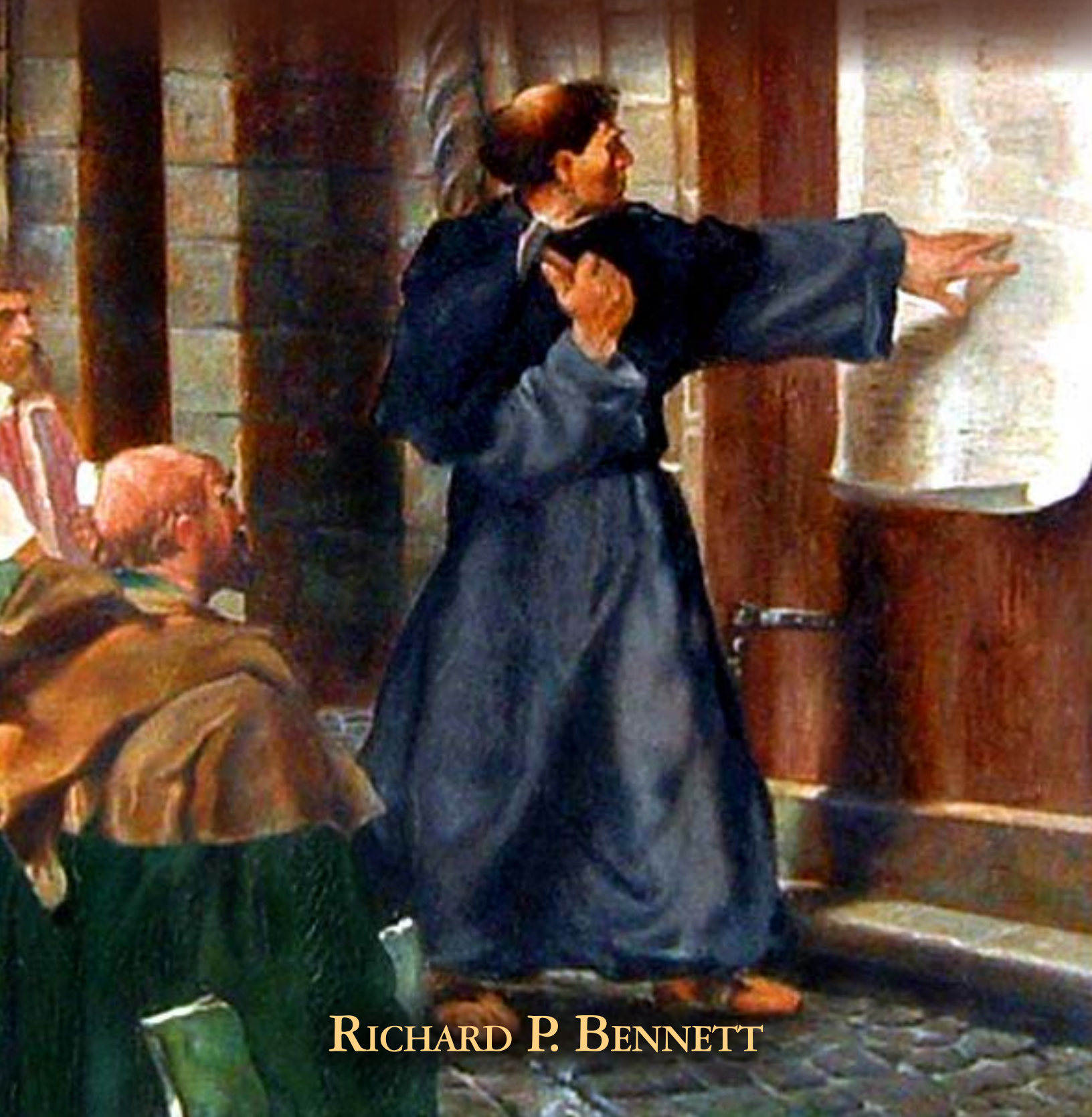


THE ROMAN CATHOLIC-LUTHERAN ACCORD



RICHARD P. BENNETT

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“Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification”

A denial of the gospel and the righteousness of Christ

THERE have been numerous, alarming attempts over the past five years to declare Roman Catholics as “brothers and sisters in Christ” during the dialogue between Evangelicals and the Roman Catholic Church. In 1999 something more sinister and authoritative took place. “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (JD), an official doctrinal statement jointly authored by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), was signed on October 31st, 1999, as a joint confessional agreement. On the 482nd anniversary of Martin Luther’s¹ pivotal posting of the yet unanswered “95 theses,” which ignited the Protestant Reformation, the RCC and LWF vividly confirmed their position of the serious apostasy to which ecumenism with Rome inevitably leads. The Lutherans of LWF have now embraced the doctrine of the Council of Trent,² and in so doing have officially and formally denied the gospel and the righteousness of Christ.

