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The ecumenical aspect of the justification of the sinner

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to discuss the ecumenical aspect of justification. Martin Luther was of the opinion that the road to justification was only through faith and grace, expressed by the principle *simul iustus et peccator*. The Council of Trent emphasized that justification is not only the remission of sins but is also sanctification. Catholic-Lutheran ecumenical dialogue formally began after the Second Vatican Council, which resulted in a consensus regarding the basic truths of the doctrine of justification and likewise looked at the person of Martin Luther, his demands, and the reformation.

KEYWORDS

justification, ecumenical dialog, Council of Trent, Martin Luther, reformation

INTRODUCTION

Justificatio is one of the fundamental components of the Christian faith. Justification is the affirmation of divine grace, which makes the sinful man just. It is the visible element of grace and has an impact on man. Grace is the gratuitous gift of the almighty God who gives himself to man, who by his disobedience walked away from the Creator (cf. Gen 3). God did not condemn man nor did He reject him, but is still waiting with love for his return (cf. Lk 15:11–31). The unique way the Creator loves His creatures is revealed in Jesus Christ. Christ has become the personification of God's grace. This grace transforms the person and makes him more perfect and pleasing to God. The main effect of this transformation is the justification of the sinner, that is, he becomes righteous in God's eyes. We can say that through it God heals the relationship with man that has been spoiled by sin.¹ The purpose of this article is to show the problem of *iustificatio* through the prism of its ecumenical dimension, which since the sixteenth-century Reformation through Catholic-Lutheran dialogue and the jointly developed documents, have appeared as the main elements in doctrinal and pastoral talks. First, the article will look at the biblical message on this subject. Then the question of justification in terms of Martin Luther, Trent and the ecumenical reports in the second half of the twentieth century, especially after Vatican II, will be looked at in a systematic way.

St. Paul addressed the issue of justification in his Letter to the Romans when he said that everyone needs justification because they have sinned, Gentiles, because they do not know God who has been revealed to them in the world and in their conscience, and Jews who do not keep the Law received through the intercession of Moses (cf. Rom 1–2). Justification is achieved by faith in Jesus, who is the *new Adam* and repairs the effects of the sin of the first Adam (cf. Rom 5:15). Besides – emphasizes the Apostle of the Gentiles – *gratia iustificationis* is a totally free gift of God, which is prepared not for the sake of good deeds, but by faith in the saving action of God (cf. Rom 3:21–28), whereas the sacrament of holy baptism is an expression of faith in Christ and a sign of forgiveness of sins, namely justification. Original

¹ Cf. *Justification*, in: R. Fastiggi (ed.), *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Detroit 2013, t. 4, p. 321–324; A. Zuberbier (red.), *Słownik teologiczny*, Katowice 1998, p. 615.

sin causes man to fall into sin after baptism but it does not deplete it of the primary justification obtained through baptism. The sacrament of penance restores the state of justification received through baptism. The task of the believer is open himself up to this gift of God and surrender to God's justifying and salvific action. Whereas, St. James, in his letter clearly states that faith is shown through works, which is proof of an authentic and living faith (James 2:14–26). So the truth about God justifying the man of works through his grace, thereby giving rise to a new relationship between God and man, has always stood in the center of Christian doctrine.²

MARTIN LUTHER AND THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

Disputes and controversies related to the issue *iustificatio* were initiated in the sixteenth century by the teaching of the father of the reformation, Martin Luther, who described the theme of justification as *the first and most important article of faith*. His opposition was to both practical and doctrinal shortcomings of the Church at the time specifically associated with the practice of indulgences among other things. He very strongly indicated the completely free, undeserved and unconditional forgiveness of sins. Therefore, the good deeds of man arise out of gratitude to God for the grace received and not from a desire to receive this grace. Martin Luther taught that only the article of justification points the way to an inexhaustible treasure and to true knowledge of Christ, as well opens the way to the Bible. Besides, without it one cannot experience the rich grace of Christ or find true consolation. The importance of *iustificatio* is manifested – according to Luther – in the fact that without this article only death and darkness would prevail in the world. If this article stands, the Church stands also, and if it falls, the Church will fall with it. Where this one and only article is in effect, Christianity is pure and in exemplary harmony free from any

