

CALVIN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE
 "TWOFOLD GRACE OF GOD"
 AND CONTEMPORARY
 ECUMENICAL DISCUSSION OF THE GOSPEL

by Cornelis P. Venema

DURING THE course of preparing recently a book-length manuscript on Calvin's understanding of the "twofold grace of God," or the double benefit of God's grace in Christ, justification and sanctification, I was struck by the way Calvin's understanding of this subject may be relevant to recent ecumenical discussions of the doctrine of justification.¹ Though my study of Calvin's doctrine of the "twofold grace of God" belongs properly to the arena of the history of doctrine, it is not without significance for an understanding of the "gospel today."² My primary aim in the study was to offer an interpretation of Calvin's view of justification and sanctification within the setting of previous studies of Calvin's theology. It is scarcely possible, however, to treat Calvin's position, which codifies in a systematic fashion the classical Protestant understanding of God's grace in Christ, without at least contemplating its relevance for the church's proclamation of the gospel in the modern age. Undoubtedly, Calvin's understanding of the "twofold grace of God" was shaped by the historical context of the sixteenth-century Reformation. It bears the marks of the polemical protest of the Protestant Reformation against the medieval Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of justification. Despite the considerable historical distance between the circumstance of the church in the six-

¹ The study to which I refer is a revision of my Ph.D. dissertation on Calvin, and is scheduled to be published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in September of this year with the title: *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The 'Twofold Grace of God' and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology*. When I use in this article the phrase, the "twofold grace of God," I am referring to what Calvin, in theological shorthand, denominates the *duplex gratia dei*. In the history of theology, the customary *ordo salutis* terminology for this "twofold grace" has been that of "justification" and "sanctification." Though referring to the same subject and issue, Calvin ordinarily uses the terminology of "justification" and "regeneration" or "repentance." Only infrequently does he speak of "sanctification," though it is clearly for him a synonym for either regeneration or repentance. In this article, I will commonly use the term "sanctification" rather than "regeneration" or "repentance" for the sake of clarity.

² This language was used at the Fourth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, in its discussion of the significance of justification for understanding the gospel. See *Proceedings of the Fourth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation*, Helsinki, July 30-August 11, 1963 (Berlin und Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1965).

teenth and the twenty-first centuries, there are two reasons that warrant this article on the subject of Calvin's view in relation to contemporary ecumenical discussion of the gospel.

First, in the last several decades, the historic disagreement between the Protestant and Roman Catholic doctrines of grace, particularly the doctrine of justification, has become the centerpiece of sustained ecumenical discussion. At no point since the Reformation of the sixteenth century has the doctrine of justification received the kind of attention it is receiving at the present time. A series of high-level discussions between representatives of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches has produced several ecumenical statements, which purport to show that a new consensus is emerging on the subject of the gospel of justification in Christ. One of the most important features of these discussions is a renewed study of the classical formulations of the churches and their representative theologians. The way forward in any ecumenical discussion that addresses important areas of doctrinal differences between the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches must include a fresh reading of the historical sources. Since the division in the sixteenth century was occasioned by sharp disagreements over the doctrine of justification, contemporary attempts to reach a consensus regarding the gospel must start by returning to the historic formulations of doctrine of that period.³ A renewed acquaintance with the classical positions of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communions is a necessary first step in any ecumenical discussion about the nature of the gospel. Since Calvin is arguably the most important theologian of the Reformation period, at least on the Protestant side, he provides a comprehensive summary of the principal differences between the historic Protestant and Roman Catholic doctrines of grace. This is itself a matter of considerable importance to contemporary discussion of the gospel.

Second, Calvin's doctrine of the believer's acceptance and renewal in Christ was formulated out of a deep concern to answer the classic Roman Catholic objections to the Protestant position. As much or more than any of the sixteenth century Reformers, Calvin formulated his understanding of the gospel in sustained dialogue with the Roman Catholic understanding. Calvin's formulations are not merely polemical in the negative sense of repudiating features of the Roman Catholic view; Calvin's formulations are also polemical in the positive sense of aiming to provide a satisfactory answer to some typical Roman Catholic objections to the Protestant doctrine of justification. Calvin's position on the "twofold grace of God" not only represents a classic codification of the Protestant view, but also clarifies and sharpens the areas of special importance to the divergence between this view and that of the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, Calvin's doctrine of the "twofold grace of God"

³ Cf. E. David Willis, "Forgiveness and Gratitude: The Doctrine of Justification in the Heidelberg Catechism," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, XXVIII (1963), 11: "Present theological and historical re-assessment of the doctrine of justification moves about two foci: (1) what, in fact, did the Protestant and Roman Catholic documents of the sixteenth century teach on the doctrine, and (2) what can formulations four long centuries ago have to do with modern man's understanding of himself before God and in a divided Church?"

has an ecumenical complexion, even if it expresses sharp areas of disagreement between Protestant and Roman Catholic views. This gives Calvin's position a special usefulness for engaging the historic differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic views of justification.

The historic and contemporary discussion of the doctrine of justification includes other dimensions that will not be addressed in this article.⁴ Our interest is strictly limited to the significance of Calvin's particular formulation of the "twofold grace of God" to the dispute between Protestant and Roman Catholic views on justification. In order to explore the potential contribution of Calvin's formulation to a clarification or resolution of this dispute, we will begin with a summary, first, of Calvin's doctrine of the "twofold grace of God," and second, of the historic Roman Catholic criticism of the Protestant doctrine of grace. After summarizing the classic disagreement between the Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines of justification, we will also briefly summarize some of the more important recent ecumenical discussions regarding the gospel and the doctrine of justification. We will then conclude by offering several observations regarding the significance of Calvin's doctrine of the "twofold grace of God" for addressing the issues that have emerged within the framework of these discussions.

I. A Summary of Calvin's Understanding of the "Twofold Grace of God"⁵

Within the framework of Calvin's treatment in the *Institutes* of the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ, the topic of the "twofold grace of God" is treated in Book III. As the title of this Book indicates, Calvin aims to describe the two benefits of salvation in Christ that believers enjoy through faith-union with Christ. In order for believers to enjoy the fruits of Christ's saving mediation, which Calvin describes at length in Book II, they must be joined to Christ by the work of the Spirit and through faith. Accordingly, Calvin introduces the subject of the "twofold grace of God" by noting that any discussion of faith would be "barren and mutilated and well-nigh useless" unless it included an explanation of its twofold benefit.⁶ Our union with Christ cannot be properly apprehended, if the effects of this union remain obscure. A satisfactory account of faith, therefore, must consider what benefits we receive when we are engrafted

⁴ For a brief summary of these discussions, including the emergence in biblical studies of what is known as the "new perspective(s) on Paul," see my "Justification by Faith: The Ecumenical, Biblical and Theological Dimensions of Current Discussion," in *Always Reforming*, ed. Andrew McGowan (Intervarsity, 2006), 289-327.

⁵ The material in this section is an abbreviation from my forthcoming volume on Calvin, and is used with the permission of Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

⁶ III.iii.1 (OS 4.55). When referring to the *Institutes*, I will cite the reference by book, chapter, and section. For example, "I.i.1" refers to the *Institutes*, Book I, Chapter i, Section 1. When referring in what follows to Calvin's works in the *Opera Selecta* (ed. P. Barth and G. Niesel, 5 vol., [München: Kaiser, 1926-52]), I will use the abbreviation, OS. When referring to the *Calvini Opera* (*Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss et al., 59 vol. [vol. 29-87, *Corpus Reformatorum*. Brunsvigae, Schwetschke, 1863-1900]), I will use the abbreviation, CO.

into Christ's body. As Calvin notes at the outset of his treatment of these benefits, they are principally the gifts of justification and sanctification:

Let us sum these up: Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace (*duplicem gratiam*): namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father, and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's Spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.⁷

Throughout all of his writings—in his *Institutes*, commentaries, and sermons—Calvin consistently refers to this “double grace” or twofold benefit of our reception of the grace of God in Christ as comprising the “sum of the gospel.”⁸ These two benefits, justification and sanctification (or repentance) are the “two parts” of our redemption, both of which are bestowed upon us by Christ through faith.⁹ Together they form the two ways in which the “justice of God” is communicated to us,¹⁰ and in which we are cleansed by the holiness of Christ and made partakers of it.¹¹ They constitute that “twofold cleansing” (*double lavement*),¹² or “twofold purification” (*duplex purgandi*),¹³ which are granted to us by the Spirit of Christ. The “twofold grace of God” answers to the two ways in which Christ lives in us,¹⁴ and forms the invariable content of all Christian preaching about redemption in Christ and its application to human existence.

