

# STUDIES AND ARTICLES

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382  
70 (1), pp. 12-30, 2017

## **Some Considerations Regarding the Lutheran Doctrine of Justification with Special Reference to Father Dumitru Stăniloae's View and to Two Important Documents**

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### **Abstract**

This article deals first with an introduction to the theme of justification by referring to the famous Martin Luther's 95 thesis and to Jaroslav Pelikan's understanding of it. Then there are special reference to Father Stăniloae's view on the Lutheran doctrine of justification. Father Stăniloae makes direct reference to Luther's work and to some Protestant theologians, showing a clear openness to dialogue, refusing aprioric judgments, and willing to value the tendencies to come closer to the authentic teachings of the Church, from the part of other Christians. The second part is dealing with the theme of justification and good works in the documents: “The Church of Jesus Christ. The contribution of the Reformation towards ecumenical dialogue on Church unity” and in the “*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church”, which are major contributions to the dialog and the mutual understanding and respect between Christians.

### **Keywords**

Sin, repentance, justification, merits, indulgences, Leuenberg agreement, Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, dialog, visible unity of the Church

The famous Martin Luther's 95 theses were first circulated on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1517 in a letter addressed to the bishop of Mainz and Magdeburg, Albrecht von Brandenburg. Because he did not receive a reply from the bishop, Martin Luther gave the teachings to one of his acquaintances, who printed them, thus making them a topic of discussion throughout Germany.

In the first six theses Luther makes clear what is the genuine repentance and which are the limits of pope's authority:

“1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, *Repent* (“*Poenitentiam agite*”) (Mt 4, 17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.

3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.

4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self (that is, true inner repentance), namely till our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

5. The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.

6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven”<sup>1</sup>.

The indulgences come in contrast with the need for genuine repentance. Indulgences are not only scandalous, but especially dangerous, because they take people away from the fear of God, leaving them to the wrath of God (cf. Ps 89;90). The cause of the indulgence was the special authority of the Pope as the successor of the Holy Apostle Peter and as the vicar of Christ on earth. The Savior had given Saint Peter the power to bind and loose the sins (*potestas clavi*), and the pope held it as a successor, and moreover, he had the basis and prerogative of setting and dethroning

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>.

secular rulers, having the full power: both spiritual and secular (*plenitudo potestatis*)<sup>2</sup>.

Luther's attack against indulgences has been triggered by abuse. In his 49<sup>th</sup> thesis, Luther states very firmly that: "Christians are to be taught that papal indulgences are useful only if they do not put their trust in them, but very harmful if they lose their fear of God because of them"<sup>3</sup>.

Moreover, it is very interesting the contrast between the true treasure of the Church which is the Holy Gospel and the treasures of the indulgences:

“62. The true treasure of the Church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.

63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last (Mt. 20,16).

<sup>2</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Tradiția creștină. O istorie a dezvoltării doctrinei. IV. Reformarea Bisericii și a dogmei (1300-1700)*, Polirom, 2006, p.176, sq. Jaroslav Pelikan (1923-2006, professor at Yale University in the USA, the most important historian of the creeds and development of Christian doctrine, a Lutheran converted to Orthodoxy in 1998, when he was 75!). Jaroslav Pelikan declared: "I was the Lutheran with the greatest knowledge of the Orthodox Church, and now I am the Orthodox with the greatest knowledge of Luther" (<http://jaroslavpelikan.blogspot.ro/>) because he edited a great part of Luther's works in English. Unlike most church historians who focused on a certain time or a certain aspect, professor Jaroslav Pelikan is considered to be an authority on the whole history of the Church. He has written forty books and a dozen reference books covering the history of Christendom. He received honorary distinctions from 42 universities worldwide. He has given also lectures in the prestigious "Guilford Lectures" in Scotland and "Gilson Lectures" in Toronto. In 2004, the Library of Congress awarded the John W. Kluge award for lifetime achievement. The distinction is offered to the fields where the Nobel Prize is not awarded, particularly in the humanities and social sciences; Jaroslav Pelikan donated to the Orthodox Institute "Saint Vladimir" in New York, who he was very fond of in recent years, the \$ 500,000 he received. Concerning his conversion, he said: "I have received hundreds of requests for interviews and decided not to respond to any of them" (<http://jaroslavpelikan.blogspot.ro/>), perhaps to avoid hurting other believers' feelings. It's very possible that study the original of the work of the Cappadocian Fathers have been determinant for his conversion. Some family members remember him saying that he had not as much converted to Orthodoxy as "returned to it, peeling back the layers of my own belief to reveal the Orthodoxy that was always there" (<http://jaroslavpelikan.blogspot.com/>). Jaroslav Pelikan used to quote Goethe's Faust, especially when he was awarded the Kluge prize: "*Was du ererbt von deinen Vaetern hast, Erwirb es um es zu besitzen*" ("What you have as heritage take now as task, and thus you will make it your own"), a desire he masterfully fulfilled ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaroslav\\_Pelikan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaroslav_Pelikan)).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>.