² Cf. W. Rakocy, *Usprawiedliwienie*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, t. 19, Lublin 2013, col. 1419–1421; J. Dunn, *The Justice of God*, in: *Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (1992), p. 1–22; J. Dunn, *Paul and Justification by Faith*, in: *The Road from Damascus*, Michigan 1997, p. 85–101.

disturbance. On the other hand, where it is not in effect, there is no possibility that it could defend against many false teachings.³

The father of the Reformation captures the issue of justification in two phrases: *sola fides* (faith alone) and *sola gratia* (grace alone). On the one hand, the way of justification is only faith and grace, and not the ensuing works of hope, love, repentance, fear of God, and keeping the commandments, which are contained in Catholic theology. In the *Large Catechism* it is said that only faith makes a man worthy of adoption in an effective way through saving, divine water. If in baptism everything is evidenced and promised in the words connected with the water, then man can't otherwise received it but by heartfelt faith. Without faith baptism has no effect even though in itself it is an immensely divine treasure. It is certain that, that which is not faith has no meaning and cannot receive anything.⁴ Only faith is sanctifying before God and serves only Him, but deeds serve people. On the other hand, Martin Luther emphasized the profound corruption of human nature that was caused by original sin and we see the same essence of sin in concupiscence. With this understanding of corruption we do not believe that the justification by grace that man receives in Baptism, cleans and regenerates him completely. God does not merely regard him in his sins but considers him a saint in spite of his extreme poverty. This confirms the principle *simul iustus et peccator* or both righteous and sinful. It is said that to be justified by God is sufficient for man's salvation, however, his internal status as a sinner does not change. For this reason, the concept of merit is pointless and assumes the Pelagian error. The justified man is called to do good works, which appear as the fruit of justification. It is worth noting that the belief that justification through faith is sufficient stemmed from suspicions of the scholastic doctrine about Pelagianism. The teaching of Luther thus expressed was the *spiritus movens* of the Reformation in the sixteenth century.⁵

The Roman Church did not identify itself with this understanding of justification and considered it a purely external, juridical approach

³ Cf. M. Luther, *Smalcald Articles*, II, 1, in: *The Book of Concord*, Minneapolis 2000, p. 301; D. Bagchi, D. Steinmetz, *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, Cambridge 2004, p. 56–61.

⁴ Cf. M. Luther, *Large Catechism*, in: *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, Göttingen 1986, p. 665–667.

⁵ Cf. O. Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, Michigan 2008, p. 143–151; M. Mullet, *Martin Luther*, Oxford 2004, p. 202–208.

that does not take into account the genuine transformation of human life that is effected by the sacrament of baptism. Justification is the true sanctification and renewal of the inner person. The justified person becomes truly righteous and lives in friendship with God. The Council of Trent stated that nature (for Gentiles forces of nature) and the law (for Jews the letter of the law of Moses) aren't able to justify man and therefore justification accomplished by Christ is God's answer to man's sinful situation. Following this the Council gave a description of the justification of the sinner as one who is moving from being the *son of the first Adam* to a state of grace and adoption as sons of God through the *second Adam*, namely Christ. The Fathers of Trent emphasized that one should appropriately prepare for *iustificatio*. The person is incited toward and supported by God's grace, accepting the faith by hearing and voluntarily turning to God, as well as having the awareness that he is a sinner and expressing the promise of baptism to begin a new life. The causes of justification are set out in the definition: intentional (the glory of God and eternal life), causative (merciful God), deserving (Jesus) tool (Baptism) and formal (the justice of God). Besides drawing attention to the understanding of justification by faith as a free gift it also emphasized that progress in the process of justification is realized through the cooperation of faith and good deeds. The state of justification does not release a person from the obligation to keep the God's commandments, on the contrary, the commandments are necessary and are needed to cultivate the gift of perseverance. One should also beware of the reckless presumption of the certainty of being counted among those who are saved. It may happen that a situation arises whereby the sinful man will fall from the grace of justification. Then, through the sacrament of penance the believer can once again receive the grace he has lost. Every mortal sin causes a loss of grace, not faith. At the end of the Tridentine *Decree*, the fruit of justification was underlined, that is, the merit of good deeds.⁶

Hence, Trent outlined the way a person can go through life in the light of justification and highlighted the steps necessary for this; that

