

## CHAPTER FIVE

### JUSTIFICATION

#### THE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE OF MISSION

#### INTRODUCING THE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE

Anyone who studies theology knows how much content it covers. Theology gathers information from Scripture about God and His dealings with the world and neatly lays out this information into numerous statements called doctrines. Every Christian who reads Scripture engages in theology and constructs doctrines in some way or another. The reader may not always take a learned approach by following a clearly defined methodology of interpreting Scripture, but as one gathers information on God from Scripture, the reader processes it into a coherent whole so that the Word of God speaks one message without contradiction.

What a reader of Scripture might not know is that there is a key that helps him to process the content of the Word of God. The key, as Lutherans believe to be revealed in Scripture, is the doctrine of justification (Acts 15:11; Rom. 1:16-17; 3:28; Eph. 2:9). Some refer to justification as the central or concretizing principle in Scripture because it truly represents the central content of the Bible, which becomes concrete in the person and work of Christ. Justification talks of a God who, through the death of His Son, Jesus, on the cross, has lowered Himself to mankind and has chosen to save us from eternal damnation through the forgiveness of sins that we receive as a gift through faith. This doctrine brings out the good news, the Gospel, that pervades Scripture from beginning to end. Justification moves through all texts like a red thread, and, even where it is not apparent, the reader should still keep it in mind. All statements in the Bible about God, man, the Church, eternal life, and so forth are tied together by the central doctrine of justification; it gives meaning to the entire Word of God and lends itself toward unraveling difficult texts in Scripture.

Theologians have long pointed out that justification serves as the inte-

Thomasius, an important nineteenth-century Lutheran theologian at Erlangen, speaks of justification as the "principle of life" (*Lebensprinzip*) of the Church and the constituting center (*Konstitutiver Mittelpunkt*) of theology.<sup>1</sup> More recently, Carl E. Braaten explains that justification is "not merely a single article among many others, but . . . the foundational truth with generative power affecting the entire organism of Christian faith, life, and thought. The relative importance of any Christian doctrine [is] determined by its proximity to the central article of faith. All doctrines, in fact, must somehow be corollaries of the vital principle of justification."<sup>2</sup>

Thus all other articles of theology connect to one another, and all in turn point to justification. This explains Luther's statement that "all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil and the world stands on the article of justification."<sup>3</sup> In unison with Luther, the confessors of the sixteenth century also hailed the doctrine of justification as the "principle article of the Christian doctrines."<sup>4</sup>

The fact that justification assumes the status of being not only the central article of theology but also the integrating principle explains why it has been called "the doctrine on which the Church stands and falls." We do not know the exact origin of this oft-quoted statement, but it does underscore the undiminished prominence of justification.<sup>5</sup> In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther and his close associate Philip Melancthon must be given credit for pointing to the doctrine of justification as the hermeneutical key for interpreting Scripture and the life and tradition of the Church. Justification serves as the arbiter of all doctrinal statements made by the Church throughout the centuries, which includes a critical analysis of her traditions, structures, and practices. In a recent study by Heinrich Holze, the argument is made that Luther was not blinded by romanticism when it came to judging the past centuries; instead, Luther measured every confession against the hermeneutical key of justification and the Gospel before he was willing to grant any statements a normative character.<sup>6</sup> Thomas C. Oden has boldly defended the Early Church by pointing out that a broad consensus on the doctrine of justification already existed prior to the

Reformation.<sup>7</sup> Oden may be overstating the case in view of other studies.<sup>8</sup> The reformers' more cautious estimate of the Church's tradition comes from the fact they gave justification central status in theology and practices in the Church.