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64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.

65. Therefore the treasures of the gospel are nets with which one formerly fished for men of wealth.

66. The treasures of indulgences are nets with which one now fishes for the wealth of men.

67. The indulgences which the demagogues acclaim as the greatest graces are actually understood to be such only insofar as they promote gain.

68. They are nevertheless in truth the most insignificant graces when compared with the grace of God and the piety of the cross”<sup>4</sup>.

By defining justification as forgiveness of sins, Luther further accentuated its free character. The scholastic doctrine of merit, whether of “conformity” or “of virtue”, “usurps” the right that belongs only to Christ. Only He saves from sins and imparts righteousness and eternal life. In the Scholastic theology what sinful man does for himself, as much as he can, was called “merit of congruity” (*meritum congrui* or *meritum de congruo*); and what a virtuous man, helped by divine grace, makes for himself or for others, “merit of condignity” (*meritum condigni*). But the idea of merit was for Luther a recursion into Pelagianism. In fact, *atonement* is the very antithesis of merit either before receiving grace or in grace, and biblical texts that speak of “reward”, such as the Sermon on the Mount, should be interpreted in light of the principle that “grace and merit are mutually exclusive”<sup>5</sup>.

For Luther, the main antithesis of the doctrine of justification was that of salvation through grace and faith on the one hand, and salvation through good deeds on the other. The problem was that the multiplication of human commands on the deeds considered to gain the goodwill of God, had come to eclipse the grace of God and the doctrine of faith, and therefore to alienate the man from God, the emphasis being on man’s deeds. The Pauline phrases “without the works of the law” from Galatians 2,16: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>.

<sup>5</sup> J. Pelikan, *Tradiția creștină*, p.188-189.

the law shall no flesh be justified”; and “not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2,9), were meant to search for justification. Luther exhorted that nobody should look at any deed as if the search for justification were to end with it<sup>6</sup>.

But that does not mean at all that the good deeds would be forbidden: “Our Teachers are unfairly accused of forbidding good deeds”<sup>7</sup>. Luther’s *Treatise on Good Works* contains comments to the *Decalogue*, which presents the good deeds prescribed by each commandment, and emphasizes the idea that faith must back the work, without faith no one is able to do this work, all things are fully included in the faith<sup>8</sup>. In conclusion, the good deeds of faith were those made for the benefit of “the neighbor”, now that they no longer needed to be done for their own benefit or to earn the good will of God.

Based on the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “The Lord is our righteousness” (23, 6) and of Saint Paul: “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1Co1, 30), Luther pointed out: “If anyone asks what justice is, he must answer: Christ who dwells in us by faith is our righteousness according to his divine nature, and the forgiveness of sins, which is not Christ himself, but which is gained by Christ, is a preparation, and the reason why God gives us His righteousness, which is God Himself”<sup>9</sup>.

Unlike the scholastic definition of grace, as a feature inspired to man, Luther states in the introduction to the *Commentary on Romans*<sup>10</sup>: “Grace is actually the favor or goodwill of God directed toward us” (*favor Dei*); while in the phrase “grace upon grace” (*charin anti charitos; gratiam pro gratia*) (Jn 1,17) in the Gospel according to Holy Apostle and Evangelist John, there is a distinction between two kinds of grace, the first being the grace of Christ as the main source of all grace, and the second being the grace we have from Christ, which He imparts with us. Salvation and forgiveness come only through the grace of Christ, and any endeavor to seek other ways to heaven is in vain. Therefore, justification means that mercy

<sup>6</sup> Luther, *Gut Werk*. (WA 6:275).

<sup>7</sup> Conf. August., 20.1.

<sup>8</sup> J. Pelikan, *Tradiția creștină*, p.190.

<sup>9</sup> Osndr. *Mel.*(1553:03) , apud J. Pelikan, *Tradiția creștină*, p.194.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, Kregel Publications, 2003, p.8.