⁶ Cf. Sobór Trydencki, *Dekret o usprawiedliwieniu*, in: *Dokumenty Soborów Powszechnych*, red. A. Baron, H. Pietras, t. 4, Kraków 2004, p. 288–310; P. Brunner, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre des Konzils von Trient*, in: *Pro Veritate. Ein theologischer Dialog. Festgabe für Erzbischof Lorenz Jaeger und Bischof W. Stählin*, hrsg. E. Schlink, H. Volk, Münster-Kassel 1963, p. 59–96.

is, first justification, then preparation for justification, and finally justification in baptism and life after justification. The road was based on scholastic interpretation. The Trentine decree on justification mentioned: „This disposition, or preparation, is followed by Justification itself, which is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just, and of an enemy a friend, that so he may be an heir according to hope of life everlasting” (Tit 3,7).⁷ The Fathers of Trent pointed to the dynamic cooperation of the person with grace, also stressing the complete primacy of grace before human deeds. Thus salvation is God’s work and a gift of grace. In accord with responsibility and human freedom – the person is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and grace. Not all human deeds can be excluded regarding justification. These deeds are only possible based on the action of grace in preparation for, and after, justification. In addition, the Council Fathers clarified the understanding that the actual justification and real forgiveness of sins is accompanied by sanctification. Referring to the same the doctrine that Martin Luther highlighted, that faith which, is necessary for adoption and justification are closely associated with hope and love, that men cannot boast of or trust in their justification and predestination, because they must constantly must keep watch over each other and be in a state of conversion.⁸

It should be stressed that the polemic of Rome was that Luther alluded to popular belief rather than the source texts. The Fathers of Trent mostly had at their disposal the catalogs of heresy and not original works of Luther. Hence the right question, on the one hand, is whether the doctrinal condemnations of this Council actually relate to the teachings of the Reformation and, on the other hand, if the condemnations contained in Lutheran religious books spoke about the true doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. It is difficult to go back to the sixteenth century to clearly and precisely answer these questions.

⁷ Sobór Trydencki, *Dekret o usprawiedliwieniu*, 7a, in: *Dokumenty Soborów Powszechnych*, red. A. Baron, H. Pietras, t. 4, Kraków 2004, p. 294. Trans. <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch6.htm> Accessed Oct. 14, 2015.

⁸ Cf. V. Grossi, *La dottrina tridentina della giustificazione. Verso nuove letture?*, *L'ateranum* 66 (2000), p. 481–508; W. Most, *Justification: doctrine of Council of Trent*, London 1995, p. 37–45.

CATHOLIC-LUTHERAN DIALOGUE AFTER VATICAN II

The contemporary theological debate on the issue of the justification of the sinner appeared in the Catholic – Lutheran ecumenical dialogue, which formally began after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Reflection on the theology of justification resulted in capturing the convergence of multiple views, which until that time were regarded as difficult or impossible to reconcile. First of all, it emphasized that Catholic teaching on this topic has its foundation in the ontological recognition of the reality of grace that assumes the priority God's action in man. Whereas, the Lutheran doctrine is based on radically relational terms, not negated, but actually described in the language of the Aristotelian–Thomistic ontology. Without a doubt, the issue of *iustificatio* is one of the main topics of ecumenical dialogue, the first phase of which began in 1967 in Zurich on the global level and ended with the publication of The Malta Report in 1972 under the title *The Gospel and the Church (Das Evangelium und die Kirche)*. On it the topic of Scripture and Tradition it was found that for the first time there existed, both in the Catholic and Lutheran views on the doctrine of justification, the possibility of agreement on the subject. Catholics underlined the gratuitousness of justification and Lutherans emphasized that *iustificatio* is not only an outward reality but also has an internal dimension that gives new life to the justified sinner.⁹

In the second phase of dialogue, which lasted until 1984, several important documents were produced: *The Eucharist* (1978), *The Ministry of the Church* (1981), two declarations *All Under One Christ* (1980, on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the *Augsburg Confession*), and *Martin Luther – Witness to Christ* (1983, on the 500th anniversary of the birth of the Reformer). Two other documents also appeared: *Ways to Community* (1980) and *Facing Unity – Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Church Fellowship* (1984). The main message of this stage came down to the determination that the effect of justification is the renewal of heart and aptitude to do good works and to indicate