In their struggle to provide clarity to justification as the article for defining salvation, Luther and Melancthon chose very distinctive terms that were borrowed from the courtroom setting; justification is a forensic declaration.<sup>9</sup> A sinner is justified by Christ imputatively and reckoned righteous through a verdict that is pronounced by God and that acquits the sinner of all his sins just as a judge would exonerate the accused of his crime. We are dealing here not merely with a play on words but with a truthful and indispensable choice of descriptions based on Scripture (e.g., Rom. 4:1-12). Luther encountered a soteriology within the Church that demanded clarification because the glory and honor of Christ were at stake in the face of ceremonies, relics, indulgences, and traditions that took authority and trust away from Christ and put it in human works and ideas. Both rulers and theologians joined Luther's struggle and stood firmly at his side as he defended the position that, in terms of salvation, man cannot accomplish anything (Rom. 3:28). God presents the gift of salvation to man, while human sin causes every human being to rely totally on this gift from God and not works; faith passively receives this gift. The doctrine of justification as so understood is no less contradicted today. Life on a day-to-day basis looks at ways to achieve things and to overcome adversities. Such accomplishments are hailed as victories of the will. Even in courtroom situations, the defendant is expected to plead his innocence before the judge and the plaintiff's accusations. Such thinking likewise infiltrates a Christian's understanding of his relationship with God. The Church and its preachers are thus challenged to preach continuously against the thinking of the world since Christians and non-Christians typically forget this biblical concern. It becomes necessary to explain justification and its terms clearly, and ways must be found to apply the principles of justification by Christ through faith in a world that has difficulty comprehending it.

Often, preachers consider other issues more pressing and may eventually lose sight of justification. Some abandon justification intentionally and find alternative ways of entering theology because they think justification

1 Thomasius, *Das Bekenntnis der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 4-5.

2 Braaten, *Justification*, 28. See also Bayer, *Living by Faith*.

3 SA II 1-5 (Kolb-Wengert, 301).

4 F. o. SD III 6 (Kolb-Wengert, 563).

7 Thomas Oden's underlying motive is to establish an ecumenical consensus among the traditions of the East and West, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox, including Charismatic and Pentecostal teachings; see Oden, *Justification Reader*.

8 Neenan, "Justification in the Early Church Fathers," 25-53, and Pelikan, *Riddle of Roman Catholicism*, 50.

has lost its appeal. The late theologian Hans Joachim Iwand cautions the Church not to go that route:

An evangelical church that views the teaching of the righteousness of faith as self-evident—but about which no one should trouble himself further because other issues are more important—has in principle robbed itself of the central solution by which all other questions are illuminated. Such a church will become increasingly more splintered and worn down. If we take the article of justification out of the center very soon we will not know why we are evangelical Christians or should remain so. As a result, we will strive for the unity of the church and will sacrifice the purity of the gospel; we will have more confidence in church organization and church government and will promise more on the basis of reform of Christian authority and church training than either can deliver. If we lose our center, we will court pietism and listen to other teachings and will be in danger of being tolerant where we should be radical and radical where we should be tolerant. In short, the standards will be lowered and along with them everything that is necessary and correct in the reforms that we sing about now will be incomprehensible.<sup>10</sup>

### THE CENTRAL ARTICLE UNDER ATTACK: EXAMPLES

Lutherans should be mindful of the article of justification's central status in theology and missiology and be sensitized to the imminent dangers that could lead to its being pushed to the margins. These are not just hypothetical concerns but valid in view of past attempts at marginalization. Let five examples suffice.

1. In ecumenical discussions, the temptation has always been to find agreement on individual points of theology apart from asking about their relationship to the central article of justification. This problem became evident in the discussion on the doctrine of justification between representatives of the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church that led to the signing of a *Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* in the city of Augsburg, where the Confession was originally presented on June 25, 1530. The date chosen for signing the *JDDJ* was October 31, 1999, the anniversary of Luther's posting the Ninety-five Theses. Although a common consensus was established, it soon became apparent after careful reading that this agreement failed to honor a number of points that would have been crucial to Luther and other reformers. Thus, for example, it was unclear