II. The Nature of Justification

According to Calvin, justification through faith is the “first” of these benefits or ways in which Christ lives in those who are engrafted into him. Whereas sanctification or repentance is the “second” of these gifts (*quae secunda est gratia*), justification or reconciliation is “the main hinge on which religion turns” (*praecipuus esse sustinendae religionis cardo*).¹⁵ When Calvin treats the subject of the benefits of our reception

⁷ III.xi.1 (OS 4.182). Cf. French ed., 1560: “double grace”; III.xi.14 (OS 4.198); III.ii.8 (OS 4.18); Comm. Deut. 30:19 (CO 25.56): “duplicem Christi gratiam.”

⁸ III.iii.1 (OS 4.55): “... summa Evangelii.” Cf. Comm. Acts 5:31 (CO 48.111): “... totam evangelii summam”; Comm. Acts 2:38 (CO 48.51-2): “Ac duae quidem illae sunt evangelii partes”; and Comm. Ezek. 16:61 (CO 40.393): “... totam evangelii summam.”

⁹ E.g., Comm. Matt. 1:21 (CO 45.65): “Duae porro sunt liberationis huius partes”; Comm. Matt. 3:2 (CO 45.112): “... totum evangelium duabus partibus constare, remissione peccatorum, et poenitentia”; Comm. John 1:17 (CO 47.18-9); Comm. Col. 1:22 (CO 52.90); Comm. Ezek. 11:19-20 (CO 40.250).

¹⁰ Comm. Heb. 7:1 (CO 55.82). Cf. Serm. Isa. 24:16 (SC 2.364).

¹¹ Comm. John 17:19 (CO 47.385).

¹² Serm. Gal. 2:17-18 (CO 50.437-8).

¹³ Comm. Acts 15:9 (CO 48.347). Cf. Serm. Job 14:1-4 (CO 33.668).

¹⁴ Comm. Gal. 2:20 (CO 50.199).

¹⁵ III.xi.1 (OS 4.182); French ed., 1560: “... c'est le principal article de la religion Chrestienne.” Cf. III.xv.1 (OS 4.239): “Praecipuum autem hunc esse causae cardinem”; Serm. 2 Sam. 12:13 (SC 1.332): “... c'est le principal point de nostre salut”; *Serm. sur la prophetie de Jesus Christ* (CO 35.626): “... c'est le principal article de nostre salut”; *Serm. sur la Justification* (CO 23.688): “... voici le fondement de la vraie Religion”; *Serm. sur la Justification* (CO 23.694): “... la principale clef de tout Evangile.”

of God's grace in Christ, he clearly grants a kind of priority to justification as the "first" aspect of the "twofold grace of God." The pre-eminence of this benefit is affirmed in various passages in his writings, which speak of justification as the principal aspect of the "twofold grace of God." For example, Calvin argues that, since the knowledge of our salvation chiefly depends upon a proper conception of this benefit, it may be termed the "leading tenet of the gospel" (*praecipuum evangelii caput*).¹⁶ Or, he argues, whenever we turn our attention to the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is justification especially that must capture our attention.¹⁷ To deprive God of the glory of his work of justification would be to impugn the redemptive work of Christ and to destroy the gospel itself.¹⁸ Reconciliation, or the forgiveness of sins, constitutes the chief end in the preaching of the gospel of Christ,¹⁹ since it concerns his chief office.²⁰ The gospel chiefly differs from secular philosophy by placing our salvation in free forgiveness, and in conceiving it to be the source of all God's blessings to us, including that of sanctification, the second aspect of the "twofold grace of God."²¹ Justification may be termed the "first" benefit of our reception of God's grace in Christ, since it particularly expresses the "true logic of piety" (*dialectica pietatis*) itself.²²

The fitting place to begin our summary of the "twofold grace of God," then, is with Calvin's conception of its principal aspect, justification. Fortunately, as is so often the case in his *Institutes*, Calvin himself provides us with a comprehensive definition of justification, which includes all of its most important components.²³

He is said to be justified in God's sight who is reckoned righteous in God's judgment (*qui iudicio Dei et censetur iustus*) and has been accepted on account of his righteousness On the contrary, justified by faith is he who, excluded from the righteousness of works, grasps the righteousness of Christ through faith, and clothed in it, appears in God's sight not as a sinner but as a righteous man. Therefore, we explain justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men. And we say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness.²⁴

Noteworthy about this definition is its emphasis upon the *juridical* or forensic nature of justification. Calvin conceives justification to be a gracious judgment of God, whereby the believer is accepted into his favor. As a gracious judgment of God, it constitutes a complex transaction, in-

¹⁶ Comm. Luke 1:77 (CO 45.51). Cf. Comm. Matt. 1:14 (CO 45.139); Comm. Luke 1:6 (CO 45.10): "foedus ... cuius primum caput est gratuita reconciliatio"

¹⁷ Comm. 1 John 5:11 (CO 55.368).

¹⁸ Comm. Gal. 1:7 (CO 50.173). Cf. Serm. Jer. 15:10-11, 14-15 (SC 6.29).

¹⁹ Comm. John 20:23 (CO 47.440): "Hic ergo praecipuus est evangelii praedicandi finis, ut Deo reconcilientur homines, quod fit gratuita peccatorum venia."

²⁰ Comm. John 1:29 (CO 47.25): "... praecipuum Christi officium."

²¹ Comm. John 20:23 (CO 47.440).

²² Comm. Micah 7:19 (CO 43.431-2).

²³ Cf. III.xi (OS 4.181), which bears the title: "De iustificatione fidei, ac primo de ipsa nominis et rei definitione."

²⁴ III.xi.2 (OS 4.182-3). Cf. III.xvii.8 (OS 4.261); III.xi.4 (OS 4.184-5).

cluding the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

Because justification means our acquittal before God's judgment, Calvin repeatedly takes issue with the more common medieval and Scholastic tendency to identify being justified (*iustificari*) with "to make just" (*ius-tum facere*).²⁵ Our justification does not depend upon the possession of righteousness as an inherent "quality" (*qualitas*) of our person, for the righteousness that justifies us is a "relative righteousness" (*relationis iustitia*).²⁶ Nor does it depend upon "an infused habit or quality" (*non ... habitum aut qualitatem in nos transfundat*),²⁷ such that God's judgment and acceptance of us rest upon what "men are in themselves."²⁸ Since only Christ's obedience suffices for perfect righteousness before God, and since only in him do we find righteousness inhering as a quality of his person,²⁹ the believer's justification rests upon Christ's work alone, and may not be understood to depend causally upon his character (*habitus*) or upon an "infused righteousness" (*iustitia infusa*).³⁰ According to Calvin, every effort—such as that of medieval and Scholastic theology—to assert that God's acceptance of us is based upon our character or an inherent quality, contradicts its gratuitous basis in the mercy of God, and represents a *conceptually confused* view of justification. Justification concerns our status, or relative position, before God's tribunal. It refers to God's act of acquittal of those who are worthy of condemnation.

Furthermore, in his articulation of the nature of this gracious judgment of God, Calvin ordinarily conceives it to comprise two interrelated elements: the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.³¹ Both of these elements need to be considered if a complete account of Calvin's understanding of justification is to be achieved. Each of them further confirms that justification, as a judicial act, relates to our status before God's tribunal and must not be confused with the infusion of a new quality. Although Calvin sometimes refers misleadingly to the first of these moments, the forgiveness of sins, as synonymous with justification,³² generally and more properly he understands it as comprising both a negative element and a positive element: the non-imputation of

²⁵ E.g., *Serm. sur la Justification* (CO 23.706). Cf. *Acta Synodi Tridentinae Cum Antidoto*, 1547 (CO 7.447): "Quaestio est verbi, quid sit iustificatio. Negant [i.e., the Catholic authors of Trent's declaration concerning justification] solam esse remissionem peccatorum: sed renovationem et sanctificationem simul contineri volunt."

²⁶ Comm. Hab. 2:4 (CO 43.534-5). Cf. III.xi.3 (OS 4.183): "... nempe relative, non autem ut qualitatem aliquam denotet."

