everyone who believes in Christ is righteous, not yet fully in point of fact (*in re*), but in hope (*in spe*)." The Christian "has begun to be justified and healed (*sanari*), like the man who was half-dead (*semivivus*)."¹³

Further, for Luther this new work of creation, this healing of the wounded, will be completed in the coming of God's kingdom. In this life, we may not see magical cures or a complete healing of our bodies. Our skin still wrinkles, our flesh hangs ever more loosely on our frames, our eyesight eventually begins to fade. But, it is the promise of the physician that already initiates in us a process of healing.¹⁴ To be justified in Christ, to participate in God's righteousness, is something we await to occur fully at the end of time. God gives us anticipations of this "new" time, even in the present. We are beginning to experience a process of healing. For Luther

this healing begins in the church as a "hospital," where the Spirit daily cleanses our wounds.¹⁵

Relating justification to healing helps to correct how we understand, speak and live our lives as Christians. It corrects a subjectivist, private and anthropocentric understanding of salvation. Traditionally, the doctrine has referred to our terrors of conscience, our desire to be included and accepted, our need to be forgiven, our longing to have a new spiritual beginning. Today, these are still critical ways in which the word of justification comes as the only balm that enables us to keep on living.

While these continue to be constants in the human situation, our spectrum of experiences has widened considerably. Our knowledge and self-understandings have expanded and undergone significant shifts. "Conscience" has acquired more integral connotations.

- As a species we have new awareness of the ways in which all existing matter and energy participate in a common field-force:
- The inextricable link of our minds and bodies with the rest of nature.
- The different levels which compose our identity, which are deeply rooted in the unconscious.
- The complex ways in which sexual and gender identity is lived out.
- The intricate way in which power flows, either lifting people up or excluding them.
- How socio-political and economic systems are part of and impacted by the larger self-regulating bio-physical environment.

Our contemporary experiences and sensitivities shape a new set of questions re-

The scalpel that cuts the flesh to remove disease from within our body, the hospital that nurses us back to health, the drill that excises the decay to restore our teeth, the psychiatrist who walks our mental labyrinths with us, the scientist who seeks new ways to improve life—all indeed are signs of the full healing we await. When lives are set aright they appear as signs of the fullness of life promised to us in Christ.

garding the scope of the healing that we await. Indeed, the healing that we seek and need, the healing that makes everything worthy, is increasingly perceived as communal, ecological and systemic. Such a sensitivity is not foreign to central Christian symbols. As the Spirit of God weaves the whole of creation, healing is that openness to the Spirit that makes us share and partake in the whole. From a Christian point of view, nothing can be really healed if it is not received as a gift from the divine love that has created everything. To be healed is to receive and to participate, to stand and to follow, to await and to pursue. It is to become an integral and responsible member of this circuitry or web that sustains us.

The Holy Spirit heals through these means, reminding us that our lives are worthy. But, bodily or psychological healing without the promise of God's final healing for us and all of creation is like an oar without a boat. Our partial healings are important signs of God's benevolence acquiring their full significance in the light of what God intends to do with the whole of creation (see the Bible study on Romans 8). The healing we receive through the means at God's disposal—through other human beings, institutions, plants and minerals, art and literature, stories and lore—are means by which God makes us integral and wholesome participants in God's creation. God constantly surprises us by the new ways through which this healing work is carried on.

It follows that a life renewed by God is a life lived in responsible and caring relationships with other human beings and the rest of creation. We are called to do so

through the institutions, systems, policies and alliances that shape our lives. No place is exempt from this renewed living that we receive through what God does for us. We must continually struggle with the tendency to withdraw into ourselves and to challenge the different criteria by which worthiness and status are determined in this world. We are transformed in the midst of our struggle with those forces that oppose renewal. Yet, in spite of hardships and failures, our existence, struggles and commitments are worthy because of what happened to and through the wounded one on the cross.

Justification as healing occurs as *koinonia* or *communio* among human beings and with all creatures. In confessing Christ as the foundation and Savior of the world, the healing that we receive can never become something that we possess, a cure that we have achieved, a good that we own. It opens us up to others, connects with our social and natural environments. Furthermore, we receive God's blessings through a renewed creation, which becomes our real place of belonging. There may be truth in some modern techniques of self-cure and self-help, but they are also plagued by the illusion that one is the maker of one's salvation, that we can live whole and integral lives apart from others and against nature. We are promised instead a healing of the whole, not just a temporary relief of its parts.