whether the doctrine of justification actually served as the criterion of all doctrine or only a criterion among all other doctrines.<sup>11</sup> As Oswald Bayer observed with respect to ecumenical attempts at reaching consensus on the doctrine: "Ecumenical discourse is to be welcomed, but not at the price of mistaking justification as just one *façon de parler*."<sup>12</sup> This procedure of isolating and compartmentalizing individual doctrines facilitated the task of finding broader consensus. Certain beliefs still practiced in the Roman Catholic Church, such as pilgrimages, purgatory, and satisfaction actually still oppose Luther's position on justification serving as the criterion of all doctrine. In other words, though the *JDDJ* expressed unanimity between Lutherans and Roman Catholics in view of terms and expressions chosen to describe the doctrine, it failed to have a full bearing on the theology and practice of the Roman Catholic Church and, arguably, also on those churches that compromise the LWF. For concerned Lutheran and Reformed theologians, the *JDDJ* operates with deliberate ambiguity to cover deeper theological distinctions that continue to divide the two churches.<sup>13</sup>

2. The failure to see the impact of justification on theology is also a fault within Protestantism. Generally, justification receives central place, but at times not as the integrating principle. All Protestants may agree on the *solus*, namely, that salvation is based on *sola fide*, *solus Christus*, *sola gratia*, and *sola scriptura* ("faith alone," "Christ alone," "grace alone," and "Scripture alone"). When, however, it comes to explaining how justification works in theology, each denomination has its own interpretation. Lutherans believe that justification is mediated through the preached and sacramental Word of God. The majority of Protestants, however, connect justification to the work of the Holy Spirit, though a Spirit not necessarily connected to divine grace and faith through the Sacraments. Take, for example, the

11. Other points of concern with the *JDDJ* are the failure to address the sinner and saint relationship (*peccator iustus et peccator*), concupiscence after Baptism, and the *monergism of God* in justification, namely, a believer's total dependency on God for justification as a gift throughout his life. How, then, does it apply to a believer's good works in his sanctified state.

12. Bayer, *Living by Faith*, xiv. One may see Nürnbergger, "Thesen zum Stellenwert der Rechtfertigungslehre," 67-86.

13. Consider the following response and assessment by the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary: "Joint Lutheran/Roman Catholic Declaration on Justification" and "Formula of Agreement" in *Concordia Theological Quarterly*. A helpful discussion on the *JDDJ* that also

Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Baptism is a visible form of the Gospel; it comprehends God's objective imputation of His righteousness and thus is more than just a mere human work. It is essentially the work of the Holy Spirit who, in this Sacrament, applies the gift of forgiveness achieved for the baptized through Christ's work on the cross. Confusion in this matter obscures the nature of the gift inherent in Baptism. When justification is divorced from the proper mediation by the Word, it falls into the realm of abstraction. Lost is a concrete, personal coming of Christ as a gift.

3. The discussion over the *JDDJ* reveals also a controversy over how best to interpret to the theology of the sixteenth century, particularly the Lutheran Confessions. The basic question is whether the condemnations, such as those expressed in the Augsburg Confession, should stand in the way of today's efforts toward rapprochement. It was important for the original confessors to articulate—next to every positive statement on the faith—also an explicit condemnation of error. The authors of the *JDDJ*, however, defined the condemnations as historically conditioned. They argued that, since the historical situation is different today, the condemnations were of no further relevance.<sup>14</sup> Thus the Lutheran Confessions become documents from which nuggets can be extracted at the whim of a reader. This hermeneutical approach was already evident at the fourth meeting of the LWF in Helsinki in 1963, and it surfaced again at the Leuenberg Concord agreements on the Lord's Supper in 1971.<sup>15</sup> It is evident that this haphazard approach widens the doors for ecumenical agreement.