²⁷ Comm. Gal. 3:6 (CO 50.205). Cf. *Serm. sur la Justification* (CO 23.692).

²⁸ Comm. Rom. 4:3 (CO 49.70).

²⁹ Comm. Rom. 5:19 (CO 49.101).

³⁰ Comm. Acts 13:39 (CO 48.306). Cf. Comm. Luke 18:14 (CO 45.421); Comm. 2 Cor. 5:21 (CO 50.74).

³¹ See, e.g., III.xi.2 (OS 4.182-3); III.xvii.8 (OS 4.261); III.xi.4 (OS 4.184-5); *Serm. sur la Justification* (CO 23.692); *Serm. sur la Justification* (CO 23.706).

³² E.g., III.xi.21 (OS 4.204): "... iustitiam fidei esse reconciliationem cum Deo, quae sola peccatorum remissione constat"; III.xi.3 (OS 4.184). Despite this kind of statement, it seems clear that Calvin does not identify justification simply with the forgiveness of sins. The importance of the aspect of the imputation of Christ's righteousness is evident from Calvin's occasional identification of justification with this aspect alone. See, e.g., Comm. Rom. 4:3 (CO 49.70).

unrighteousness and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.³³ Both of these, the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness, serve not only to confirm the juridical nature of justification, but also to highlight its basis in the gratuitous mercy of God, who makes provision for our need through redemption in Christ.

Consistent with this judicial conception of justification, Calvin never tires in his insistence that, given the nature of the gracious judgment of God, there is a profound and insuperable antithesis between justification by works and justification by faith. If justification means God's gracious acceptance of guilty persons, a judgment which includes both his free decision to overlook their sins and to receive them into his favor clothed with the righteousness of Christ, then it cannot depend upon the righteousness of works, but must be received and acknowledged through faith alone. If we are to have an adequate understanding of Calvin's view of justification as the first benefit of the "twofold grace of God," the nature of this antithesis and the role of faith in our justification require comment.

When Calvin denies that justification depends upon the infusion of a new character ("being made just"), he presupposes this antithesis and incompatibility between justification by works and justification by faith. Faith righteousness and works righteousness wholly exclude one another: "faith righteousness so differs from works righteousness that when one is established the other has to be overthrown."³⁴ According to Calvin, there are at least two important considerations that require our positing this antithesis: first, even if we were to grant, hypothetically, that we could be justified by works, this is not possible in actuality; and second, the very notion of justification by works is repugnant, as it contravenes a fundamental article of the Christian faith.

In respect to the first consideration, Calvin concedes that "doers of the law" are justified, and that those who perfectly fulfill God's will in every respect are acceptable to him. He emphatically denies, however, that any such persons can be found, for all are in some respect destitute of that perfect fulfillment of God's will that is acceptable to him.³⁵ The supposition that one could be justified by works is contrary to fact. It supposes the impossible, namely, that one has or could achieve a righteousness so perfect in every respect that it could stand in the presence of God's judgment.³⁶ For Calvin, such a supposition, because it is contrary to fact, is nothing more than a form of gross self-deception as to the gravity of God's judgment against sin.³⁷ Since no partial righteousness, which is the most that anyone might achieve, could sustain itself before the requirements of God's own righteousness and holiness, it is axiomatic for

³³ See, e.g., III.xi.11 (OS 4.192-5); Comm. Rom. 4:6 (CO 49.71); Comm. Rom. 4:25 (CO 49.87); *Serm. sur la Justification* (CO 23.706); *Acta Synodi Tridentinae Cum Antidoto*, 1547 (CO 7.442-3); *Responsio ad Sadoleti epistolam* (OS 1.469-70); *Instruction Et Confession De Foy*, 1537 (OS 1.393).

³⁴ III.xi.15 (OS 4.199). Cf. *Serm. sur la Justification* (CO 23.703).

³⁵ See, e.g., *Serm. sur la Justification* (CO 23.718); *Serm. sur la prophetie de Jesus Christ* (CO 35.669); III.xi.15 (OS 4.199); III.xvii.13 (OS 4.266-7).

³⁶ III.xii.1 (OS 4.208).

³⁷ III.xii.4 (OS 4.211-2).

Calvin that justification in no wise depends upon works of righteousness or works done according to the law of God.

This consideration, however, is to put the antithesis negatively. For Calvin, the more important consideration is that justification by works cannot be squared with the nature of the gospel itself. For if works of the law are granted a role, however partial, in justification, then one must also repudiate the *free* grace of God in Christ, thereby betraying a fundamental article of the Christian faith by introducing the thought of merit in interpreting our reception of salvation.³⁸ Faith alone justifies us, not works of righteousness, because it is a peculiar property of faith to acknowledge that this grace is free and that our redemption is a gift. To fully appreciate Calvin's understanding of this antithesis, it is important that this role and property of faith be considered. Faith justifies us, according to Calvin, not because it is an alternative and superior human "work" to the works of the law, but because it is exclusively oriented to God's benevolence and mercy in Christ. Faith ascribes the whole reason for our salvation to Christ alone and retains nothing for itself; it recognizes no other righteousness than that which is in Christ, and understands it to be constitutive of our justification before God.³⁹ Since we shall never be clothed with this righteousness of Christ unless we first forswear any claim to a righteousness of our own,⁴⁰ faith alone, as it looks only to God's redemption in Christ and claims nothing for itself, is the exclusive means by which we may appropriate that gracious judgment of God which is our justification.⁴¹ For this reason, Calvin suggests, the antithesis between justification by works and justification by faith may be variously expressed. It is an antithesis between works and faith, which finds the basis for salvation only in the free mercy, love, and grace of God, and in the righteousness of Christ.⁴²

Calvin's treatment of justification is pervaded by his polemic against the medieval Roman Catholic and Scholastic doctrine. His forensic conception of justification, his concomitant repudiation of the notion that justification depends upon an infused character or inherent righteousness, his statement of the antithesis between justification by works and justification by faith—each of these elements reflects the extent to which his position differs from the prevailing medieval conception. There are two points in particular that Calvin stresses in his polemic against it that are worthy of special notice. These are: God's honor, and peace of conscience.⁴³ For Calvin, both of these are preserved in his conception of

³⁸ Comm. Gal. 2:21 (CO 50.201). Cf. Comm. Gal. *Argumentum* (CO 50.161-5).

³⁹ Comm. Gal. 5:2 (CO 50.244).

⁴⁰ Comm. Rom. 8:3 (CO 49.139).

⁴¹ Comm. Gal. 3:6 (CO 50.205-6). Cf. Comm. Rom. *Argumentum* (CO 49.1); Comm. Rom. 1:17 (CO 49.21-2): "... sola Dei misericordia, per fidem nos iustificari"

⁴² Comm. Gal. 3:6 (CO 50.205). Calvin also simply equates justification with God's love in not sparing his only Son. Cf. *Serm. sur la Justification* (CO 23.722-3): "Et ce iustifier-la, c'est ce qui est dit au troisieme chapitre de saint Iehan, que Dieu a tant aimé le monde, qu'il n'a point espargné son Fils unique, à fin que quiconque croira en luy, ne perisse point, mais qu'il passe de la mort à la vie."

⁴³ Cf. III.xiii (OS 4.215-0), which bears the title: "Duo esse in gratuita iustificatione observanda." It is noteworthy that a recent study of Calvin's theology takes the theme of God's glory

justification, and are threatened by the conception of those who understand justification to depend upon the righteousness of works or upon an infused character.

In his discussion of God's honor, Calvin calls attention to the necessary incompatibility between God's free justification of his people in Christ and any glorying in self-righteousness.⁴⁴ When, in its articulation of the doctrine of justification, Scholastic theology refers to free will,⁴⁵ the merit of works,⁴⁶ works of supererogation,⁴⁷ cooperating grace,⁴⁸ preparations for grace,⁴⁹ subsequent grace,⁵⁰ and the like, it strips Christ of his *exclusive* office as Redeemer and opens the way to boasting before God.