1. Overview of the Joint Declaration

a. Elite untouchable JD?

JD is the result of thirty years of Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue. This fact alone might dissuade many from daring to challenge it. The document itself is

¹ **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German Roman Catholic monk, theologian, university professor, and church reformer whose ideas inspired the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization. According to Luther, salvation was a free gift of God, received only by true repentance and faith in Jesus as the Messiah, a faith given by God and unmediated by the church.

² **Council of Trent** – Roman Catholic Church council (1545-1563) called by Pope Paul III to respond to the need for reform in light of the Protestant Reformation, and to control the spread of Protestantism. It did make some reforms, but installed as Roman doctrine the supremacy of the pope and the whole system of salvation by meritorious works and the seven Roman sacraments.

about nineteen pages in length, depending on which printing one reads. Arrayed with many footnotes, a sizable appendix, the official response of the Lutheran World Federation, the Roman Catholic response, the clarifications to the document, and the added accouterment of John Paul II's comment on JD, the document appears very much like the robes of those who devised it: all very "haut couture"³ meant to stun anyone who might dare to analyze it.

In addition to the first rate showmanship with which JD has been presented, it appears that there is neither grub nor gnat that has not been strained out of this cleverly worded document and addenda. Dare anyone be so bold as to ask if a camel has been swallowed (Mat 23:24)? Daunting circumstances notwithstanding, the Christian—committed to Scripture as his sole authority, and in the same Holy Spirit that gave the Scripture—is able to sift error from truth, discerning that which is in accord with Scripture in the Official Common Statement in which JD is ratified and approved by both parties.

b. Heretical landmines

There are presuppositions upheld in JD itself that are not stated as such in the Official Common Statement. Some of these presuppositions totally negate biblical justification⁴—as, for example, the idea that justification is by means of the sacrament of baptism. Such a tradition of men is accepted by both parties to the agreement. JD states,

4.4 The Justified as Sinner

28. We confess together that in Baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies, and truly renews the person.

This heresy is in line with the teaching of the Council of Trent,

Can. 8. If any shall say that by the said sacraments of the New Law, grace is not conferred from the work which has been worked [ex opere operato] but that faith alone in the divine promise suffices to obtain grace: let him be anathema.

Biblical truth, however, is that the believer's faith cannot be based on any physical works of men whatsoever, as true faith is in God's work alone. To attempt to claim causative effects, therefore, for that which was given to testify to the Lord's grace and His finished work, is to preach *another gospel* (Gal 1:6-8).

³ **haut couture** – *French*: literally, high culture.

⁴ **justification** – “Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.” (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 32; available from Chapel Library)

While such deadly landmines as this permeate JD, this analysis is limited mainly to examining the Official Common Statement ratified by both parties. To examine adequately the superabundance of heresies and half truths in the full JD document is far beyond the scope of this paper, but certainly it is hoped that Evangelical men will undertake to address these.

c. JD and the judgement of Sovereign God

Because God is All Holy and man is dead in trespasses and sins, an immense gulf exists between the Creator and the human creature. Because of Adam's sin, mankind is born spiritually dead. God justifies His own holiness in graciously providing the believer's rectitude by imputing to the sinner the perfect righteousness of Christ and His perfect propitiation-sacrifice.⁵ The Scriptures proclaim the holiness and righteousness of God in the flawless life and death of the God-man, the Lord Christ Jesus. Justification in the first place has to do with God Himself, to show that He is just in justifying the sinner in Christ.

The gospel has to do with Who God is in His holy and righteous nature. The gospel demonstrates that, because of Who God is, He alone justifies. Thus Romans 3:26 states,

“To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

The final cause of justification is the glory of the divine Holiness, Justice, and Goodness. Thus, the one who preaches any other gospel is accursed by God (Gal 1:8-9).