4. A new interpretation of the traditional explanation of justification itself began in the mid-1970s by scholars of the School of Finnish Luther Research at the University of Helsinki. They approached the Eastern Orthodox churches in the interest of furthering ecumenical relations. As justification became the topic of discussion, common strings were threaded around this doctrine, and the term *theosis* was chosen as its synonym. In the

discussions, however, the Finnish theologians soon realized that rapprochement with the Eastern Orthodox could apparently be reached only with Luther's theology of justification, but not with Melancthon and the Lutheran Confessions. As a result, a wedge was driven between the reformers themselves, most notably between Melancthon and Luther.<sup>16</sup> Melancthon was unappealing for his forensic-declaratory character of justification that the Finns claimed did not represent Luther's concept of justification. The Finnish theologians based their argument on a few selected statements in Luther's writings, such as his *Lectures on Galatians* (1535) in which Luther states that the believer is "in Christ" and "Christ in us." These theologians posited justification essentially as an ontological union between the believer and Christ, so that the indwelling (the presence of Christ in the believer through faith) marks the true nature of justification, not the declaration of pardon to the sinner. Such an interpretation of Luther's theology would strike a chord with Eastern Orthodoxy's motif of *theosis* (divinization). However, more recent research has persuasively shown that the portrayal of justification as *theosis* cannot cover all nuances of Luther's interpretation, and it distorts the sequence of justification as Luther and Melancthon both represented it.<sup>17</sup>

Consider, for example, that the Christian must daily die and rise with Christ. Properly speaking, justification does not constitute an upward spiral of the believer's righteousness that leads to an eventual blend with the divine chorus, which is how the Eastern Orthodox conceive of *theosis*. In a careful study on all these issues, Reinhard Flogaus convincingly concludes that the apparent distinction on the nature of justification lies within Luther himself rather than in the differences between him and Melancthon or with the Formula of Concord.<sup>18</sup> In other words, Luther and Melancthon did not have that apparent disparity in understanding as the Finnish theologians claim. After a careful analysis of all of Luther's statements, it is evident that Luther indeed was of the opinion that the prerequisite and basis for a concept of Christ's indwelling is the forensic-imputative declaration. The

<sup>14</sup> See the text of the *JDDJ* in Commission of Theology and Church Relations, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Braaten, *Justification*, 13. It seems puzzling why Carl Braaten, despite his clear articulation of the important central and integrative status in theology, is such an avid supporter of the *JDDJ*. A

<sup>16</sup> Mauniermae, "Why Is Luther So Fascinating?" 1-20, and "In ipsa fide Christus adest" 11-93.

<sup>17</sup> One may read the following helpful contributions: Mattes, *Role of Justification in Contemporary Theology*; and "Future for Lutheran Theology?" 439-57; Kolb, "Contemporary Lutheran

problem, then, is not so much with the thought of an inhabitation of Christ—something the confessors had encountered in Andrew Oslander's proposal<sup>19</sup>—but *more so the sequence*. The divinization or inhabitation of God follows the act of declaration based on Christ's righteousness that remains alien. Christ's righteousness can never dwell within the Christian ontologically apart from faith, to which it is bound.<sup>20</sup> Finally, as we look at the sequence, it is puzzling how scholars have completely ignored the concept *unio mystica* in the discussion. Although appropriated as a term and concept by dogmatists after Luther, the mystical union became the descriptive term of highlighting the believer's renewal and life in Christ.

5. Finally, justification reminds us of the core content of the Gospel that must withstand cultural relativism. It is true that the Gospel is always culturally embodied. Thus it is delivered in a particular language and a particular lifestyle. In his book *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Lesslie Newbigin debates the related questions: "How can it be possible for the Gospel to have a critical relation to culture?" and "Will it (the Gospel) accept all elements of human culture?"<sup>21</sup> In contrast to those who want to dismiss the critical role of the Gospel in culture, Newbigin affirms that the Gospel must serve in a countercultural capacity. The Gospel opposed barbaric practices that missionaries encountered in their travels, such as cannibalism in Papua Guinea, the Indian custom of *sati* (the burning of a man's widow with his body on the funeral pyre), and slavery. It is thus clear that "the Bible speaks of things which are not simply products of human culture but are Words and deeds of God, creator and sustainer of all that is."<sup>22</sup> Not everything in culture can be condoned.