If, on the part of God, it is grace alone, and if we bring nothing but faith, which strips us of all praise, it follows that salvation is not of us. Ought we not then to be silent about free-will, and good intentions, and invented preparations, and merits, and satisfactions?⁵¹

The implication of these concepts, each of which attributes to us a contributing role in obtaining salvation, is the curtailment of Christ's might and honor.⁵² They serve only to weaken Christ's power by obscuring and perverting his office in redemption.⁵³ Consequently, they deprive us of the "sum of all piety,"⁵⁴ justification by grace alone through faith, and they take from God the praise which is his alone in salvation, thus insulting his goodness.⁵⁵ Whenever our justification depends on something other than God's benevolence in Christ, boasting in our own strength ensues, and serious injury is done to God's honor in justification.

Not only is serious injury done to God's honor, but it is also no longer possible for us to find that peace of conscience that derives from a recognition of God's mercy. This is the second thing that must be noted in free justification: it alone affords believers peaceful rest and confidence in God's presence. If we look to our own righteousness, the promises of God will be of no avail and we cannot but despair. As Calvin describes it,

as a central motif in Calvin's thought. See Marijn de Kroon, *The Honour of God and Human Salvation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001).

⁴⁴ III.xiii.2 (OS 4.216).

⁴⁵ E.g., Comm. Rom. 6:18 (CO 49.116); Comm. Rom. 7:5 (CO 49.122); Comm. Rom. 8:7 (CO 49.143); Comm. Phil. 2:13 (CO 52.31-2); Comm. John 6:45 (CO 47.150).

⁴⁶ E.g., III.xi.13-20 (OS 4.197-204); III.xv.1-3 (OS 4.239-42); Comm. Rom. 3:27 (CO 49.65); Sermon. Isa. 24:16 (SC 2.365). Calvin interprets merit, whether "condign" (*meritum de condigno*) or "congruent" (*meritum de congruo*), as dependent upon the idea of free will and cooperation in salvation; he rejects the idea that good works are wholly or partially responsible for our justification before God, since this would be to rob God of the glory which is his in freely justifying sinners.

⁴⁷ E.g., III.xiv.13-14 (OS 4.232-3).

⁴⁸ E.g., Comm. Rom. 9:16 (CO 49.183); Comm. John 15:16 (CO 47.346); Comm. Phil. 2:13 (CO 52.33-4).

⁴⁹ E.g., Comm. Eph. 2:8-10 (CO 51.165-7).

⁵⁰ E.g., Comm. Phil. 2:13 (CO 52.32); Comm. Hab. 2:4 (CO 43.531-6).

⁵¹ Comm. Eph. 2:8 (CO 51.165).

⁵² III.xv.6 (OS 4.244).

⁵³ Comm. 1 John 2:22 (CO 55.324-5); Comm. Col. 1:12 (CO 52.83). In particular, Christ is deprived of his exclusive office as our priest. Cf. *Serm. sur la Prophetie de Jesus Christ* (CO 35.686).

⁵⁴ III.xv.7 (OS 4.245).

⁵⁵ Comm. Matt. 5:14 (CO 45.169-70).

... for to have faith is not to waver, to be borne up and down, to hesitate, to be held in suspense, to vacillate—finally, to despair. Rather, to have faith is to strengthen the mind with constant assurance and perfect confidence, to have a place to rest and plant your foot.⁵⁶

This is why faith alone, not the consideration of free will and works of righteousness, must have an exclusive place in our justification. Its nature is “to prick up the ears and close the eyes—that is, to be intent upon the promise alone and to turn thought away from all worth or merit of man.”⁵⁷ Both at the beginning and throughout the whole course of our justification before God, the sole basis for peace of conscience and rest is the awareness of his kindness and mercy that come through faith. If we turn elsewhere, to a righteousness of our own on the basis of which we try to stand in his judgment, we only make ourselves guilty of having misjudged the severity of God’s law and of having deprived ourselves of hope: “... this would be only to lead us into false hope, to laugh at us and mock us.”⁵⁸ Any conception of justification that requires an inherent righteousness, in terms of which God determines to accept us or receive us into his favor, can only obscure the gratuitous mercy of God in Christ and create a circumstance of uncertainty and even fear toward God.

III. The Nature of Sanctification: The Second Benefit of Union with Christ

Calvin usually terms the second benefit of our reception of God’s grace in Christ, “regeneration” (*regeneratio*) or “repentance” (*poenitentia*).⁵⁹ Though inseparably joined with justification and faith, this benefit must not be confused with it. “As faith is not without hope, yet faith and hope are different things, so repentance and faith, although they are held together by a permanent bond, require to be joined rather than confused.”⁶⁰ Between this aspect of God’s grace and the first there exists an “unbreakable connection,”⁶¹ yet it is distinct from it in conception and nature. Whereas justification refers to our status as forgiven sinners, sanctification refers to the process by which our sinful condition is transformed through the work of the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, though justification is by faith alone, exclusive of the righteousness of works, Calvin contends that it is inextricably related to and accompanied by good works and the reformation of our life. Sanctification or repentance, as the

⁵⁶ III.xiii.3 (OS 4.218).

⁵⁷ III.xiii.4 (OS 4.219).

⁵⁸ III.xiv.10 (OS 4.229).

⁵⁹ III.iii (OS 4.55) bears the title: “Fide nos regenerari; ubi de poenitentia.” Calvin uses a variety of terms to describe this aspect of God’s grace in Christ, and makes no effort to distinguish between them. Among the more important of these are “sanctification,” “renewal” or “reformation of life,” “rebirth,” and “conversion.” Unlike the highly technical and more complex terminology of later Reformed and Lutheran doctrines of an *ordo salutis*, Calvin’s language is rather fluid. He wishes only to describe redemption in terms of the twofold benefit of our incorporation into Christ through faith and the working of the Spirit.

⁶⁰ III.iii.5 (OS 4.59).

⁶¹ Comm. Acts 20:21 (CO 48.463): “... individuo nexu inter se cohaereant poenitentia et fides.”

second benefit of the believer's union with Christ, constitutes Calvin's comprehensive category for understanding the re-direction and alteration of the lives of those indwelt by Christ through the Spirit.

Calvin's conception of sanctification is based upon the conviction that it is an *effect* of faith. "Now it ought not to be doubted that repentance not only immediately follows faith, but is produced by it."⁶² This does not mean that repentance or sanctification is chronologically subsequent to faith in the sense that faith could genuinely express itself for a time before sanctification occurs. Rather, it means that "a man cannot apply himself seriously to repentance without knowing himself to belong to God."⁶³ Sanctification or repentance is produced by faith and follows upon it since, unless we acknowledge that God is favorable toward us and readily inclined to forgive, there is little likelihood that we will devote ourselves to his service. Calvin acknowledges that when the term "regeneration" is used as a synonym for the general creative and life-giving work of the Spirit in us, faith may be said to be a part of and follow from regeneration. But ordinarily he understands it to be a synonym for sanctification or repentance, which follows upon faith as an effect of our reception of God's grace in Christ through the work of the Spirit. It is in this latter and more common sense, then, that Calvin uses the terms "regeneration," "repentance," and "sanctification" synonymously, and understands sanctification to form the second benefit of God's grace in Christ as it is received through faith.

That Calvin ordinarily uses these three terms synonymously reflects his understanding that this reformation of human life, which comes about through faith, is not so much something we accomplish of ourselves, as it is a gift of God, effected by the Holy Spirit. Our sanctification is no less the fruit of the creative power of the Spirit of Christ than our justification.

For Christ imparts the Spirit of regeneration to us in order that he may renew us within (*Nam ideo spiritum regenerationis affert nobis Christus, ut nos intus renovet*), and that a new life may then follow the renewal of mind and heart. For if the function of giving repentance belongs to Christ (*Quod si in Christum competit munum dandae poenitentiae*), it follows that it is not something that has been put in the power of man (*in hominis facultate*). And since it is truly something of a wonderful reformation, which makes us new creatures, restores the image of God in us, transfers us from the slavery of sin to the obedience of righteousness, men will no more convert themselves than to create themselves.⁶⁴

Consequently, Calvin repudiates any suggestion that sanctification or the reformation of our life is something we can effect of ourselves to complement the free grace of God in Christ. Christ himself, through the operation of his Spirit, is the sole source of our purity, righteousness, and re-

⁶² III.iii.1 (OS 4.55): "Poenitentiam vero non modo fidem continuo subsequi, sed ex ea nasci, extra controversiam esse debet."

⁶³ III.iii.2 (OS 4.56).