Perversion of the gospel is an enormous crime. It debases the perfect righteousness and sacrifice of Christ, and in so doing stands against the very nature of God's holiness. Through the prophet Isaiah the Lord warns, “But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness” (Isa 5:16).

It must be carefully observed that it is no more possible for those who pervert the gospel to continue unaccused, than for God to permit His glory to be set aside. The time frame is not known; however, the certainty is inevitable. “God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness.” God is God, and those who teach a false gospel may not, by a false fancy, assure themselves of uninterrupted tranquility. God is holy by nature; He must be sanctified in judgment, for God cannot deny Himself.

⁵ **propitiation-sacrifice** – a sin offering that turns away wrath; an appeasement.

2. The Joint Declaration's Claim

The document alleges,

...that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics...[and] that the mutual condemnations of former times do not apply to the Catholic and Lutheran doctrines of justification as they are presented in the joint declaration.

These statements notwithstanding, the relevant “condemnations” by the Church of Rome on those who hold to the biblical gospel have never been revoked or recanted. The present day dogma of the RCC upholds the teaching of the Council of Trent and declares that it is infallible. From the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent, the following curses still stand,

Canon 9. If anyone shall say that by faith alone the sinner is justified, so as to understand that nothing else is required to cooperate in the attainment of the grace of justification, and that it is in no way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will: let him be anathema.

Canon 11. If anyone shall say that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity, which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and remains in them, or even that the grace by which we are justified is only the favor of God: let him be anathema.

From a Roman Catholic perspective, as will be seen, these condemnations do in fact stand because JD does not contradict either. From a biblical and historical Lutheran viewpoint, however, these anathemas of Trent fall under the wrath of God.

3. The Contents of the Joint Declaration

JD consists of five main divisions with the entirety subdivided into forty-four numbered paragraphs. The fourth main division, the lengthiest of the five, is broken down into seven sections, an overview being as follows:

Preamble (7 paragraphs, JD 1-7)

1. Biblical Message of Justification (JD 8-12)
2. The Doctrine of Justification as Ecumenical Problem (JD 13)
3. The Common Understanding of Justification (JD 14-18)
4. Explicating the Common Understanding of Justification (JD 19-39). This 20-paragraph section has seven subheadings:
 1. Human Powerlessness and Sin in Relation to Justification (JD 19-21)
 2. Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous (JD 22-24)

3. Justification by Faith and through Grace (JD 25-27)
 4. The Justified as Sinner (JD 28-30)
 5. Law and Gospel (JD 31-33)
 6. Assurance of Salvation (JD 34-36)
 7. The Good Works of the Justified (JD 37-39)
5. The Significance and Scope of the Consensus Reached (JD 40-44)

The Official Common Statement ratifies JD. This begins with three paragraphs (OCS 1-3), followed by the words, “By this act of signing, The Catholic Church and The Lutheran World Federation, confirm the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in its entirety.”

The Official Common Statement has an Annex with four sections, of which Section 2 has five subsections, A-E.

4. An Analysis of the Joint Declaration

a. Jesus Christ is the standard.

JD must be analyzed in the light of biblical truth. What was true for Israel in the Apostle Paul’s analysis applies in this instance.

“But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed...For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom 9:31-33).

The biblical “rock of offence” is Christ Jesus Himself, the Rock on which one believes for extrinsic⁶ justification, that is, imputed⁷ righteousness. One must remember from the outset that the issue at hand is *justification*. Error always cloaks itself in reasonable sounding phrases and often makes use of the scheme of the evil one to twist the Scriptures. JD is replete with “Reformation-like” language and Scripture quotations. A characteristic vagueness and impreciseness permeates the document. Certain sentences can be read and assented to by a biblical Christian, but when the slant of meaning is examined each is seen to be the opposite of what it first seemed to say. The conclusions arrived at are similar to

⁶ **extrinsic** – derived from outside.