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and grace were attributed free of charge and out of pure mercy<sup>11</sup>. At the same time, the doctrine of justification by faith implied that the sinner was, throughout his life, “just and sinner at the same time” (*simul justus et peccator*), this formula summing up Luther’s entire theology on justification, the most important of which is in *Romans 7*.

Finally, although we do not have a complete exposition of Martin Luther’s theology, we have to keep in mind that he stated that the true theologian must speak about “*theologia crucis*”<sup>12</sup>, because God is in suffering, for us and our salvation; and, concerning our suffering Luther said: “in this way [God] wants to make us conformed to the image of his dear Son, Christ, so that we may become like him here in suffering and there in that life to come in honor and glory”<sup>13</sup>. We suffer in this life, so that we would be like our Lord Jesus who suffered in this life. Being like Him here in this life, we will be like Him in the life to come, with honor and glory<sup>14</sup>.

**I. The biblical fundamentals of the church life**

After recounting the founding of the Church, Saint Luke says about the first Christians: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine (*te didache ton Apostolon, doctrina Apostolorum*) and fellowship (*te koinonia, communicatione*), and in breaking of bread (*te klaei tou artou, fractionis panis*), and in prayers. (*tais prosehais, orationibus*)” (Acts 2 ,42). The joint confession of the teaching of the Apostles, full living of life in communion (*koinonia*), the communion from the same chalice and prayers for “the union of all” form a unity that expresses the identity and the integrity of the Church, while also being the fundamental prerequisites for any theo-

<sup>11</sup> J. Pelikan, *Tradiția creștină*, p.195.

<sup>12</sup> The term *Theologia Crucis* itself is “most prominent in Luther’s early works, the later texts bear up the scholarly contention that the fundamental contrast between *cross* and *glory*, with its various methodological and theological implications, remains and is in fact amplified throughout Luther’s later writings. Indeed, considered topically, Luther’s treatment of virtually every significant theological locus throughout his canon—e.g., revelation, ecclesiology, and ethics is impacted by his understanding of the cross” (<http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-340>)

<sup>13</sup> *Luther’s Works, Vol. 51: Sermons I*, Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (eds.), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, p. 206.

<sup>14</sup> <http://lutheranreformation.org/theology/luther-cross-suffering/>

logical conclusion resulted from the bilateral or multilateral dialogues. The succession is also of great importance in its relevance for the Holy Liturgy where we first confess we are in communion of faith and love, then we take the Eucharist from the same chalice and thus we leave “in peace” the church in order to have “the liturgy after the Liturgy”, which is service for the world in prayer and good deeds.

The phrase “the teaching of the Apostles” refers to the historical, dynamical reality of the Christian faith, revealed by the Savior Himself, settled by the normative confession of the Holy Scripture and by the Holy Tradition, explained, transmitted and proclaimed by the Church under assistance from the Holy Spirit. In fact, “the living dialogue of the Church with Christ is done mainly through the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition”<sup>15</sup>, the latter being understood as a lasting consequence of this dialogue<sup>16</sup>. The Orthodox Church is known as the Church of Tradition because it kept faithfully the content of the Apostolic kerygma and the sacramental apostolic practice in its entirety<sup>17</sup>. As it is known, there are problems with some of the Christian denominations or groups who claim, sometimes exclusively, to possess this same faithfulness to the “beginnings”, purporting they have returned to and are in accordance with the primary period of the Church, when there was “unity in diversity”. Commenting on “Scripture and Tradition”<sup>18</sup>, the document issued by the *Faith and Order* Commission of the World Council of Churches, Father Stăniloae shows that the authors reduced the diversity of the present church traditions to the diversity of traditions that exists in the Holy Scripture, therefore “the search for unity between different traditions of the Church will have to acquire the unity of the Gospel, as it is reflected in the plurality of different biblical avowals”<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, it is considered that “the variety of thinking inside the Bible reflects the diversity of God’s actions in different historical circumstances and the diversity of human responses to God’s actions”, therefore “it is important that the researcher would not attach to a single

<sup>15</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă- pentru Institutetele teologice* (abr. TDO), vol.I, București, 1978, p. 53.

<sup>16</sup> TDO, p.58.

<sup>17</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Concepția ortodoxă despre Tradiție și despre dezvoltarea doctrinei*, în “Ortodoxia”, nr.1, 1975, p.5.

<sup>18</sup> In *Nouveaute dans l'oecumenisme*, Les Presses de Taise, 1970.

<sup>19</sup> Pr. prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Sobornicitate deschisă*, in “Ortodoxia”, nr.2, 1971, p.165.