⁶⁴ Comm. Acts 5:31 (CO 48.111).

generation.⁶⁵ Since sanctification is effected in us through the Spirit, it is as much the peculiar gift of God's grace to us as is our justification.⁶⁶ For this reason, both repentance and regeneration are *by faith*, and both are the free gift of Christ, who imparts them to us in the power of his Spirit.⁶⁷

IV. The Relation of Justification and Sanctification: "Distinction Without Separation"

In his formulation of the relation between justification and sanctification, Calvin appropriates the language of the Chalcedonian Christological formula and describes it as one of "distinction without separation." When faced with the question as to how these two aspects of God's grace in Christ relate to one another, Calvin frequently appeals to this formula. The relation between justification and sanctification is analogous to the relation and union between the divine and human natures in the one Person of Christ. Justification and sanctification are *distinct in conception*, yet they are *inseparable in reality*, since they form the simultaneously given and necessarily conjoined benefits of our union with Christ through the operation of his Spirit.

Interpreters of Calvin's doctrine of the "twofold grace of God" who charge him with juxtaposing justification and sanctification, do so because of Calvin's insistence upon the first part of this Christological formula. Justification and sanctification must be conceptually distinguished, lest they be confused and our relation to God adversely affected. For example, in his *Institutes* III.iii.19, Calvin, while acknowledging their inseparability, insists that justification and sanctification must be distinguished in order that the proper object of faith, God's goodness, might better be comprehended.

Repentance is preached in the name of Christ when, through the teaching of the gospel, men hear that all their thoughts, all their inclinations, all their efforts are corrupt and vicious. Accordingly, they must be reborn if they would enter the kingdom of heaven. Forgiveness of sins is preached when men are taught that for them Christ became redemption, righteousness, salvation, and life, by whose name they are freely accounted righteous and innocent in God's sight. Since both kinds of grace are received by faith, as I have elsewhere proved, still because the proper object of faith is God's goodness, by which sins are forgiven, it was expedient that it should be carefully distinguished from repentance.⁶⁸

Justification and repentance denote two quite distinct ways in which God's grace in Christ affects those who are united with him by faith.

⁶⁵ E.g., Comm. Acts 11:16 (CO 48.257); Comm. Acts 13:39 (CO 48.307); Comm. 1 John 2:17 (CO 55.320); Comm. 1 John 3:5 (CO 55.333); Comm. Mal. 4:2 (CO 44.491).

⁶⁶ Comm. Ezek. 11:19, 20 (CO 40.246); Comm. Ezek. 18:32 (CO 40.456).

⁶⁷ Calvin offers a general definition of sanctification in III.iii.5 (OS 4.60): "Repentance can thus be well defined: it is the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit."

⁶⁸ III.iii.19 (OS 4.77).

Unless the difference between justification and sanctification is carefully maintained, the goodness and mercy of God will be seriously impugned and the assurance of faith will be threatened.

The first part of Calvin's basic formula for relating these two aspects of God's grace in Christ reflects his judgment that justification and sanctification concern two different questions, and denote two distinct facets of God's relation to us. Whereas justification concerns the *basis* or *reason* for our salvation, sanctification concerns the *way* in which our life is converted to God.

The difference (*distinctio*) between faith and repentance must first of all be observed (*primum notanda*), for some wrongly and stupidly confuse (*confundunt*) them, saying that repentance is a part of faith. Indeed I admit they cannot be separated (*Fateor equidem disiungi non posse*), because God does not illuminate anybody with the Spirit of faith, without regenerating him to new life at the same time (*quem non simul in novam vitam regeneret*). Yet they need to be distinguished (*Discerni tamen necesse est*) as Paul does in this verse [Acts 20:21]. For repentance is a turning (*conversio*) around to God, when we compose ourselves and the whole of our lives to his obedience. On the other hand faith is the receiving of the grace which is presented to us in Christ (*Fides autem, gratiae nobis in Christo exhibitae receptio est*). For the object of the whole of religion is that (*Nam huc spectat tota religio*) we may serve the Lord, purely devoting ourselves to holiness and righteousness, and, secondly, that we do not seek any part of our salvation from any person than from him, and that we do not search anywhere else than in Christ alone (*in solo Christo*).⁶⁹

Justification and repentance correspond, respectively, to the recognition of salvation in Christ alone and to the transformation of our life that is rooted in that recognition. Repentance relates to the regulation of our lives in conformity to God's righteousness; and justification relates to the reason for our salvation.⁷⁰ These may no more be confused than may the distinction be overlooked between our *status* before God's judgment and the sinful *condition* of our lives. "For there are implied contrasts between washing and unclean things; sanctification and contamination; justification and guilt."⁷¹ Precisely this contrast is preserved when justification and repentance are distinguished. The strict or normal sense of sanctification differs from that of justification, as the renewal of our lives differs from God's free pardon and the imputation of Christ's righteousness, whereby we are accorded a new status before God.⁷²

Therefore, Calvin insists upon a basic conceptual difference between justification and sanctification that may not be blurred or diminished. On the one hand, justification contrasts with our guilty status before God's tribunal, since it means God's free and irrevocable decision to acquit us despite our unrighteousness and guilt. This decision, comprising both the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness, is a definitive judgment that excludes the righteousness of works and is

⁶⁹ Comm. Acts 20:21 (CO 48.462-3).

⁷⁰ Comm. Rom. 4:4 (CO 49.70).

⁷¹ Comm. 1 Cor. 6:11 (CO 49.394).

⁷² Comm. Titus 3:7 (CO 52.432).

received by faith alone. Repentance, on the other hand, contrasts with our sinful condition, since it means a life-long and progressive advance wrought in us by the Spirit of Christ, a process in which we are converted to God. This gracious action of Christ's Spirit, comprising both the mortification of the flesh and the vivification of the Spirit, follows upon faith, and is never definitively effected in this life.

To appreciate fully this emphasis of Calvin on the conceptual distinction between these two aspects of God's grace in Christ, special notice should be given to the theological motive that undergirds it. In the statement from the *Institutes* cited above, Calvin intimates that his motive for distinguishing between them is his desire to highlight God's goodness in salvation. Unless justification is carefully distinguished from repentance, God's goodness and his free grace in Christ will not be properly appreciated, and it will become impossible to insure the believer's confidence and rest in God's mercy alone as the sole basis for salvation. Accordingly, Calvin primarily distinguishes between justification and sanctification in order to preserve the gratuitous character of God's grace in Christ and to provide a basis for the assurance of salvation. If the gospel benefits of justification and sanctification are confused, Calvin is convinced that some credit for righteousness will inevitably be transferred to us, and God's mercy will be called into question. Since justification is God's free gift, and since we never possess a perfect righteousness of our own, it is conceptually confused to say that our justification is partially or wholly dependent upon sanctification.⁷³ In this respect, Calvin believes that even Augustine, despite his laudable emphasis upon God's grace, errs when he "still subsumes grace under sanctification, by which we are reborn in newness of life through the Spirit."⁷⁴ The inevitable accompaniment of such conceptual confusion is a Pelagian understanding of our relation to God, wherein repentance is in part the cause for God's forgiveness.⁷⁵

Moreover, when these two benefits are confused, not only is God's free grace called into question, but also our relation to God is misconstrued. When sanctification is made a partial cause for justification, those who are regenerate will become "mercenary-minded by demanding something from God as their due."⁷⁶ To avoid any suggestion that our relation to God is of this kind, Calvin urges that "[w]hen we discuss justification, [we must] hold on to the exclusive adverb [i.e., *sola fide*]."⁷⁷ If no proper distinction is made between justification and sanctification, the doctrine of justification by works will inevitably follow, and we will be deprived of the confidence in God's presence that characterizes his children when they recognize his paternal favor. It is this deprivation of the believer's confidence before God that particularly disturbs Calvin.

⁷³ Comm. Rom. 4:16 (CO 49.80). Comm. Titus 3:7 (CO 52.432); Comm. Acts 20:21 (CO 48.462-3).

⁷⁴ III.xi.15 (OS 4.200). Cf. Comm. Rom. 3:21 (CO 49.58).

⁷⁵ See, e.g., Comm. Jer. 4:14 (CO 37.586-7); Comm. Hag. 2:1-5 (CO 44.10); Comm. Gal. 5:6 (CO 50.246-7).

⁷⁶ Comm. Rom. 4:4 (CO 49.70).