⁷ **imputed** – given by God apart from men’s works.

the deception of Jacob in Genesis, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau” (Gen 27:22). The “voice” of JD is distinctly that of the Scriptures; the “hands,” however, are the hairy hands of Rome. The document is excelsior⁸ of doublespeak. It claims to explain a common understanding of the doctrine of justification, and then adds encumbrance upon impediment to the purely scriptural, wholly objective, wholly juridical⁹ nature of the doctrine. There is no better way to assess the guile of JD in its attendant Official Common Statement, than by comparing it to what the Scripture, the Word of God, declares to be truth.

b. JD compared to Scripture

In JD, imputed righteousness is cleverly sidestepped for the old lie of establishing one’s own righteousness. The central point that separated the Reformation from Rome was the biblical doctrine of extrinsic justification. A person is accepted by the All Holy God only “in the beloved,” “to the praise of the glory of his grace” (Eph 1:6). The doctrine of imputed righteousness struck at the very heart of the Roman Catholic insistence on one being made “inherently” just, i.e., just within oneself. In JD, the doctrine of extrinsic or imputed righteousness has been wiped out in favor of the RCC doctrine of inherent righteousness. Clearly, JD is an attempt to do away with the biblical gospel. Thus the Official Common Statement 2.A. reads,

We confess together that God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from sin’s enslaving power...Justification is forgiveness of sins and being made righteous, through which God imparts the gift of new life in Christ (JD 22).

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Rom 5:1). “In this the children of God are manifest” (1Jo 3:1). We are truly and inwardly renewed by the action of the Holy Spirit, remaining always dependent on His work in us.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2Co 5:17).

The justified do not remain sinners in this sense.

This is a convoluted mixture of the doctrines of justification and sanctification rather than merely a problem of semantics. Justification nowhere in Scripture ever means inherent righteousness (i.e. “being made righteous”). The believer’s jus-

⁸ **excelsior** – *Latin*: elevated; higher.

⁹ **juridical** – pertaining to law.

tification is not based on a single iota¹⁰ of anything in him; it is based wholly in his standing in Christ.

This is the crux of the matter in JD. One goes the way of all flesh to the judgement of hell if he adds anything to the pure and perfect righteousness of Christ. One needs to be “fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2Co 11:3). Justification is not “being made righteous,” but JD follows such statements as these with numerous scriptural quotations and phrases cloaking its errors in the semblance of truth. It is quite like Rebekah’s word to Jacob, “Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee.” Thus “Rebekah took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son” (Gen 27:8, 15). In JD, the voice of some of the best Scripture texts on justification is heard. The conclusion, however, is similar to what Isaac discerned, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” The hands of JD are distinctly those of Rome; the material that is manipulated, however, is that of Scripture.

c. “Being made righteous”

In the justifying act of God, He imputes Christ’s perfect righteousness to the individual. It is a legal and one-time, finished, irrevocable act that cannot be misconstrued to be a process or ongoing occurrence, such as the term “being made righteous” will allow. The simple truth of Scripture is stated Rom 3:22, “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.” God’s demonstration of His own righteousness is the faithfulness of Jesus Christ in His perfect life and sacrificial death. The great news is that this absolute righteousness is by imputation “unto all and upon all them that believe.” Being “called children of God” and “a new creation” is the fruit. It is what follows on this act. “Being made righteous” here is just a rewording of the old lie of the Council of Trent in which it was officially declared,

Justification...which is not merely remission of sins, but also of the sanctification and renewal of the interior man...whereby an unjust man becomes a just man.

In this final word of the JD Official Common Statement is the age old Roman Catholic mixing of sanctification with the act of justification, returning to the age old fabrication that righteousness is supposedly within the soul, rather than to the biblical truth that by the Holy God the believer is credited with the everlasting

¹⁰ **iota** – smallest letter of the Greek alphabet; smallest bit.

righteousness that is in Christ Jesus. “Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength” (Isa 45:24).

What is proposed in JD as the “doctrine of justification” is deficient in two essential ways. It neither upholds the perfect standard of God’s holiness, nor does it demonstrate the perfect righteousness of Christ in life and death. In the words of the Apostle Paul,

“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom 10:3).

The Bible emphasizes and declares the righteousness of God, “the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith” (Rom 1: 17). This is not proclaimed nor taught in the Official Common Statement on JD. Destitute and sinful human beings need the perfect righteousness of Christ. This is what the Scripture clearly says is now manifest, “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested” (Rom 3:21).

d. Manifested in Scripture, missing in JD

What precisely is omitted in JD is “the righteousness of God without the law; the righteousness which is of God by faith” of Philippians 3:9; “the righteousness of the one” and “the obedience of the one” of Romans 5:18-19, and “the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” of 2 Peter 1:1. The verdict act of God in declaring that a sinner is acquitted and counted righteous because of the obedience and death of Jesus Christ alone, is not contained in JD. What is proposed in its place is a combination of some biblical truths (such as grace alone, faith alone) with the old lying definition of “justification” being seen as a quality of the soul within the believer.