Newbigin points to the double event of Jesus' death and resurrection, according to which "we are called neither to a simple affirmation of human culture nor to a simple rejection of it."<sup>23</sup> It

19 Andrew Oslander's position is summarized as follows: "... Christ is our righteousness before God only according to his divine nature. . . . That when the prophets and apostles speak of the righteousness of faith, the words 'justify' and 'be justified' do not mean being pronounced free from sin and receiving the forgiveness of sins but rather being made righteous in fact and in truth on account of love and other virtues infused into us through the Holy Spirit and on account of the works that result" (FC III 60, 62, Kolb-Wengert, 573).

20 FC III 54 (Kolb-Wengert, 571-72).

21 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 185, 191.

seems that Newbigin detects the critical element in the content of the Gospel, which includes justification as the act that accuses sinners of their sin and then acquits them. Justification uncovers the constant murderous rebellion of man against God and then extols the forgiveness earned by Christ on the cross. This content of the Gospel is universal and countercultural in that it is brought to all peoples around the world, no matter their indigenous cultural context and behavioral patterns.

#### JUSTIFICATION AND THE CROSS

Does the making of justification the central article of Christianity result in a shift of focus from the objective reality of Christ's death and resurrection to the actual subjective appropriation of that reality through faith? We would argue that both the objective (justification) and the subjective (faith) dimensions are essential to Christianity. Braaten is of the opinion, for example, that the cross "provides the criterion of all Christian thought and life; it offers a perspective on all Christian knowledge and shows the way to do theology that is truly Christian."<sup>24</sup> There is certainly no disagreement between the cruciform character of our theology and affirming the doctrine of justification as the integrating principle. For justification is more than just the subjective description of the believer appropriating salvation through faith. It embraces the "lofty articles of the divine Majesty" and those "that pertain to the office and the work of Jesus Christ, or our redemption" (2 Cor. 5:19-21; Eph. 2:1-10).<sup>25</sup>

An example of how the cross itself forms the backbone of our theology and is part of justification can be seen in Luther's *Theses on the Heidelberg Disputations*. There, Luther describes the task of theology and of every theologian as follows: "He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through the suffering and the cross."<sup>26</sup> By the expression "theology of the cross" (*theologia crucis*) Lutherans mean a lens through which Christians evaluate all theology and practice. Christ's death on the cross offers a crucial correction to a person's overbearing confidence in himself and his abilities (1 Cor. 1:18-25). It also represents our own suffering that is inflicted upon us for being believers in Christ: "For where God's Word is preached, accepted, or believed, and bears fruit, there the holy and precious cross will also not be

24 Braaten, *Apostolic Imperative*, 17.

25 SA 1-11 (Kolb-Wengert 300).

far behind.<sup>27</sup> The cross of Christ thus serves as the basis for all theology and of mission as well, and the doctrine of justification points to Christ alone as our salvation. Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our trespasses and was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). His suffering and death was satisfactory for all humanity and opened access to God (Rom. 5:2); the cross represents the payment for all the sins of the world (Phil. 3:9). And righteousness as the forgiveness of sins before God can be found only in the person of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30).

Thus the doctrine of justification includes the doctrine of Christ's death and resurrection. The total accomplishment of Christ in achieving righteousness for the world compels one to confess Luther's dictum that "the cross alone is our theology" (*crux sola est nostra theologia*).<sup>28</sup>

Yet, having affirmed the event of the cross as a *fait accompli* for our salvation to which nothing must be added or subtracted, we should not fall into the trap of a false universalism that relieves the Church of its missionary obligation of proclaiming the Good News to the world so that it may hear and believe (Rom. 10:14-17). The message of reconciliation must go out to all.