⁷⁷ Comm. Gal. 5:6 (CO 50.246-7).

Papists overturn the whole doctrine of salvation, by mingling and confounding pardon of sin with repentance (*Papistae totam salutis doctrinam evertunt, dum remissionem peccatorum miscent ac confundunt cum poenitentia*); and not only they, but others also who wish to be thought more acute. They acknowledge that a man is justified by free grace through Christ, but add, that it is because we are renewed by him. Thus they make our justification to depend partly on the pardon of sins and partly on repentance (*Ita partem iustitiae nostrae in remissione peccatorum, partem in poenitentia constituunt*). But in this way our consciences will never be pacified, for we are very far from being perfectly renewed. These things must, therefore, be distinguished, so as to be neither separated nor confounded (*Sic igitur haec distinguenda sunt ut ne separentur nec misceantur*); and thus our salvation will rest on a solid foundation (*atque ita solidum nostrae salutis fundamentum retineamus*).⁷⁸

Whenever justification and sanctification are confused, our relation to God either leads to demanding what we think is our due, apart from his mercy and grace, or to despairing of his mercy. Both are forms of ingratitude toward God, and are consequences of having substituted a basis other than God's mercy for our salvation.⁷⁹ For Calvin, such ingratitude seriously distorts our relation to God, and betrays the attitude of a mercenary rather than of a child who knows that God's chief delight is to forgive freely. While Calvin readily admits the inseparability of justification and sanctification, when it comes to the question of the assurance of salvation and of the nature of our relation toward God, he insists upon distinguishing between them.

I certainly admit that we are regenerated to newness of life by the grace of Christ, but when it is a question of the assurance of salvation, we ought to be thinking about free adoption alone, which is bound up with the expiation and pardon of sins.⁸⁰

Though Calvin emphasizes the conceptual distinction between justification and sanctification for these reasons, he is equally concerned to emphasize the second part of the Christological formula of "distinction without separation." Though justification and sanctification are conceptually distinct, they are inseparable in reality. Speaking of repentance and faith, Calvin argues that they "are indeed things wholly distinct, and yet not contrary, and ought never to be separated, as some inconsiderately do."⁸¹ Whether Calvin's understanding of the relation between justification and sanctification amounts to a "dialectical juxtaposition" that fails to account adequately for their unity, as has been suggested, depends upon how this emphasis is interpreted and how important a role it plays in Calvin's comprehensive conception of the "twofold grace of God." It is undeniable, however, that Calvin repeatedly and consistently urges that

⁷⁸ Comm. Isa. 59:20 (CO 37.351).

⁷⁹ Cf. III.iv.3 (OS 4.88-9).

⁸⁰ Comm. Acts 15:11 (CO 48.352).

⁸¹ Comm. Jer. 26:17-9 (CO 38.532): "Sunt quidem res distinctae, sed tamen non diversae, nec separari debent, ut quidem parum considerate faciunt." Calvin then adds, "Nam poenitentia est conversio totius vitae et quasi renovatio: fides autem reos confugere docet ad Dei misericordiam."

these two aspects of God's grace in Christ are inseparable in the lives of those who embrace Christ by faith.

According to Calvin, there is a necessary and invariable bond between these two aspects of God's grace in Christ. It is inconceivable that those who are justified are not at the same time converted and regenerated by the Spirit of Christ.

God works in us the two things at the same time (*Imo utrumque simul agit in nobis Deus*), so that we are both renewed by repentance and freed from the bondage of sins and also justified by faith and freed from their curse. These are the inseparable gifts of grace and because of the invariable bond between them (*Sunt igitur gratiae inseparabiles: et propter individuum coniunctionem*) repentance can rightly and fittingly be called the beginning of the way that leads to salvation; but more as an accompaniment than a cause (*Sed hoc modo consequentia magis significatur quam causa*).⁸²

But these two things, the reconciliation of God with men and repentance, are necessarily connected together (*Caeterum, quam vis necessario res sint coniunctae, Dei et hominum reconciliatio et poenitentia*), yet repentance ought not to be deemed as the cause of pardon or of reconciliation, as many falsely think who imagine that men deserve pardon because they repent. It is indeed true that God is never propitious to us, except when we turn to him; but the connection (*sed coniunctio*), as it has been already stated, is not such that repentance is the cause of pardon (*non facit ut poenitentia causa sit veniae*)⁸³

Both of these statements concur in expressing Calvin's basic conviction that justification and sanctification are two distinct, yet inseparable, benefits of our reception of God's grace. They are particularly interesting in that, while retaining Calvin's insistence on a distinction between them in order to exclude any *causal* connection between them, they articulate with equal emphasis his corollary conviction that God is propitious only toward those who repent, since repentance is a necessary and invariable accompaniment of justification.⁸⁴

In his development of this inseparable relation between justification and sanctification, Calvin does not hesitate to take issue with those who improperly interpret the phrase, "faith without works justifies," and who inadequately treat the relation between justification and sanctification. Commenting upon the proper interpretation of the former phrase, Calvin notes:

[I]t still remains true, that faith without works justifies, although this needs prudence and a sound interpretation; for this proposition, that faith without works justifies, is true and yet false, according to the different senses which it bears. The proposition, that faith without works justifies by itself, is false, because faith without works is void.... Thus faith can be no more separated

⁸² Comm. 2 Cor. 7:10 (CO 50.90).

⁸³ Comm. Jer. 24:7 (CO 38.464).

⁸⁴ Any suggestion of a temporal distinction between justification and sanctification cannot be sustained against passages such as these, as well as many others.

from works than the sun from its heat; yet faith justifies without works, because works form no reason for our justification....⁸⁵

It would be an imprudent interpretation of this proposition to allow that a dead faith could justify, even though it did not express itself through works of love. Not only would it be imprudent, but it also would be impossible.⁸⁶ This interpretation reflects an inadequate conception of the relation between justification and sanctification, since it allows a separation between them. Only a living faith may be said to justify us. Only those indwelt by the Spirit of Christ and consecrated to the Lord, having hearts framed to obedience to the law, may be said to have been forgiven and accounted righteous by God.⁸⁷

Because there is no real separation between justification and sanctification, there is in us, besides that righteousness reckoned to us by a free act of reconciliation, a genuine righteousness that is *imparted* to us when we are renewed by the Spirit.⁸⁸ We participate in the holiness of Christ, Calvin argues, “not by imputation alone, for in that respect he [Christ] is said to have been made to us righteousness; but he is also said to have been made to us sanctification ... that we may be renewed to true holiness by his Spirit.”⁸⁹ Accordingly, spiritual righteousness consists of two parts, which correspond to the two aspects of the “twofold grace of God,” one being free reconciliation through the non-imputation of sins, and the other being inward reformation unto obedience by the Spirit.⁹⁰ The former of these parts is never a “single, unaccompanied gift, for since we are clothed with the righteousness of the Son, we are reconciled to God, and renewed by the power of the Spirit to holiness.”⁹¹ Only when this is acknowledged, and the inseparable relation between these gifts maintained, is it possible to interpret justification by faith alone in such a way as not to give way to sin⁹² or allowing the “vain pretence” of faith without newness of life.⁹³

This is what Calvin intends to teach, then, when he utilizes the formula “distinction without separation” in his exposition of the relation between justification and sanctification: these are two conceptually distinct, yet inseparable, benefits of our reception of God’s grace in Christ. That Calvin appropriates this Christological formula in order to interpret this relation attests his conviction that both of these benefits correspond to God’s grace in *Christ*. The integral relation between them depends fi-

⁸⁵ Comm. Ezek. 18:14-17 (CO 40.439). Cf. *Serm. sur la Justification* (CO 23.733).

⁸⁶ Calvin expresses his position briefly when he notes that “it is faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone.” Cf. *Acta Synodi Tridentinae Cum Antidoto*, 1547 (CO 7.477): “Fides ergo sola est quae iustificet: fides tamen quae iustificat, non est sola. Quomodo modum solis calor solus est qui terram calefaciat: non tamen idem in sole est solus, quia perpetuo coniunctus est cum splendore.” *Serm. sur la Justification* (CO 23.733). Calvin often uses, as should be evident, the metaphor of the relation between the sun and its heat or light to emphasize the invariable and necessary relation between justification and sanctification.

⁸⁷ III.xiv.9 (OS 4.228).