Because righteousness is of and from God, it is absolutely perfect. The one-time act of God in justifying a sinner in Christ Jesus is perfect. Because man in himself cannot be perfect, righteousness can only be communicated through imputation or reckoning. God’s provision of the perfect righteousness of Christ is acquired by faith alone. It is not seen (Heb 11:1). The “righteousness of God without the law” (Rom 3:21) is not to be seen on earth. The fruitfulness of such righteousness is indeed seen; nevertheless, the righteousness itself is in heavenly places in Christ.

What is proposed to be “justification” in the Official Common Statement on JD is to be seen here on earth, and not the scriptural, declarative justification “in heaven.” Rather, justification is presented as taking place “on earth” in the believer, as for example, in Annex Para 2,

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 works (JD 15). (Emphasis added.)

The simple truth of Scripture is that God never accepts an individual as such. Rather, he is accepted only in the Beloved, in the righteousness of the One, Christ Jesus, that is, in the righteousness of faith. Receiving the Holy Spirit and the renewal of hearts is the old confusion of justification with sanctification. Because the purpose of these statements is to define justification, such stupefaction¹¹ is studied deceit.

The phrases, "being made righteous" and "we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit," both make room for what is to be concluded, i.e., that "justification" is within the person and a quality of the soul within the believer. Basically the biblical truth is this: the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer is an act of God in Christ.

e. **Sophisticated sophistry**¹²

The official statement ratifying JD states,

C) Justification takes place "by grace alone" (JD 15 and 16), by faith alone, the person is justified "apart from works" (Rom 3:28, cf. JD 25). "Grace creates faith not only when faith begins in a person but as long as faith lasts" (Thomas Aquinas,¹³ S. Th II/II 4, 4 ad 3).

The use of the phrase "Justification takes place" rather than the biblical concept, "to whom it shall be imputed," is studied deceit, because the word "justification" can be made to imply a process rather than a one-time act of God. Nevertheless, the Scriptures continually speak about the outcome of the justifying act as "righteousness," not justification. JD and the Official Common Statement on JD use the noun "justification," and carefully avoid the verb "justifies." The Greek word "justifies" (*logizomai*) means to count, esteem, impute, number, reason, reckon. It is a verb denoting a one-time action. The repetition of the noun "justification" in JD and in the Official Common Statement on JD, conveys the concept of a quality within a person that totally contravenes the Scripture. Not

¹¹ **stupefaction** – act of being made to be stupid.

¹² **sophistry** – argumentation that is intentionally deceptive.

¹³ **Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274) – Italian philosopher and theologian; immensely influential in the Roman Catholic Church. He was the foremost classical proponent of natural theology, and much of modern philosophy was conceived in development or refutation of his ideas, particularly in the areas of ethics, natural law, metaphysics, and political theory. His best known work is *Summa Theologica*.

mentioning “imputed righteousness” and continually speaking of “justification” is seductive sophistry.

Thus in the Official Common Statement’s endorsement of JD, the basis for the gospel is given as within man rather than the perfect righteousness of the God-man, Christ Jesus. This is speaking against God and is worse than anything proposed by Israel or the Pharisees. The words of the Lord Christ Jesus therefore apply, “for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Mat 23:13).

5. The Mindset of Rome in the Joint Declaration

The Roman Catholic Church cannot conceive of the act of justifying in which man remains a sinner. Catholic theology understands “justifying” as “justification,” something that God graciously pours into a man’s heart, displacing sin and sinfulness in the process. Biblically speaking, however, justifying righteousness is something that always resides in the person of Christ alone. The imputation of this righteousness is what makes a believer acceptable to God. As long as the believer lives, he is in himself guilty; but in Christ he is righteous and accounted precious in God’s sight.

a. An astonishing quote from Aquinas

It is a surprising thing that a section of Thomas Aquinas’ teaching is affirmed in the final word confirming the conclusion of JD and the Official Common Statement. The question Aquinas was answering in S. Th II/II 4, 4 ad 3 is, “Whether formless faith can become formed or formed faith formless?” The abstruseness of the question itself gives one a taste of the intricacies of scholastic theology. Why quote from a most intricate question in Aquinas rather than simply giving the words of Scripture that are referred to in the brackets? The Romans 3:28 text given in brackets before the Aquinas quote states, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” The word “conclude” in this text is the Greek word *logizometha*, meaning, we esteem, impute or reckon “that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” This imputation of righteousness (*dikaioushai*) annihilates the concept proposed that “the person is justified.” Had the Scripture been cited rather than Aquinas, “righteousness reckoned” would have been obvious, and the sophistry exposed. The statement agreed on says,