⁹ Cf. *Das Evangelium und die Kirche*, in: *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung. Sämtliche Berichte und Konsensustexte interkonfessioneller Gespräche auf Weltebene 1931–1982*, hrsg. H. Meyer, D. Papandreou, H. J. Urban, L. Vischer, t. 1, Paderborn – Frankfurt am Main 1991, s. 248–271; A. Hauke-Ligowski, *Dialog między Kościołem katolickim a Federacją Luterancką*, in: *Collectanea Theologica* 38 (1968) 4, p. 129–132.

that the criticism contained in the *Confessio Augustana* relating to the various practices of the church was irrelevant. The Catholic–Lutheran dialogue on justification in the USA produced the document *Justification by Faith*¹⁰ (1983) and in the German–speaking countries, *Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?*¹¹ (1986), was published. Considering the sixteenth-century conflict in terms of the justification of the sinner was grounded in the medieval interpretation of St. Augustine’s theology and his doctrine of grace, merit and predestination. Furthermore, it was determined that Luther’s personal experiences also played a significant role in the dispute. It also became apparent that there were divergent perceptions by both confessions on some theological theses, especially external justification, justification of the sinner and the sufficiency of faith. The view that the Bible is richer than confessional interpretation and – when it comes to justification – the basic differences in meaning are linked not only to the aspect of content, but to the methodology as well. Thus, the Lutheran doctrine of justification fulfills the criteriological function of the theology, especially ecclesiology, while for Catholics there is a certain distance in relation to *iustificatio* and the criteriological principle of the theological teaching.¹²

The third phase in the ecumenical dialogue, which lasted until 1993, was associated mainly with the essence of the Church through the prism of the doctrine of justification and sacramental doctrine. The result of the talks was the publication of the report *Church and Justification (Das Verständnis der Kirche im Licht der Rechtfertigungslehre)*.¹³ It was found that, whereas there are ecclesiological implications of the doctrine of justification, the Church is in no way in competition with the importance of the justifying act of God, but is a necessary part of

¹⁰ Cf. *Justification by Faith (Common Statement)*, in: H. Anderson, T. Murphy, J. Burgess (ed.), *Justification by Faith. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, Minneapolis 1985, s. 13–74.

¹¹ Cf. K. Lehmann – W. Pannenberg (ed.), *Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?* t. 1: *Rechtfertigung, Sakramente und Amt im Zeitalter der Reformation und heute*, Freiburg 1986.

¹² Cf. M. Brinkman, *Christological Implications of the Ecumenical Agreement on Justification*, in: T. Merrigan, J. Haers (ed.), *The Myriad Christ*, Leuven 2000, s. 567–573; J. Kempa, *Usprowiedliwienie*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, t. 19, Lublin 2013, col. 1425.

¹³ Cf. *Kirche und Rechtfertigung. Das Verständnis der Kirche im Licht der Rechtfertigungslehre*, red. Gemeinsame Römisch-katholische/Evangelisch-lutherische Kommission, Paderborn – Frankfurt a.M. 1994.

God's salvific mediation. The Lutheran Church called for an inclusive interpretation of the rules *solus Deus* and *solus Christus* in relation to the concept of the Church as a sacrament. Both confessions became convinced that justification is the ecclesial dimension, because in the Church the justifying grace to the believer becomes something visible. However, such elements as awareness of sinfulness, imperfection and the historical roots of the Church do not give it the exclusive role as mediator of the communication of salvation, but shows the essence of justification as a gift of God's grace. In addition, it was confirmed that the primacy of the Gospel message of salvation and the gratuitousness of grace in Jesus Christ should be the overriding criterion in defining and assessing the structural elements of the Church along with various practices of ecclesial life.¹⁴

It is worth mentioning that during the talks it became apparent that Catholics feared that the Protestant doctrine of justification negated the freedom of man, and consequently his ability to make an effective effort in doing good actions that deserve to be rewarded. On the other hand, Lutherans harbored the suspicion that the Catholic teaching stated that prideful man could save himself by good works, thus eliminating the redeeming sense of the Passion of Jesus Christ. So, again, the main problem was – as in the days of Augustine and Pelagius – to reconcile the gratuitousness of God's grace with human freedom. Although these concerns are still present in the midst of Christian ecumenical dialogue, ongoing since the Second Vatican Council, it allowed for the signing of an official joint document on justification.¹⁵

JOINT DECLARATION ON JUSTIFICATION

The documents of the Catholic–Lutheran dialogue in Europe and the United States became the basis for the development of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Representatives of both sides were optimistic in that respect. The development of this cooperative work required many discussions and hard work. It can be said that it

¹⁴ Cf. D. Wendebourg, *Kirche und Rechtfertigung. Ein Erlebnisbericht zu einem neuen ökumenischen Dokument*, in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 93 (1996) 1, s. 93–97.