⁸⁸ Comm. Heb. 7:1 (CO 55.82).

⁸⁹ Comm. John 17:19 (CO 47.385).

⁹⁰ Comm. John 1:17 (CO 47.18-9).

⁹¹ Comm. Rom. 6:23 (CO 49.119).

⁹² Comm. Ezek. 11:19, 20 (CO 40.250).

⁹³ Comm. 1 John 3:6 (CO 55.334).

nally upon the unity of our redemption through Christ in the power of his Spirit. The most important clue, therefore, to Calvin's understanding of this formula and of the unity between justification and sanctification is his conception of its Christological and pneumatological basis.

V. The Traditional Roman Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Grace

In order to evaluate the contribution Calvin's view of the "twofold grace of God" may make to contemporary Roman Catholic-Protestant discussions of justification, we need to consider at this point the classic Roman Catholic critique of the position of the Reformers. An official, authoritative statement of the Roman Catholic objection to the Protestant doctrine of God's grace in Christ is given in the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent, which codified the official Roman Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation. Before reviewing more recent ecumenical discussions of the gospel on the part of Protestant and Roman Catholic representatives, it is necessary to review the decisions of this Council, since they constitute the traditional Roman Catholic response to the Protestant doctrine of grace and free justification.⁹⁴

Within the context of late medieval discussions of justification, the statement of the Council of Trent represents a relatively moderate and reformed account of the position of the Roman Catholic Church. Though the Council strongly condemns the Protestant position on the doctrine of justification, it also tempers the more objectionable features of some forms of late medieval theology. It begins, for example, with the assertion that no one is able to be justified on the basis of nature alone and the law.⁹⁵ In the Council's judgment, it is inconsistent with the gospel to teach that human beings may obtain justification simply by means of their own works. In order to remedy the consequences of sin and to redeem his people, God sent his own Son to redeem those under the law and to secure their adoption as his children.⁹⁶ Our justification depends upon God's grace in Christ, and begins with the "prevenient grace of God," apart from any human merit.⁹⁷ At the outset of its treatment of the

⁹⁴ Since the Council of Trent codifies the traditional Roman Catholic critique of the Protestant Reformation, it will be the basis for my summary of the Roman Catholic view. Though the Second Vatican Council softened the historic divisions between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches, it did not substantially alter the dogmatic position of Catholicism with respect to justification. Passages from the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Eng. Trans.; Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) will be cited in the following to illustrate the conformity of contemporary Roman Catholic dogma with the decrees and canons of Trent on justification.

⁹⁵ Henricus Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum Et Declarationum De Rebus Fide Et Morum*, Editio 21-23 (Friburgi Brisgoviae: Herder & Co., 1937), 284, par. 793: "Cap. I. De naturae et legis ad iustificandos homines imbecillitate." An English translation is found in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. III: *The Greek and Latin Creeds, with Translations* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), 89-118.

⁹⁶ Denzinger 285.794.

⁹⁷ Denzinger 286.797: "Declarat praeterea, ipsius iustificationis exordium in adultis a Dei per Christum Iesum praeveniente gratia sumendum esse, hoc est, ab eius vocatione"

doctrine of justification, therefore, the Council appears to agree with the basic thrust of the Protestant view that justification is by grace alone.

The promising beginning of the Council's statement on justification begins to be tempered, however, when it directly takes up the subject of justification. There are three points of special importance in the position of the Council that express its criticism of the Protestant position. These are: (1) the definition of justification itself; (2) the affirmation of "merit" and the associated ideas of "cooperating grace" and "preparations for grace"; and (3) the rejection of an ordinary possibility of the believer's assurance of salvation.

When it comes to the definition of justification, the Council takes sharp issue with any view that would speak only in terms of the forgiveness of sins or the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer for justification. Though the Council affirms the idea of the forgiveness (non-imputation) of sins, it rejects the teaching of the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the basis for justification.⁹⁸ After stressing the importance of the believer's "preparation for justification," justification itself is defined as

not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and the 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.⁹⁹

According to the Council, there are several distinct "causes" of this justification, or sanctification and renewal of the inward man: (1) the "final cause" is the glory of God and of Jesus Christ; (2) the "efficient cause" is the mercy of God; (3) the "meritorious cause" is the redemptive work of Jesus Christ; (4) the "instrumental cause" is the sacrament of baptism; and (5) the "formal cause" is the justice or righteousness of God.¹⁰⁰ It is especially the Council's understanding of the last, or formal, cause that underscores its conception of justification as a transformative process whereby sinners are made just:

Lastly, the alone formal cause is the justice of God, not that whereby he himself is just, but that whereby he makes us just, that with which we, being endowed by him, are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and we are not only reputed, but are truly called, and are just, receiving justice within us....¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ See Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, trans. by Dom E. Graf (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961), vol. II, esp. 179ff., 255-56, for a discussion of Trent's rejection of Seripando and any who taught or implied an imputed righteousness. In terms of subsequent history, this rejection closed the door to an agreeable compromise between the Roman Catholic and Protestant views.

⁹⁹ Denzinger 287.799: "...non est sola peccatorum remissio, sed et sanctificatio et renovatio interioris hominis per voluntariam susceptionem gratiae et donorum, unde homo ex iniusto fit iustus et ex inimico amicus ut sit *heres secundum spem vitae aeternae*." This definition is cited and affirmed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 1989.

¹⁰⁰ Denzinger 287-799.

¹⁰¹ Denzinger 287-799: "Demum unica formalis causa est iustitia Dei, non qua ipse iustus est, sed qua nos iustos facit, qua videlicet ab eo donati renovamur spiritu mentis nostrae, et non modo reputamur, sed vere iusti nominamur et sumus, iustitiam in nobis recipientes"

What is noteworthy in the Roman Catholic definition of justification is the emphasis placed upon the process of change effected in us by God's grace. The formal cause of justification is not an extrinsic justice or righteousness, but a justice that has been effected within and hence inheres in us. We are justified by faith only in the sense that "faith is the beginning (*initium*) of human salvation," but not in the sense that faith alone justifies.¹⁰² We are also justified freely in the sense that "none of those things which preceded justification—whether faith or works—merit the grace itself of justification."¹⁰³ The grace that justifies, however, does so by producing works within us that are worthy of meriting further justification. The grace of justification can increase so that, subsequent to the believer's entrance into a state of grace, the believer can perform works of righteousness that advance and ultimately secure his or her final justification. According to the Council of Trent, therefore, it is not enough to speak of the forgiveness of sins or of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us for justification. The essential meaning of "to justify" is "to make just," to effect a renewal and transformation within us on the basis of which we become acceptable to God. Consequently, in its canons, which offer a series of anathemas against the Protestant teaching on justification, the Council strongly anathematizes anyone who fails to teach that, in addition to faith, human cooperation and a proper disposition of the will are necessary to salvation.¹⁰⁴ It further anathematizes anyone who would teach that we are justified by the sole imputation of the righteousness of Christ or by the sole remission of sins.¹⁰⁵

Consistent with this understanding of justification, the Council also develops its understanding of the role of human works and merit in justification. Though it acknowledges the prevenient grace of God at the inception of justification, and though it rejects an unqualified assertion of justification by works, the Council frequently emphasizes the role of human works in the attainment and continuance of justification. For example, before treating justification proper, the Council describes the "preparation" necessary to the grace of justification. God's prevenient grace at the inception of justification includes a calling by which sinners are "disposed through his quickening and assisting grace, to convert themselves to their own justification, by freely assenting to and cooperating with that said grace."¹⁰⁶ Justification requires believers to receive voluntarily the grace whereby they are made just and experience continual growth in

Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 1992: "Justification conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy."

¹⁰² Denzinger 288.801. It should be observed that, at its beginning, justification can be said to be "by grace alone through faith alone." This is often overlooked by Protestant critics of the Roman Catholic position, who misrepresent its doctrine of justification by suggesting that it is a justification "by works." In the Council's view, works do "increase" and "merit" further justification, but they are the consequence of God's prevenient grace.

¹⁰³ Denzinger 289.801.

¹⁰⁴ Denzinger 296.819.

¹⁰⁵ Denzinger 296.821. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2001-5.