Mission is the act of extending the gift of righteousness and forgiveness to the world through its preaching of the Word and administering of the Sacraments. Just as justification by Christ through faith embraces the objective moment of the cross, it also includes a strong evangelical and personal dimension. The righteousness wrought by Christ on the cross for the world is offered to the individual, and he or she appropriates it as salvation through faith. As was pointed out earlier, it is also very important that the actual delivery of Christ's righteousness to the believer includes the concept of imputation, namely, the act of appropriating righteousness through a declaration of the spoken Word. God declares through His spoken Word that sinners who believe the promise are righteous. We commonly identify that personal appropriation of the Word as subjective justification. But as was said before, the act of believing the Gospel is also based on the objective reality of the cross of Christ. In other words, both the objective and subjective side of justification remain indissoluble as the two sides of the article of justification (Rom. 5:17-19; Eph 2:8-9).<sup>29</sup>

27 LC III 65 (Kolb-Wengert, 448-49).

## THE MISSIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE

The main focus of our discussion must rest upon the missiological character of justification. Although that connection might not seem that difficult to make, in fact most discussions on justification do not go this far. Justification is missiological in its very essence, since it describes what mission is at its core: imparting salvation through the forgiveness of sins. Thus justification represents, in a nutshell, the truth of the biblical message about our salvation in narrative form (e.g., the prodigal son, Luke 15:11-32) or what Paul set forth so brilliantly as the quintessence of his mission to the Gentiles (Romans 1, 3-5, 10; Galatians 2-3). Paul posits our salvation as an activity of the triune God, in other words, as divine monergism (e.g., Rom. 3:21-26). The world receives the divine gift of salvation apart from its own doing. For the apostle Paul, this principle of *sola gratia* signified his theology and motivation for mission to the Gentiles; it had to be defended at all costs, even when contested by the apostle Peter himself (Gal. 2:11-21).

As we have just stated, the implications attached to the doctrine of justification are familiar to most students of theology; its far-reaching missiological implications, however, are rarely mentioned. Clearly, since justification by grace through faith is synonymous with what we call salvation, it imbues and promotes a strong mission motif and motive. For this reason, any theology of mission and activity of mission deprived of justification will remain in a kind of Babylonian captivity.

### JUSTIFICATION AS THE CRITICAL YARDSTICK IN MISSION

In making justification central to theology, it also becomes the critical yardstick of all theology and the mission of the Church. Making justification the critical key to mission will expose many false perceptions of missiology. Three examples may illustrate this point.

1. There is the tendency to confine mission to the Church. In other words, as the Church concentrates on her mission, she is susceptible to making herself the starting point as well as the bearer of mission. Justification by Christ through faith, however, broadens a Church's scope by pointing to God as the sole initiator and source of mission. Even in terms of all accomplishments in mission, Christians glorify and honor God's work through the Holy Spirit. Fishing for compliments and praise by claiming

credit for oneself truly diminishes the work of the triune God in mission.

Justification by Christ through faith also dismisses the erroneous notion of equating mission solely with the numerical expansion of the Church at the expense of internal growth.<sup>30</sup> A proper missiology underscores the existence of sin among Christians and their continuous need of forgiveness, imparted through the divine sending of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual growth within the Church is equally as important as the outward expansion of numbers. To use Luther's description, Christians "have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and attacks of the devil and the world that they often grow weary and faint and at times even stumble."<sup>31</sup> As Christians plan to reach out to the non-Christian world, justification by Christ through faith also points to our own continual need for forgiveness and the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification.

The doctrine of justification promotes an important task for mission, namely, of giving glory and honor to Christ alone and honestly disclosing natural man's condition before God. If there ever is a central theme that permeates Lutheran theology, it is this combination of the doxological and hamartological motives (e.g., Rom. 3:23). A proper hamartology steadfastly affirms Christological doxology. Failing to speak of our own fallen state represents a deviation from the doxological motive and would "rob Christ of his honor as mediator and propitiator" and "our consciences of their comfort."<sup>32</sup> Justification by Christ through faith invites a theocentric perspective in mission that pays full tribute to the Lord "as the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). "To Him be given all the glory" is the final purpose of all mission. Justification disciplines Christians to hold their actions accountable to God Himself and to His Word.