¹⁵ Cf. R. Porada, *Usprawiedliwienie*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, t. 19, Lublin 2013, col. 1426–1427.

was a kind of culmination of the Catholic and Lutheran dialogue on the issue *iustificatio*. The first project saw the light of day in 1995. A year later, after taking into account the comments of both parties, a second document with different wording was developed, however, it was decided that the text must be reworked. Finally, in 1997, another text was created, which together with a letter, was sent to the churches belonging to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). If it received a positive response and the declaration was to be signed in 1998. The member churches numbered 122 communities and two affiliated churches. Regarding the letter, which had been sent in 1997 to all the Secretaries General of LWF, 89 churches responded, 81 positively and 7 negatively. However, the Roman Catholics proposed the joint document be examined primarily at the level of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for the Unity of Christians. Both of these offices reported many reservations and signaled the need for further clarifications. Thus compulsory works related to the declaration prevented the signing of a common understanding in 1998.¹⁶

The *Joint Declaration on Justification*¹⁷ was signed on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg, on Reformation Day. It should be underlined that despite the common document, all the difficulties that exist in the Catholic and Lutheran concept of justification, had not been completely resolved but undoubtedly brightened a large part of them. The authors of the *Declaration* cautioned that although it does not contain everything every church teaches about justification, it represents a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification. In addition, it shows that the differences that still exist are no longer a cause for doctrinal condemnations. The method that was used in the formulation of a body of the document was a varied consensus. The dialogue partners came to the conclusion that there was a considerable degree of common attitudes and opinions regarding the doctrine of justification. The authors identified the basic common truths about *iustificatio*. First, justification as the work of the Triune God, the foundations and conditions of which are:

¹⁶ Cf. A. Napiórkowski, *Bogactwo łaski a nędza grzesznika*, Kraków 2000, p. 288–289; W. Medwid, *Usprowadliwienie w dialogu katolicko-luterańskim*, Kraków 2010, p. 202–207.

¹⁷ Cf. „*Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre*”, in: *Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre. Ein Kommentar für Ökumenische Forschung*, Straßburg 1997, p. 55–77.

the incarnation and the death and resurrection of Christ who was sent by the Father for the salvation of sinners; and second, the universality of salvation in Christ, who comes to man through faith and as a gift of God through the Holy Spirit. It was pointed out that only through Christ are men justified, in faith they accept salvation and that faith itself is a gift of God through the Holy Spirit. Third, the exclusion of merit in receiving the gift of salvation along with the total dependence of man on God's mercy and grace. It is true that only through grace and faith in Christ's saving work man is adopted by God and receives the Holy Spirit who renews the heart and calls and empowers us to good works. Fourth, the doctrine of justification as a criterion for bringing together doctrine and the practice of the Church around Christ, and for Catholics this doctrine constitutes one of many criteria.¹⁸

The second thematic group formed questions of differentiated consensus regarding *iustificatio*. The first is the possibility of human collaboration with a justifying God, called *cooperatio*; second – merits and good deeds; third – sinfulness justified, that is the principle of *simul iustus et peccator*. It should be underlined that on these points the Catholic and Lutheran teaching are not identical, but the existing differences are permissible to the extent that they do not obstruct the unity of the Church. These differences are connected with language, theological form, and emphasis in the understanding of justification. The discussion, which appeared around the permitted variations referred to in the *Declaration*, showed that they had become a source of dispute within the church and conformity on these questions had to be worked out. For this reason an appendix is included in the document for clarification, which was approved October 31, 1999 in Augsburg. Even though it is not a dogmatic document of the Catholic Church, nor is it binding for some of the Lutheran denominations, it may be suggested that the *Declaration* signed in 1999 opened a new path in the ecumenical quest.¹⁹

In my view, the document – in the form of consensus – seems to be a sign of the danger of the protestantization Catholic Church. On the other hand, for experts of Protestant theology, there was some concern

¹⁸ Cf. *Wspólna deklaracja w sprawie nauki o usprawiedliwieniu (1997). Projekt ostateczny. Światowa Federacja Luterńska – Papieska Rada do spraw Jedności Chrześcijan*, in: „Studia i Dokumenty Ekumeniczne” (1997) nr 2, p. 55–61.