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biblical thought, even if they find it of central importance. This would only lead to a misunderstanding of this variety and richness<sup>20</sup>.

Unilateral reading was a feature of early Christianity. Heresy is the somewhat random choice of a single aspect of the complex or dialectic unity of two or more aspects and denying the rest, thus simplifying the rich and complex theological realities<sup>21</sup>. But while in the East, with the exception of Christological heresies, all others were eventually absorbed by the Church, both due to the help of the Byzantine Empire, as well as the fact that “the Church was never placed unilaterally and contradictorily opposed to one heresy or another, but rather largely embraced all aspects of faith”<sup>22</sup>, in the West, if the Church of Rome chose to legitimize its authority by Scripture texts that involved Saint Peter’s primacy, reformers chose, in order to legitimize their rejection of any structure in the Church, those in which it is about general priesthood, community life of the first Christians, the variety of ministries, disregarding those which speak of the priesthood through Ordination, the Holy Sacraments and other aspects that have led to controversies. To the anti-Catholic protest in on part, responded the anti-Reformation from the other part. What was lost, was the orientation after “the supple, balanced complexity of a reality expressed by the Gospel and of a rich, authentic life”, dominating “a spirit of harsh, sharp alternatives, a spirit used to the simplifications of a shallow, inferior rationalism”<sup>23</sup>.

Next, Father Stăniloae deems it necessary to presents the Orthodox spirit which is not characterized by the tendency to confrontation<sup>24</sup>, but by the embracing of the teaching as a whole, hence “in their thirst for complex knowledge and Christian life”, western Christians meet Orthodoxy, many thinking that “the unity of Christianity cannot be achieved outside Orthodoxy, can only be achieved through Orthodoxy, in reverting to the initial plenitude”<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Sobornicitate deschisă*, p.165.

<sup>21</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Sobornicitate deschisă*, p.167.

<sup>22</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Sobornicitate deschisă*, p.167.

<sup>23</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Sobornicitate deschisă*, pp.160-170.

<sup>24</sup> ÎPS Kallistos Ware wrote: “This is an author who treats the West, be it Christian or not, with no aggressiveness or fear. Even if his critique of Roman-Catholicism, proselytism or even radical theology may seem at times antagonical or simplistic, beyond that structure, there are good intentions”, in the preface to: Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, translated and edited by Ioan Ioniță and Robert Barringer, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1989, p.XXIV

<sup>25</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Sobornicitate deschisă*, p.171.

Due to this assertion, the author cannot be blamed of elitism or of idealizing reality because he immediately criticizes the way Orthodox values are brought to the presents concerning the spirituality and the effectiveness in the life of the faithful, arguing in favor of enriching the Orthodox sobornicity with the values discovered by western Christianity, too. He even finds it forgivable the stressing of the unity in Catholicism, since in the East one had not allegedly lived fully the Christian unity in the superior form of the universal communion between the local churches. On the other hand, a juridical-central assertion of the unity of Christianity prompted Orthodox Christians to underline the independence of their own local church, instead of finding ways to maintain their unity – leading to embarrassing situations like that of the calendar, or recently those created by the Synod in Crete (June, 2016). And after the emergence of Protestantism, the Orthodox “have put into practice from the Catholicism a kind of anti-Reformation, stressing Tradition more than the Holy Scripture, and the importance of objective acts of the Mysteries and of hierarchy, more than personal living and then the communion of the relationship with God”<sup>26</sup>.

This lucid analysis must be taken as an encouragement for Orthodox Christians to do truly the deeds of faith, Orthodoxy is also *Orthopraxy*, while the others must reanalyze the aspects of their faith that no longer recall the primary period. Moreover, there is a clear opening to dialogue, refusing aprioric judgments, the will to value the tendencies to come closer to the authentic teachings of the Church, from the part of other Christians.

### **I.1. “Let us bring forth what unites us!”**

In order to shed light on the way in which this slogan was taken seriously by Father Stăniloae, we consider it important to refer to a study<sup>27</sup> published when the famous Romanian theologian was turning 80. From the very beginning, the author shows that, in spite of the fact that the Orthodox Dogmatic handbooks present the Lutheran justification as an act through which the human being is assured its sins are forgiven but not erased (*simul justus et peccator*) or without affecting a change in his being (*actus forensis*), recent Protestant studies, and even texts from Luther’s work they rely

<sup>26</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Sobornicitate deschisă*, p.171.

<sup>27</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Doctrina luterană despre justificare și cuvânt și câteva reflecții ortodoxe*, in “Ortodoxia”, nr.4, 1983, pp.495-508.