A Lutheran understanding of the sacraments reminds us of the nature of the healing we proclaim. The sacraments convey that we are true creatures to the

How is justification healing for you?

extent that we constantly receive our being anew from outside, from the wholesome presence of the Spirit. Created elements become means of grace. The community that the sacrament of Holy Communion creates, as we symbolically share the same cup and bread, signifies that everything we are and possess belong to the other. It also speaks about the object of this grace. Life eternal is promised not to a part, but to the **whole of us**—to all the relationships that knit together our bodies, minds and lives. We cannot be healed if these relationships are not healed. Other human beings, families, friendships, economic systems, the woods, rivers, oceans and mountains which surround us—all are intrinsic to what we are and will be.

So, is living worth our while? The doctrine of justification points to the basic answer. It knits together the symbols by which our worth is settled once and for all. God participates integrally in creation through the cross and is totally committed to our world. God becomes especially present in the meanest, lowest and most marginalized corners of creation. Indeed, it is from this cross that we learn that God is truly the Creator and Redeemer of

the world, because if this wounded man is declared worthy, then our wounds, our separations, our sins can be healed, breeched, forgiven. Indeed only a marginalized God can save us, only a wounded God can heal.¹⁶

We do not achieve our worthiness through what we do nor through the institutions that we create, or even through our churches. But, we live out our worthiness in all of these places. Furthermore, we are also affirmed as worthy people of God through the healing that God effects in and through us. A right relationship is worthy, a healthy engagement with nature is worthy, development that refuses to condemn anyone to poverty is worthy, research into new cures is worthy, the liberation of women is worthy, the struggle against exclusion from socio-political decisions is worthy, sound ecological policies are worthy, a peaceful and safe environment within a family is worthy. They are worthy because through these God weaves a wholesome creation. The declaration of worthiness is the chance to receive our created life as a sheer gift, as a promise of wholeness, as a place for the beginning of the fulfillment promised in Christ.

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What questions does this raise for you? How can the church proclaim and live this out more fully?

Notes

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1959), pp. 53, 57.

² There are other ways in which the truth and reality of justification can be lived and asserted today apart from this doctrine. Furthermore, in some catechetical or worship contexts, insisting on the language of justification may cause more harm than good to the cause of the gospel. The doctrine of justification is better served and honored when it is regarded as a “rule” to guide Christian speech and action. As formulated from Paul onwards, it is a critical guide for understanding how the human condition, creation and God are related. Justification insists that salvation not be understood as a badge, medal or prize, but as the gift and presence of the Holy Spirit in the person of the Son.

³ This is one of the most important aspects of Luther’s rediscovery of justification. Theologians often point to the historical data this contains, but forget the theological assertion that Luther sets forward.

⁴ See Gerhard Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 68.

⁵ Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. III (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 215f. He follows the Finnish Luther research interpretation, especially by T. Mannermaa.

⁶ See Forde, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 73.

⁷ Luther’s understanding of baptism as the promise and realization of new creation clearly points in this direction. See Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator: Luther’s Concept of*

the Holy Spirit (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), pp. 145–146.

⁸ The Lutheran World Federation and The Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI.; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 42.

⁹ One should note that the whole study on justification was prompted by a previous study of the Commission on Theology directed by Vilmos Vajta, entitled “The Church and the Confessions: The Role of the Confessions in the Life and Doctrine of the Lutheran Churches.” The research questioned the relevance that the doctrine of justification had for the teaching and practice of the churches of the time. See Jens Holger Schjørring, Prasanna Kumari, Normal A. Hjelm (eds.), *From Federation to Communion: The History of the Lutheran World Federation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 377.

¹⁰ Cf. Vitor Westhelle, “And the Walls Come Tumbling Down: Globalization and Fragmentation in the LWF,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 36/1 (Winter 1997).

¹¹ See Wolfgang Greive (ed.), *Justification in the World’s Context, LWF Documentation 47* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2000), p. 11.

¹² But it is also true that often the context may acquire a normative status of its own to which the doctrine of justification then is accommodated and sometimes violated.

¹³ *LW* 27:227; *WA* 2:495. Luther shows a continuity of this image as we can see in writings from 1516 through 1546.

¹⁴ See *WA* 56:272; "Martin Luther's Lectures on Romans," Wilhelm Pauck (ed.), *Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 15 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 127.

¹⁵ See Luther's last sermon in Wittenberg on Romans 12:3 (January 17, 1546): "If Christ, the Samaritan, had not come, we should all have had to die. He it is who binds our wounds, carries us into the church and is now healing us. So we are now under the Physician's care. The sin, it is true, is wholly

forgiven, but it has not been wholly purged. If the Holy Spirit is not ruling men, they become corrupt again; but the Holy Spirit must cleanse the wounds daily. Therefore this life is a hospital; the sin has really been forgiven, but it has not yet been healed." *LW* 51:373; *WA* 51:124.

¹⁶ Cf. Marcella Althaus-Reid, "The Divine Exodus of God: Involuntary Marginalized, Taking an Option for the Poor, or Truly Marginal?," *Concilium* 2001/1, pp. 27-33.