¹⁹ Cf. R. Porada, *Usprawiedliwienie*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, t. 19, Lublin 2013, col. 1426.

that adoption of the joint formula would undermine the Lutheran doctrine of justification. Without a doubt after the announcement of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* on 31 October 1999, there was talk about the great turning point in the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue, a milestone on the road to unity to the extent that it could be called a revolutionary act. However, without extensive research and analysis anyone with an elementary knowledge of the difference between the Catholic and Lutheran doctrine of justification will recognize that achieving this common understanding is impossible. These two doctrines are themselves diametrically opposed. Enthusiastic statements about the groundbreaking Lutheran–Catholic *Joint Declaration* seem to be an exaggeration. In the mind of most faithful Catholics and Lutherans, the doctrine of justification has not been the reason for the lack of unity. It is worth noting that many theologians are still raising objections and have subtle concerns. This document concerns wording that is rooted in medieval theology and modern man doesn't always know how to appreciate the importance of the sixteenth-century theological digressions. What is noticeably missing in the *Joint Declaration* is an animating and unifying perspective that is perceptible to modern man, this all too subtle distinction that comes from centuries ago is actually about something important, namely the authenticity of a personal encounter with a loving God.²⁰

DISPUTE OVER THE JUSTIFICATION – ECUMENICAL DISCUSSION BEFORE THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REFORMATION

In 2013, fourteen years after the Joint Declaration, the document *From Conflict to Communion*,²¹ was published, which was created as part of the ecumenical working group set up by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity. In the context of the

²⁰ Cf. W. Pannenberg, *Die Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre aus evangelischer Sicht*, w: *Zur Zukunft der Ökumene. Die „Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre“*, B. J. Hilberath, W. Pannenberg (eds.), Regensburg 1999, p. 70; W. Medwid, *Usprawiedliwienie w dialogu katolicko-luterańskim*, Kraków 2010, p. 210–220.

²¹ Cf. *From conflict to communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, Leipzig 2013.

upcoming anniversary of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the ecumenical document proposes to look at the person of Martin Luther and his demands as well as the events of the sixteenth-century Reformation. The ecumenical dialogue has allowed for a better understanding of the issues that are the sources of controversy, for example, justification by grace through faith, the understanding of the Eucharist, the priesthood of all the baptized and its relation to the service of the Church and the ordained ministry. The memory of the beginning of the Reformation is intended to encourage a common hearing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The document addresses the following issues: the commemoration of the Reformation in the era of ecumenism and globalization, new perspectives on Luther and the Reformation and the importance of ecumenical dialogues; the Catholic response to the Reformation; Luther's main theological themes in the light of ecumenical dialogues – justification next to authority, Bible and tradition; and Baptism as the basis of unity and common commemoration. The document is essentially pastoral and missionary. It does not contain any doctrinal breakthroughs that would entail any consequences of an ecclesial nature. It is an interesting attempt to read what, at first glance, appears to resolve and cement the confessional division of the sixteenth century. Controversial historical, doctrinal, and spiritual issues were looked at in a way that both Catholics and Lutherans could have a better possibility of a deeper knowledge of their ecumenical partners and a more sustained reading of their own religious tradition, and through it – their common roots.²²

When it comes to the question of justification, it is shown that Luther's understanding of *iustificatio*, a belief that has shaped the Reformation in regard to the sacrament of penance and God's forgiveness, states that the priest proclaims justification of the repentant. For Luther, the word of God appeared as a promise. Man is called to look to the promise of God's Word, which he trusts, and faith gives the believer total assurance of his salvation and is dependent on God's promises. Salvation, however, happens only with grace. Luther outlined, that the justified man does good deeds in the Holy Spirit. Human justice,

²² Cf. R. Porada, „Od konfliktu do komunii” – w drodze ku 500. rocznicy Reformacji, w: „Studia Oecumenica” 13 (2013), p. 297–301; M. Rinehart, *From Conflict to Communion: Observing the 500th anniversary of the Reformation*, <http://www.bishopmike.com/2015/07/27/from-conflict-to-communion-observing-the-500th-anniversary-of-the-reformation-1517-2017/> (dated 4 IX 2015).