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on, show that “Luther frequently understands justification as an act that produces a new life in the being”<sup>28</sup>. The study quotes Peter Stuhmacher who claims that: “Justitia Dei means for Luther that creating effective act of the grace of God that justifies, not one of God’s attributes”<sup>29</sup>. This new life that Luther speaks of is, according to the above mentioned theologian, the result of the synthesis between the two conceptions about God’s justice related to the human being: “Justice as God’s attribute, manifested towards man according to man’s behavior, and the justice that forgives man and produces in him a new life through His mercy or His grace”<sup>30</sup>. Even if Lutheran theologians don’t always draw the same conclusion that Luther sometimes did, that God’s justice can make man in His image, giving him the possibility of working together with Him to further one’s resemblance with Him, claiming that only God is active in man’s new life, “Luther strongly regards justification as a creating act which forecloses any possibility to conceive faith, and therefore justification, as man’s act as well”<sup>31</sup>; therefore, “it is a joy for us to see that in this assertion, even faith is implicitly considered as a power produced in man by God, and not something that does not bring any change in man’s life”<sup>32</sup>. And if man is the subject of this new power, that means he participated, collaborated. Father Stăniloae mentions in this context that Karl Barth himself admitted this fact, in not asserting that man does not have any responsibility in his own salvation:

“In explaining the justification «only through faith», we admitted that it has to be stated very clearly that: in our belief we have take into account also the *imitatio Christi*. The fact that the faith as a human attitude, as it is illustrated by the double use of *pistis*,

<sup>28</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Doctrina luterană...*, p.495.

<sup>29</sup> “Justitia Dei bezeichnet für Luther also das schöpferisch-wirksame Ereignis der rechtfertigenden Gnade Gottes und nicht eine göttliche Eigenschaft”, Peter Stuhmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus*, Göttingen, 1966, p.20.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Stuhmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus*, p.18, “Keiner der Vater ist darauf aufmerksam geworden, dass Paulus selbst Rechtfertigung und Schöpfungsgen ineinander interpretiert zuordnet. Das Miteinander zu gewahren und von daher justitia als das Gottes Werk zu interpretieren ist Luthers Eigentliche exegetische Leistung”, *apud* D. Stăniloae, *Doctrina luterană...*, p. 495.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Stuhmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus*, p. p.21, “(...) Luther an der Rechtfertigung als einem Schöpfungsvorgang festhält und so jede Möglichkeit verlegt wird, den Glauben als Leistung des Menschen und damit die Rechtfertigung als Werk des Menschen aufzufassen”, *apud* D. Stăniloae, *Doctrina luterană...*, p. 496.

<sup>32</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Doctrina luterană...*, p. 496.

is an imitation of God, an analogy to God's work and behavior, it is a trusting of man who answers accordingly to God's fidelity which reveals itself as efficient in His judgement. But it is especially and really also an imitation of Christ, a resemblance with the work and behavior of Christ"<sup>33</sup>.

Father Stăniloae then quotes the work of Barsanuphius, a 6<sup>th</sup> century Gaza hermit, and surprisingly says that: "(...) in this fragment, the meaning of imitation amazingly coincides to what Barth says", even if Barsanuphius is more straightforward and concrete. The parallel continues with Moltmann and Barsanuphius. Where the former declares that, according to Luther, "humility is the way to God"<sup>34</sup>, Barsanuphius says: "God has always chosen the meek (1Co 1, 27). Be humble and God will come to your help"<sup>35</sup>.

"So, one can say that the Eastern Fathers, the same as Luther did, understood that meekness does not mean we do not have any role in our own salvation, but the fact that this meekness is the conscience that if we can any good at all, it is because it comes from the power given to us by God"<sup>36</sup>.

Moreover, another Lutheran theologian, E. Jungel, considers it necessary for maintaining the relationship with Christ by justification, not solely love, but good deeds as well. Man shall be judged according to his deeds which are not of the Law, therefore of fear, but of freedom and joy into Christ and thus of a more interior nature<sup>37</sup>. The author then goes back to Jürgen Moltmann who speaks of a true dialogue between God and man, man is ascended by God to being a partner in this dialogue. "to God's word corresponds man's answer, to the promise, the hope, to the Gospel, the divine faith, and to the grace, man's satisfaction"; "it is not only God Who speaks to man through the Scriptures, but man speaks to God also"<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/1, EVZ-Verlag, 1960, p.709.