2. Mission is commonly associated with the art of communication and proclamation. At its core, mission is all about proclaiming the Gospel and learning the mechanics of communication itself. The most influential contribution in this area began with Eugene A. Nida's *Message and Mission*.<sup>33</sup> Nida's insights,

<sup>30</sup> Ap IV, with its definition of growth in faith, confirms this (Kolb-Wengert, 167).

<sup>31</sup> LC V 23 (Kolb-Wengert, 469).

particularly in Scripture translation and revision, have set the course for many linguists after him. There is an inherent danger, though, when such studies begin to concentrate exclusively upon cultural sciences and secular anthropology. A proper missiology allows biblical theology and the divine operation through the Word to reign supreme. The study of the Word of God is more than an investigation into linguistic rules or communication theories. Linguistic studies that are based on empirical investigations and human insight must be willing to admit potential shortcomings.

3. Justification by Christ through faith stands for traditional soteriology. It is identified as personal freedom from the bondage of sin and divine wrath gained through forgiveness of one's sins. David Bosch describes how many theologians and church leaders have squeezed this traditional concept of salvation into ideas of peace and liberation that apply to life in this world and related concerns and thereby ignore the vertical dimension between God and the individual sinner. This shift has brought about a "crisis in the modern understanding of salvation."<sup>34</sup> With respect to salvation, Bosch states that the classical interpretation "dangerously narrows the meaning of salvation, as if it comprises only escape from the wrath of God and the redemption of the individual soul in the hereafter and . . . that it tends to make an absolute distinction between creation and new creation, between well-being and salvation."<sup>35</sup>

The consequences of this shift result in justification being compromised. Thus mission is no longer devoted to the task of restoring the impaired relationship between God and the believer and bringing about spiritual peace, nor would the Church be primarily devoted to the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. Against this theological shift and confusion in soteriology, justification provides an important correction. Indeed, it projects an eschatological motif that bars idealistic and romantic notions of establishing an inner worldly peace. Justification demands a sober outlook on worldly affairs where human ability is limited

<sup>34</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 397. Bosch identifies this crisis occurring within the Conciliar-Ecumenical Movement in which the term "liberation" is now used to describe salvation. Obviously, supporters of liberation theology within Roman Catholicism engage in the same error. See Niñez, *Liberation Theology*, 175-206. But liberation theology is also controversial within Roman Catholicism for its ideological character, as the late Pope John Paul II courageously opposed various aspects of it.

in changing events. The doctrine of justification thus fills and guides our perceptions of how we seek to promote the kingdom of God in this world. Its coming into this world has to do with an individual's bondage to sin and his restoration with God. Thus, in place of promoting mission as "liberation," Lutheran missiology continues to operate with the term "justification" to underscore salvation as "forgiveness of personal guilt" and "spiritual freedom."

### CONTRIBUTIONS IN LITERATURE

These previous examples over the last three sections involve situations, ways of thinking, paths to resolution, and implementation of ideas that engage serious issues requiring critical self-reflection. In the spirit of such reflection, I now consider existing scholarly literature to see if it presents the doctrine of justification as the integrating principle for mission and whether it adequately describes soteriology. In answer, consider that scholars have drawn attention to the missiological significance of the doctrine of justification. In his essay "Luther und die Mission," Adolf Schlatter hailed the doctrine of justification through faith as the formative motif in all evangelical missionary activity, and freedom from legalism as its missionary corollary.<sup>36</sup> Georg Vicedom's brief monograph *Justification as the Shaping Power of Mission*<sup>37</sup> accentuates the doctrine of justification as the foundation of any missionary endeavor for bringing out the facts of salvation—that is, God's judgment and merciful intention of saving the world. In his book *Das Kerygma und der Mensch*,<sup>38</sup> Walter Holsten follows the Bultmann tradition by concentrating on the "nowness" of the Gospel message. For him, Christian mission can be based only on God's own kerygmatic action. In fact, the kerygma itself, the message of justification, evangelizes. Holsten presents missionary activity as the verbal witness of the Pauline kerygma of justification. This insight validates the proclamation of the Word of God (the *kerygmatic motive*), but it lacks mooring in the historic events of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Another point of contention against Holsten is that his one-sided emphasis on the verbal witness weakens the missionary tasks of human care and service that have been part of Christian mission since its inception.<sup>39</sup>