which is something external, because it is the righteousness of Christ, must become something internal through faith in Him. For Luther, the law had great spiritual and theological importance. God's commandments can be filled only by complete trust in God, and no one can be obliged to do something beyond his own abilities. Luther showed total dependence on the righteousness of Christ, because only He completely fulfilled the will of God. A man can become justified when he has a share in His righteousness. Luther argued that his contemporary theologians had not sufficiently emphasized the role of grace as the basis of every true renewal. He was also of the view that man is fully accepted and redeemed by God. With regard to the Law – people are still sinful, but in relation to the gospel – while justified because they trust the promise of the Gospel. This revealed Luther's understanding of the Christian, who is righteous and also a sinner. There is no contradiction here, because here is the relationship to the word of God as the Law of God (nature of the accused) and to the Word as the gospel of God (Christ the Savior). This accounts for the freedom to be accepted by God through grace alone and through faith in the promises of Christ. The justified man is obliged to fulfill the commandments of God and does so under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.²³

The document presents the Catholic comments on *iustificatio*. The necessity of God's grace and the inability of earning salvation through ones own efforts were consistent in Catholic and Lutheran teaching of the sixteenth century, which was confirmed by the Council of Trent. In the first canon on justification the Council of Trent excommunicates those who claim that man can be justified by his own acts without the grace of Christ. Luther's disturbing views, which negated mans personal responsibility for his actions aroused concern. It is necessary to take into account the legitimate participation in the process of the development of grace in his life. Luther's recognition of the sinner as juridically justified negates the creative power of God's grace in conversion and overcoming sin. Forgiveness of sins takes place and the sinner who receives God's justice is sanctified.²⁴

²³ Cf. *From conflict to communion. Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, Leipzig 2013, p. 43–48; R. Porada, „Od konfliktu do komunii” – *w drodze ku 500. rocznicy Reformacji*, w: „Studia Oecumenica” 13 (2013), p. 302–305.

²⁴ Cf. Sobór Trydencki, *Dekret o usprawiedliwieniu*, in: *Dokumenty Soborów Powszechnych*, red. A. Baron, H. Pietras, t. 4, Kraków 2004, p. 310; *From conflict to com-*

It was acknowledged that the doctrine of justification is, for Luther and other reformers, the first and chief article. Regarding Catholic–Lutheran relations, priority was given to try and overcome division on this point, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. The basis of the outline for the *Joint Declaration on Justification* in 1999, proposes a differentiated consensus to common expressions with different emphasis, under the argument that the differences do not devalue the issues common to both traditions. Thus it goes on consensus, which doesn't exclude differences, but they are clearly taken into account.²⁵

Thus, as shown by the following, the wording specifies the common agreement regarding *iustificatio*. First, *only by grace*. A man of grace and faith receives forgiveness and acts in everything through God's mercy and not on the basis of merit. *By grace alone* refers to the human movement toward salvation. The Lutherans stressed that one can only receive justification through adoption and Catholics pointed to a preparation to grace through cooperation. This does not undermine the conviction that justification is achieved through grace alone. Also, faith is understood primarily as the confidence of the heart built on the Word of God. Second, the issue of faith and good works. It stresses the common understanding of the link between faith and good works, namely faith active in love. Lutherans believe in the creative power of God's grace and Catholics ascribe creative activity to justifying grace. Justified as a result of a new relationship with God men are transformed and called children of God. There is also a shared belief that performing good deeds is a result and the fruit of justification. The communion with Christ is deepened and achieved by doing good deeds. Thus, on the question of human cooperation the authors of the document stressed that the summary of this issue is a quote from the Lutheran books of confession, precisely from the *Book of Concord*. Third, the wording *simul iustus et peccator*, specifically where there is a different understanding by both confessions regarding concepts such as sin, lust and justice. However, the common denominator refers to the truth that sin can't govern a Christian (Romans 6:12; 2 Corinthians 5:17), but he isn't devoid of sin

munion. Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017, Leipzig 2013, p. 48.

²⁵ Cf. *From conflict to communion. Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, Leipzig 2013, p. 49; R. Porada, „Od konfliktu do komunii” – w drodze ku 500. rocznicy Reformacji, w: „Studia Oecumenica” 13 (2013), p. 305–306.