C) Justification takes place “by grace alone” (JD 15 and 16), by faith alone, the person is justified “apart from works” (Rom 3:28, cf. JD 25). “Grace creates faith not only when faith begins in a person but as long as faith lasts” (Thomas Aquinas, S. Th II/II 4, 4 ad 3).

Biblically speaking, it ought to say,

The righteousness of Christ is credited to the believer “by grace alone” and by faith alone, and thus the person is justified in Christ alone, “apart from works.” As is stated by the Apostle Paul, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28).

b. Cancerous cuisine

Earlier in the same work cited, Aquinas teaches that grace is a “quality” of the soul. In the “Treatise on Grace,” he asks the question, “Is grace a quality of the soul?” In the body of his article, he cites Aristotle’s¹⁴ physics saying, “motion is the act of the mover in the moved.” Then in Reply Obj. 1, he states,

Grace, as a quality, is said to act upon the soul not after the manner of an efficient cause, but after the manner of a formal cause, as whiteness makes a thing white, and justice, just.

The whole idea of grace being moral justice located inside a person, rather than the Holy God imputing Christ’s righteousness to each person whom He places in Christ, blatantly contradicts biblical truth. Such teaching is a negation of the consistent biblical teaching of positional legal righteousness in Christ alone.

c. Complete perfection in Christ, not in the individual

Endorsing the teaching of Aquinas—and all such teaching in JD as “Justification takes place,” “being made righteous,” and “we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit”—is quite cleverly teaching “inherent righteousness” without using those words. Such teaching opposes both the gospel and the righteousness of Christ.

The distinction between the righteousness of faith (justification) and the righteousness of the law (i.e., sanctification) was foundational in Luther’s understanding of the gospel. After Luther, the *Formula of Concord of 1577* reiterated the basic biblical insights of double righteousness. This was a bedrock of historical Lutheranism. It was recognized that if active righteousness (sanctification) were brought into the definition of the passive righteousness by faith, then both the glory of Christ and the gospel are denied, and one returns to the old lie of Satan: that what is inside a man makes him right before God. “Ye shall be as gods” (Gen 3:5).

The written Word of the Lord continually shows the believer where he or she is eternally and splendidly saved. “And ye are complete in him, which is the head

¹⁴ **Aristotle** (384-322 BC) – Greek philosopher, pupil of Plato, the tutor of Alexander the Great, and the author of works on logic, metaphysics, ethics, natural sciences, politics, and poetics.

of all principality and power” (Col 2:10). The Roman Catholic Church does not rest satisfied with Christ alone, her process program in fact nullifies the grace of God. What is literally damning in the Official Common Statement of JD is that an attempt has been made to masquerade the perfect righteousness of Christ as inherent righteousness. What was truly biblical in Luther’s understanding of imputed righteousness, is now subsumed under Rome’s idea of “inner” righteousness, the source of her power over the minds and hearts of men, which power she covets. What is most serious, the very truth of the gospel is thus made void. The “inner” process system is a hopeless practice born of a blasphemous idea. Rather, “It is God that justifieth” (Rom 8:33).

d. “The wrath of God is revealed.”

The Lord forewarned of stumbling at the Rock of offense,

“Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner” (1Pe 2:7).

The RCC and LWF, in publicizing their apostasy in JD, have to fear a revelation of something much more serious, the very wrath of God:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18).

The intent to continue dialogue, “to reach full church community,” is a conclusion mentioned in paragraph 3 of the Official Common Statement. The actual words are as follows,

The two partners in dialogue are committed to continued and deepened study of the biblical foundations of the doctrine of justification. They will also seek further common understanding of the doctrine of justification, also beyond what is dealt with in the Joint Declaration and the annexed substantiating statement. Based on the consensus reached, continued dialogue is required, specifically on the issues mentioned, especially in the Joint Declaration itself (JD 43) as requiring further clarification, in order to reach full church communion, a unity in diversity, in which remaining differences would be ‘reconciled’ and no longer have a divisive force.