<sup>34</sup> J.Moltmann, *Therese von Avila und Martin Luther*, in "Stimmen der Zeit", Heft 7,1982, p. 457

<sup>35</sup> *Biblos Barsanouphiou kai Ioannou*,Thessalonique, 1974, Ep.665, p.311.

<sup>36</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Doctrina luterană...*, p. 501

<sup>37</sup> E.Jungel, *Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus*, in "Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche" 60, 1963, p.73, *apud* D. Stăniloae, *Doctrina luterană...*, p. 503.

<sup>38</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Die Gemeinschaft des Heiligen Geistes. Trinitarische Pneumatologie*, conference held at the Congress of Pneumatology in Rome, 26th of March 1982(mms.), *apud* D. Stăniloae, *Doctrina luterană...*, p. 503.

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However, “the merging of God’s gift and its active use is also expressed in all prayers and chants of the Lutheran divine service”<sup>39</sup>, and several quotes are offered which show the following:

- the possibility and the necessity of repenting
- even if it becomes active with the help of God, this help does not preclude man’s effort
- justified man is no longer burdened with sins, God being unable to forgive them as is stated in “our school Dogmatic books”; on the contrary, man himself asks for forgiveness for the sins committed, which could not have been committed
- the necessity to manifest faith through good deeds, “a man is known through the deeds” (*an Werken wird erkannt ein Mann*)
- the use of “cover our sins” cannot mean that they might remain untouched, on the contrary, it is the faith that Christ takes them and bears them Himself
- the new life of the justified man, manifested through good deeds, cannot be understood as only having God as subject and man as a mere spectator, since that would imply the admission of “an irreconcilable dualism inside man and in his relationship with the others”<sup>40</sup>, consequently, the faithful could no longer ask of God to be rid of despair and be filled with joy, love for others, for a cure of everything improper in one’s acts and to give a strengthening of power<sup>41</sup>.

However, Father Stăniloae criticizes the tendency to give sometimes exclusive attention to the word, a tendency which comes from a certain disregard of the body, considering the word as a direct and exclusive manifestation of the spirit, What is also lost is the straightforward connection between the word and the Holy Mysteries, as it is emphasized by Saint Luke: “*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2, 37-38). In this sense, Alexander Schmemmann also remarked:

<sup>39</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Doctrina luterană...*, p. 504.

<sup>40</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Doctrina luterană...*, p. 505.

<sup>41</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Doctrina luterană...*, pp. 504-506.

“Through Sacrament (*Mysterion*), we become partakers of the One Who comes and remains in us in the Word: the destination of the Church is to herald that One. The Word considers the Sacrament (*Mysterion*) as its fulfillment, because in this Mystery, Christ the Word becomes our life. The Word gathers the Church so that He can become embodied in it. By severing the Word from the Sacrament (*Mysterion*), the latter is prone to be read as magic, while the Word without the Sacrament (*Mysterion*) is prone to be reduced to mere doctrine”<sup>42</sup>.

In fact, “each Sacrament is a corporal means through which Christ transmits, through a gesture, a power that comes from His resurrected body”<sup>43</sup>.

## II. Justification and good deeds (service and diakonia) in the document: “The Church of Jesus Christ. The contribution of the Reformation towards ecumenical dialogue on Church unity”<sup>44</sup>

“For the first time since Reformation protestant churches of Europe agreed on a common document about the Church. Thus the Frankfurt-based Protestant Press Service (epd), in its report of 9 May 1994, summarized the most important event of the 4th General Assembly of the churches participating in the Leuenberg Agreement held in Vienna from 3-10 May 1994”<sup>45</sup>.

Concerning justification, this important document offers a trinitarian perspective:

“The justifying action of the triune God”, is “the content of the gospel”<sup>46</sup>, and consequently it is normatively proclaimed in Holy Scripture by acknowledging Jesus Christ:

- “as the One in whom God became man and bound to man;
- as the crucified and risen One who took God’s judgment upon himself, and, in so doing, demonstrating God’s love for sinners; and

<sup>42</sup> Alexander Schmemmann *Euharistia, Taina Împărăției*, Ed. Anastasia, f.a., p.74.

<sup>43</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Doctrina luterană...*, p.509.

<sup>44</sup> *The Church of Jesus Christ. The contribution of the Reformation towards ecumenical dialogue on Church unity* Leuenberger Texte, Heft 1, Verlag Otto Lembeck, Frankfurt am Main, 1995; <http://www.leuenberg.net/publication/church-jesus-christ>.

<sup>45</sup> *The Church of Jesus Christ...*, p.75.