In his presentation "Missiologische Aspekt der Rechtfertigungslehre" ["The Missiological Aspect of the Doctrine of Justification"],<sup>40</sup> Hans Schwarz stresses the hamartological motif, the world's sinfulness. He thus defines the goal of mission as overcoming man's estrangement from God, a goal founded in the reconciling event of Christ's death on the cross. Seen from the doctrine of justification, mission should therefore be nothing other than bringing faith, thereby strengthening the Christian.

All these scholars have shown that the missiological dimension of the doctrine of justification lies in its soteriological significance. Justification embodies and epitomizes God's saving acts upon man. Justification is concerned with the worldwide and universal distribution of Christ's presence to the whole world and stresses faith received through proclamation. Thus justification motivates the missionary enterprise and points away from applying it selfishly to oneself or from making it an inner-ecclesial issue. Rather, justification exposes the deeper underlying missionary cause and motivation for the proclamation of the Christian message to *all* those in need of salvation.<sup>41</sup> It frames the setting for mission from the cross.

### PROPOSING THE SYNTHETIC AND DOCTRINAL METHOD

In taking justification as the integrative principle, this study now turns to other theological themes. I pursue a *synthetic* rather than an *analytical* approach to theology. I do not plan to discuss each article separately in full detail, but I will argue the integrative nature of each doctrine of faith. One begins with the work and mission of the trine God (*missio Dei*) as the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. God reaches out to the entire world and embraces the Church as His instrument of reaching the lost. I thus include the proclamation of the Church and how God ensures that His Word is preached to the world so that each individual is received through forgiveness into His kingdom. Then we shall consider the nature of the Church, the service of all Christians, the means of grace, the ethical character of mission as an outflow of new obedience, and how justification holds the key to the proper discernment of Christendom from other religions. Thus one will not simply behold a panoramic view of theology and practice, but one will be engaged in a paradigm that has a particular missiological thrust. As a result, I will argue that a proper theology of mission is

36 Schlatter, "Luther und die Mission," 281–88.

37 Vicedom, *Die Rechtfertigung als gestaltende Kraft der Mission*.

38 See Bibliography for publication information.

40 Schwarz, "Missiologische Aspekt der Rechtfertigungslehre," 200–17.

deductive, not inductive, and one that is not merely descriptive but also prescriptive and normative in its approach. In other words, as we discuss missiological issues, we shall remain predominantly in the parameters of a doctrinal and dogmatic missiology.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> One may see here Jongeneel, *Philosophy, Science, and Theology of Mission*, 1:177–80; 2:49–50.

Paul Heerboth defines the relation of systematic theology to mission as follows: "Systematic Theology seeks the meaning and application of Christology and Soteriology in mission, and the interaction of Christian faith with the secular world" ("Missouri Synod Approach to Mission in the Early Period," 26). The same study concludes that "every aspect of theology has an inescapable missiological dimension." Gensichen, *Glaube für die Welt*, 250, states that missiology should be "the theme of all theology" ("Gegenstand aller Theologie"), or as Bosch, *Transforming Structures and Movements*, "Mission may be termed 'the semantic discipline' within the wider

## THE MISSION OF THE TRIUNE GOD

### PART II