It is quite revealing that the stated conclusion here is one of the primary goals as defined in the Church of Rome’s conditions for dialogue.

6. RCC Rules of Engagement Applied

In the Vatican Council II Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents No. 42, “Reflections and Suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue,” the Church of

Rome carefully lays out the ground rules for her program of ecumenical dialogue among Christians. From that document, it is clear that the RCC is proceeding to “dialogue” with Christians by adhering to a special set of rules. Thus specifically she states, “dialogue is not an end in itself...It is not just an academic discussion.” Rather, the stated purpose of dialogue is that,

...little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesial communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist [i.e., the Mass], into that unity of the one and only Church...This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose...

The “little by little” may this time be a giant step, as it appears in the conclusion to the Official Common Statement of JD (quoted above).

In the introduction to “Reflections and Suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue” (No. 42), the RCC states that,

This document concerns only ecumenical dialogue, that is to say, dialogue which is established between the ‘Christians of different Churches or Communions’ (p. 538).

Ecumenical dialogue is rooted in a number of doctrinal and pastoral facts...First, since ‘the brethren who believe in Christ are Christ’s disciples, reborn in baptism, sharers with the People of God in very many riches,’ and since these riches, such as ‘the written word of God, the life of grace, faith, hope and charity,’ along with other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit and visible elements, are accessible to all those who have been baptized...This *community of spiritual goods* is the first basis upon which ecumenical dialogue rests (p. 541, emphasis added).

The “dart through the liver”: Rome’s first basis

“With her much fair speech...till a dart strike through his liver” (Pro 7:21-23).

Using many words, the RCC is giving what is consistently her primary basis, “the community of spiritual goods.” Her “first basis” is not that of the Lord and the Apostles, which was the written Word of God alone.

For the RCC, the first basis on which ecumenical dialogue works is not *Sola Scriptura*,¹⁵ “the Scripture cannot be broken” (Joh 10:35); rather it is a “community of spiritual goods.” This basis is exactly the same as the premise on which the RCC builds her doctrine, and which is spelled out in her latest official Catechism:

¹⁵ **Sola Scriptura** – *Latin*: Scripture alone, one of the five “solos” of the Protestant Reformation. The Scripture alone is authoritative for Christian doctrine.

Para. 80. Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine wellspring, come together in some fashion to form one thing and move towards the same goal.

Thus, the first basis for all the dialogue with the LWF was the RCC's own measure of "truth." The rules following on this first basis were also her own rules of engagement. Some of the rules are these:

Each partner should seek to expound the doctrine of his own community in a constructive manner, putting aside the tendency to define by opposition... [Interestingly, the Bible teaches much by means of contrast.] The partners will work together towards a constructive synthesis, in such a way that every legitimate contribution is made use of, in a joint research aimed at the complete assimilation of the revealed datum.

The words "revealed datum" are carefully chosen. For a Bible believer, the term would mean just the written Word; for the RCC, however, the term "revealed datum" consistently refers to Scripture plus Tradition as her first basis. Proceeding from this impure base, the "constructive synthesis" rules are simply the old line of evolution: "truth" by synthesis, or relative "truth." Excluded from start to finish is the principle of Sola Scriptura. To the RCC, who by so exquisite an application of her rules of engagement has "thrust through" the Lutherans, the words of the Lord speak directly: "making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered" (Mar 7:13).

According to Vatican Council II Document No. 42, the final goal of the dialogue between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church is that the Lutherans be brought "into that unity of the one and only Church...This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose." For the RCC, the final conclusion has not yet been attained until her stated objective is secured. Until then, "continued dialogue is required...in order to reach full church communion." And to this, the Lutherans apparently have agreed fully—snared by thirty years of hearing her "much fair speech...till a dart strike through his liver," as indeed it has.

The RCC has been clear in laying out her agenda toward all Christians who are not part of her organization. She has applied her method skillfully and relentlessly since Vatican Council II. Ought one to be surprised by the conclusions to which she and the LWF have come?

For those who are the Lord's own within the Lutheran Churches, the warning of the Lord is clearly given,

“Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death” (Pro 7:24-27).

JD, as ratified in the Official Common Statement, is indeed outwardly stunning, but the message is “dead men’s bones” in that it attempts to cleverly establish man’s own righteousness. The words of the Lord are indeed appropriate (Mat 23:27),

“I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 5:20).