<sup>46</sup> *The Church of Jesus Christ...*, p.87.

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- as the coming One who, as Judge and Savior, leads the world to its consummation (LA9)<sup>47</sup>.

The Church *has its foundation* in the Word of the triune God. It is the *creature of the Word calling for faith* by which God reconciles and relates the alienated and rebellious human race to himself by justifying and sanctifying it in Christ, by renewing it in the Holy Spirit and by calling it to be his people<sup>48</sup>.

After quoting the *Leuenberg agreement*, where is underlined the importance of the “trust” for justification: “Whoever puts his trust in the Gospel is justified in God’s sight for the sake of Jesus Christ and set free from the accusation of the law<sup>49</sup>, the document *The Church of Jesus Christ (...)*, we refer to, also emphasizes the “human action”:

“God’s justifying action does not exclude *independent* and *free* human *action*, but provides a foundation for it and qualifies it, requires it and creates space for it as the freedom of faith. People recognise what God alone can do and thereby become free to do what is entrusted to them<sup>50</sup>.”

The document *The Church of Jesus Christ (...)* makes then reference to the «witness and service», “as marks of the church and of the Christian life”:

“The Leuenberg agreement refers to «witness and service» as the fruits of faith for which the gospel liberates as the power of God. (...) «witness and service» refer to two aspects of the obedience of faith in the whole of life and not to two separate realms. «Witness » should not be understood as keeping the first and «service» as keeping the second table of the Ten Commandments, but as the active fulfilment of the whole will of God in both tables. It is in both tables *always* «witness and service» *together*, both in the Christian life and in the activity of the visible church<sup>51</sup>.”

Concerning *diakonia*, the document makes distinction between the institutions of diaconic work and the diaconic engagement of *all believers*:

<sup>47</sup> LA = Leuenberg agreement: <http://www.leuenberg.net/leuenberg-agreement>.

<sup>48</sup> *The Church of Jesus Christ...*, pp.87-88.

<sup>49</sup> LA 10, cited in the document, *The Church of Jesus Christ ...*, p.88.

<sup>50</sup> *The Church of Jesus Christ...*, p.89.

<sup>51</sup> *The Church of Jesus Christ...*, p.96.

“The visible church has not only to contribute to the keeping of the commandments of the first table, but also to the keeping of the commandments of the second. Therefore institutions of the diaconic work of the church in its widest sense are necessary. For the work of these institutions full-time staff is required. They take part in the ordered ministry of the church. The work of the institutions of the diaconic work of the church and their full-time staff does not replace the diaconic engagement of all believers in their every-day life, but should inspire, aid it and support it”<sup>52</sup>.

Finally, the document underlines the commission of Christians to worship (*leiturgia*), to witness (*martyria*), to serve (*diakonia*), and to live in community (*koinonia*)<sup>53</sup>. In this section it is made again the distinction between the “professional character” of diaconia and the “service of individual Christian”, the social engagement of the churches being so important that due to it they still “gain a broad response and acceptance in society”:

“This service of Christians in everyday life, emphasized so much by the Reformers, includes appreciation for the professional character of such service. (...) For Christians living in the everyday life of the world and having to exercise their being Christians in this context there is today the urgent task of practising and confirming afresh the connection between witness and service – not only in the social and diaconic work of the church but also in the secular professions (e.g. as lawyers, journalists, politicians, managers, doctors etc.). Many churches meet the increasing challenges for diaconic work with a *political diakonia* which is not only concerned with individuals in need, but also with the social tasks of society (e.g. in statements on social ethics or through institutions of diaconia: hospitals, counselling services, telephone ministry etc.). It is especially the social engagement of the churches that still helps them today to gain a broad response and acceptance in society. The church does not thereby replace the service of individual Christians, but supplements and supports it”<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> *The Church of Jesus Christ...*, p.100.

<sup>53</sup> *The Church of Jesus Christ...*, pp.104-108.

<sup>54</sup> *The Church of Jesus Christ...*, p.107.

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The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* is a document elaborated and agreed to, by the Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity(PCPCU) and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999, as a result of extensive ecumenical dialogue. It states that the churches now share "a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ". The World Methodist Council adopted the *Declaration* on 18 July 2006. The World Communion of Reformed Churches (representing the "80 million members of Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting, and Waldensian churches"), adopted the *Declaration* in 2017<sup>56</sup>.