(1 John 1:8–10). The tendency to oppose God does not separate man from the justification of God. Fourth, the certainty of salvation, especially where the differences in the ways of thinking between Luther and Cardinal Cajetan led to mutual misunderstanding in the sixteenth century. In conclusion it stated that a signed diverse consensus and mutual condemnation of his teachings doesn't refer to another religion and an agreement was reached with respect to the fundamental truths about *iustificatio*. While differences remain that are acceptable such as: language, form, and different theological emphases in the understanding of justification. Doctrinal condemnations made in the sixteenth century, appear in a new light, which – according to the authors of the document is an amazing response to conflicts lasting almost half a millennium.²⁶

The document was intended to fill a gap between Catholics and Lutherans on the theological level. There is no doubt that the ecumenical dialogue is important for the relationship between the Churches on various levels. The Reformation was the beginning of a painful split of the Western Church. It would be worth finding a place to express the blame for the breakdown that occurred in Christianity. Looking with a critical eye at the document, it must be pointed out that there is too much focus on the person of Luther. Also, the differences between the theology of Luther and Lutheran theology has not been taken account in a sufficient manner.

SUMMARY

The doctrine of justification is the most important of all Catholic dogmatic theology and a fundamental point of difference between Catholicism and Protestantism, for which it is the *articulus stantis et cadentis Ecclesiae*. Luther based his interpretation of the truth of justification by faith on the bible, but he didn't properly understand the doctrine. The doctrine of justification through God's grace and through faith in the merits of Christ was a priority for Luther. From the Catholic point of

²⁶ Cf. *From conflict to communion. Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, Leipzig 2013, p. 49–53; *Formula Concordiae (Konkordienformel)*, II, 64–65, in: *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, Göttingen 1986, p. 1058; R. Porada, „Od konfliktu do komunii” – w drodze ku 500. rocznicy Reformacji, w: „Studia Oecumenica” 13 (2013), s. 307.

view, righteousness is realized in every particular human through faith in Jesus Christ and baptism in the faith. The fruit of justification is forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the principal author of turning man away from sin and turning him toward God. The Spirit heals the enslaved human will and moves it to cooperate with God's grace, renews and improves it in the likeness of God.

Changes in Catholic thinking about Luther and the Reformation took place by theological reflection on the father of the Reformation, and extensive research on the theology and spirituality of the Middle Ages by Protestants. The atmosphere of the sixteenth century doctrinal polemics disrupted the perception of efforts to rescue unity. It also prevented the understanding of the common contents of faith, which were covered with a thick layer of prejudice, ignorance and a sequence of circumstances that weren't always associated with religious issues. The importance of ecumenical dialogue has caused significant changes in the relations between the two Churches by the official dialogue, which has been made possible thanks to the opening up of the Catholic Church to ecumenism by the decisions of Vatican II. We can say that the purpose of the ecumenical project is to achieve a clear Catholic and Lutheran identity in the midst of the division, to underline the phenomenon of faith, and to search for what is common to both churches.

The Catholic–Lutheran dialogue of justification has not be limited to explaining the difficulties with sixteenth century disputes, but he has opened up new prospects for understanding *iustificatio* and other issues on which both confessions differ. It is not in any way a disregard for tradition and history. It's about the search for ideas, about how to see the deeper unity of what once was shared. Another aspect, which might be revived in the contemporary dialogue of justification, is the eschatological perspective. It reminds us that all the formulations of the Christian faith have sense if they carry us into the future to God. Justification should be seen from the perspective of the direct vision of God, which is the goal and the fulfillment of the human being. God became man so that man can become God – to repeat the Fathers of the Church. And no doubt the prospect of human deification can help Lutherans and Catholics to find a fuller unity.

The documents of ecumenical dialogue are meant to foster doctrinal and pastoral understanding and bring Catholics and Lutherans closer together as well as preparing for talks on sensitive topics. The long-term goal should be, above all else, to recognize a mutual full ecclesiology

and the possibility of reciprocal invitations to the Eucharistic Table. Because these are very complex issues there is still a need for dialogue and mutual understanding. Reflecting on the ecumenical dimension of the justification of the sinner in its present perspectives needs to be mature in the context of the document and the still ongoing dialogue. It should be emphasized that all comments, analyses, and observations would only be vain chatter, if not for the belief in the power Jesus' prayer, whose desire was and is „*that they all may be one* (John 17:21).”

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