The *Declaration* has 44 paragraphs and the 5 sections deal with: 1. Biblical Message of Justification; 2. The Doctrine of Justification as Ecumenical Problem; 3. The Common Understanding of Justification; 4. Explicating the Common Understanding of Justification: 4.1. *Human Powerlessness and Sin in Relation to Justification*; 4.2. *Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous*; 4.3. *Justification by Faith and through Grace*; 4.4. *The Justified as Sinner*; 4.5 *Law and Gospel*; 4.6 *Assurance of Salvation*; 4.7 *The Good Works of the Justified*; 5. The Significance and Scope of the Consensus reached.

In the preamble of the *Declaration* we read that:

"The doctrine of justification was of central importance for the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century. It was held to be the «first and chief article» and at the same time the «ruler and judge over all other Christian doctrines». The doctrine of justification was particularly asserted and defended in its Reformation shape and special valuation over against the Roman Catholic Church and theology of that time, which in turn asserted and defended a doctrine of justification of a different character. From the Reformation perspective, justification was the crux of all the disputes. Doctrinal condemnations were put forward both in the Lutheran Confessions and by the Roman Catholic Church's

<sup>55</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_31101999\\_cath-luth-joint-declaration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html).

<sup>56</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joint\\_Declaration\\_on\\_the\\_Doctrine\\_of\\_Justification](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joint_Declaration_on_the_Doctrine_of_Justification).

Council of Trent. These condemnations are still valid today and thus have a church-dividing effect<sup>57</sup>.

The *Declaration* shows that the subscribing Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of the justification by God's grace through faith in Christ. Although "it does not cover all that either church teaches about justification; it does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations" (&5).

Concerning the biblical basis of justification in the *Declaration* it is stated that:

"In the New Testament diverse treatments of «righteousness» and «justification» are found in the writings of Matthew (5, 10; 6, 33; 21, 32), John (16, 8-11), Hebrews (5, 3; 10, 37f), and James (2, 14-26). In Paul's letters also, the gift of salvation is described in various ways, among others: «for freedom Christ has set us free» (Gal 5, 1-13; cf. Rom 6, 7), «reconciled to God» (2 Cor 5, 18-21; cf. Rom 5, 11), «peace with God» (Rom 5, 1), «new creation» (2 Cor 5, 17), «alive to God in Christ Jesus» (Rom 6, 11.23), or «sanctified in Christ Jesus» (cf. 1 Cor 1, 2; 1, 30; 2 Cor 1, 1). Chief among these is the «justification» of sinful human beings by God's grace through faith (Rom 3, 23-25), which came into particular prominence in the Reformation period".(&9.)

The trinitarian perspective on justification is clearly emphasized in the *Declaration*:

"In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good work (&15)".

<sup>57</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_31101999\\_cath-luth-joint-declaration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html).

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In the section dedicated to the significance of good works for salvation, it is made clear that through the “meritorious” character of the good works, Catholics wish to underline the reward in heaven and the personal responsibility of the believer and not the unmerited gift of grace; consequently, due to these clarifications, it is worth to quote that section *in extenso*:

#### *“4.7 The Good Works of the Justified*

37. We confess together that good works - a Christian life lived in faith, hope and love - follow justification and are its fruits. When the justified live in Christ and act in the grace they receive, they bring forth, in biblical terms, good fruit. Since Christians struggle against sin their entire lives, this consequence of justification is also for them an obligation they must fulfill. Thus both Jesus and the apostolic Scriptures admonish Christians to bring forth the works of love.

38. According to Catholic understanding, good works, made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace, so that the righteousness that comes from God is preserved and communion with Christ is deepened. When Catholics affirm the „meritorious” character of good works, they wish to say that, according to the biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works. Their intention is to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions, not to contest the character of those works as gifts, or far less to deny that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace.

39. The concept of a preservation of grace and a growth in grace and faith is also held by Lutherans. They do emphasize that righteousness as acceptance by God and sharing in the righteousness of Christ is always complete. At the same time, they state that there can be growth in its effects in Christian living. When they view the good works of Christians as the fruits and signs of justification and not as one’s own „merits”, they nevertheless also understand eternal life in accord with the New Testament as unmerited „reward” in the sense of the fulfillment of God’s promise to the believer”.

In conclusion, “the understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics”. The doctrinal condemnations of the 16th century, in so far as they relate to the doctrine of justification, appear in a new light: The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this *Declaration* does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this *Declaration*.

Finally, bearing in mind the efforts behind the two documents we referred to, and behind the ecumenical movement in general, we have to admit that, despite all difficulties, *the dialog and the mutual understanding and respect between Christians is, by God’s grace, the only way for reaching the visible unity of the Church.*