¹⁰⁶ Denzinger 286.797: "... per eius excitantem atque adiuvantem gratiam ad convertendum se ad suam ipsorum iustificationem, eidem gratiae libere assentiendo et cooperando, disponantur."

righteousness.¹⁰⁷ This growth in righteousness occurs when the believer cooperates with God's grace by producing good works that are conformed to God's commandments.¹⁰⁸ As a process of renewal and sanctification, justification requires a mutual cooperation between God and the believer in order to effect the transformation of life that it represents.

In its treatment of the increase of justification, the Council also insists upon the legitimacy of the idea of "meritorious" good works. When it concerns the beginning of justification, the idea of merit is excluded. Justification begins with faith and none of the things that precede its inception, whether faith or works, can be said to merit the grace itself of justification.¹⁰⁹ Yet, when it concerns the increase and advance in the way of justification, the Council notes that eternal life is "the reward" of works, and is given only to those who labor faithfully to the end. Because our attainment of eternal life and reception of God's promised reward depend upon our continuance in and progress in doing good works, such works merit and are a true condition for salvation.

To evaluate properly the sense in which such works merit salvation, the Council's decree needs to be quoted at length:

For, whereas Jesus Christ himself continually infuses his virtue into the justified (*in ipsos iustificatos iugiter virtutem influat*) ... and this virtue always precedes and accompanies and follows their good works, which without it could not in any wise be pleasing and meritorious before God, —we must believe that nothing further is wanting to the justified, to prevent their being accounted to have, by those very works which have been done in God, fully satisfied the divine law according to the state of this life, and have truly merited eternal life (*vitam aeternam ... vere promeruisse censeantur*).¹¹⁰

This does not mean that we may boast or glory in our good works. For those good works and the justice or righteousness that inheres in us, have themselves been infused into us by God. Therefore, the meritorious quality and value of our righteousness derive from the presence and action of the infused virtue of Christ.

The difficulty of interpreting this understanding of merit should be evident from the Council's rejection of self-justification and glorying in one's works, and its declaration that the works that merit eternal life are themselves the fruit of God's infused grace. These emphases would seem to preclude the whole idea of merit in the sense that we may possess a righteousness of our own worthy of salvation, or in the sense that we may earn our justification. Because justification is treated as a process of renewal and sanctification, however, and because grace is identified with that which God infuses into us, the Council rejects entirely the idea of

¹⁰⁷ Denzinger 289.803: "... in ipsa iustitia per Christi gratiam accepta, *cooperante fide bonis operibus*, crescunt atque magis iustificantur"

¹⁰⁸ Denzinger 290-1.804.

¹⁰⁹ Denzinger 286.797; 289.801.

¹¹⁰ Denzinger 294.809. On the subject of merit in justification, see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2006-11. The *Catechism* emphasizes that such merit is "pure grace," and that "there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man." Furthermore, no one can merit "the initial grace of forgiveness and justification."

justification on the basis of an imputed righteousness. The righteousness by which we are justified is an infused or an inherent righteousness. It is both God's gift and our possession. It is produced by the cooperative and mutual actions of God and the sinner in the process of renewal. Consequently, though this righteousness has its original source in God's virtue, it so much becomes ours that it is possible to ascribe our justification to the merit of works or the justice that resides within us. Such merit is true merit, corresponding to the value that such works possess. It is not a merit that derives from the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is reckoned to our account in justification.

Perhaps the most significant implication of this understanding of justification emerges in the context of the Council's treatment of the assurance of salvation. Here the Council takes issue with what it terms the "vain confidence" (*inanis fiducia*) of those who teach that a believer may be certain of the forgiveness of sins and justification:

For even as no pious person ought to doubt the mercy of God, the merit of Christ, and the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments, even so each one, when he regards himself and his own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension touching his own grace; seeing that no one can know with a certainty of faith, which can not be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God.¹¹¹

To assert that every believer may have confidence of God's mercy in regard to his or her own salvation leads to a presumptuous and easy assurance of salvation. Such an assurance neglects to consider the weakness that remains in us, and the consequent possibility of "shipwreck" and loss of grace. Therefore, the Council warns against a "rash presumptuousness" in the assurance of predestination, since "except by special revelation, it can not be known whom God has chosen unto himself."¹¹² Furthermore, when it comes to our perseverance in grace, we ought to avoid promising ourselves anything certain or absolute. This would be to underestimate the conflict that remains within us, and to ignore the possibility of a fall from grace, which requires the sacrament of penance as a means of restoration or "second justification."¹¹³ For this reason, the Council strongly rejects any teaching that affirms a certainty of salvation for all who believe in Christ. Such teaching fails to reckon with our remaining weakness, or with the possibility of self-deception and vain confidence in the lives of those who may not be living in accord with the law of God.

While this is a short account of the Council's teaching, the three points that we have summarized clearly identify the key elements in the traditional Roman Catholic criticism of the Reformation's view of justification. Quite apart from the possible misunderstanding that they may betray in respect to one or another aspect of the Protestant view, the

¹¹¹ Denzinger 289.802: "... cum nullus scire valeat certitudine fidei, cui non potest subsesse falsum, se gratiam Dei esse consecutum."

¹¹² Denzinger 291.805: "Nam, nisi ex speciali revelatione, sciri non potest quos Deus sibi elegerit."

¹¹³ Denzinger 291-3.806-7.

Council's decrees clarify the most significant features in the historic dispute between the Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines of grace. Throughout the statements of the Council, the concern is expressed that the Protestant position, when it ascribes the whole of salvation to God's grace in Jesus Christ, denies a legitimate role to the recipients of this grace. In order to retain God's glory in justification, the Protestant view of justification fails to ascribe a meaningful role to the person who is justified by means of his or her cooperation with God's grace. In order to emphasize the sovereign grace and free mercy of God as the sole foundation of salvation, the Reformers treat the activity of the justified person as utterly valueless, even impossible.¹¹⁴ Everything is ascribed to God; nothing is ascribed to the sinner. Consequently, there is no place for an acknowledgement of the indispensable role of human cooperation and responsibility in appropriating salvation, or for an account of the Scriptural insistence upon the doing of good works and the reward of eternal life.

Critical to the Catholic objection to the Protestant view is the claim that it reduces justification to a "legal fiction," which ascribes a merely nominal or unreal righteousness to the person who is justified. Because our justification is said to be based upon a righteousness outside ourselves, the Reformer's view fails to provide an account of the manner in which we are necessarily changed by God's grace and come to possess a righteousness of our own. The sinner, though accounted righteous in Christ, remains still a sinner. Therefore, God is said to save us without effecting any real change in us, without effecting any change in our actual sinful condition. This unreal and ineffective justification leaves those who are saved in a condition that, however good or bad, has no final bearing upon their salvation.

For a similar reason, the Council of Trent also finds fault with the Protestant teaching that faith produces assurance of salvation. According to the Protestant view, which teaches that justification is by grace alone through faith alone, the assurance of salvation does not depend upon the believer's progress in renewal or obedience to God's commandments. Despite the fact that justification effects no actual change in the believer's sinful condition, the believer may nonetheless boast of an assurance of God's favor, expect the reward of eternal life, and be confident of persevering in grace. Without endeavoring to keep God's commandments or living a life of good works, the justified sinner may rest assured of God's mercy and know with a certainty that God will be propitious. Such an assurance is mere presumption, and fails to provide any safeguard against the idea that the faith that justifies may do so without love.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Louis Bouyer, *The Spirit And Forms of Protestantism*, trans. by A.V. Littledale (New York: The World Publishing Co., 1954), 140-1: "By a similar process, the sovereignty of God comes to mean the crushing down of man, the uselessness, the non-existence, the impossibility, the total undesirability, of any activity on his part which might claim any religious value, constitute 'merit', in whatever way that may be understood." This criticism is often joined, as in the case of Bouyer, with the argument that the Reformer's view was the result of a decadent nominalist theology in which God "arbitrarily" accepts the sinner without that acceptance being integrally related to an inherent righteousness.

VI. Summary

Our rehearsal of the traditional Roman Catholic Church's response to the Protestant doctrine of grace indicates that there are three principal issues in dispute. The first issue is the definition of justification itself. In the Protestant view, justification is a judicial declaration regarding the believer's status, which pronounces the believer to be acceptable to and in favor with God. In the Council of Trent's reply to this view, justification is defined, not merely as the forgiveness of sins or the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to believers, but as the renewal of the believer in obedience to God's commandments. To use the language of Calvin, justification according to the Roman Catholic view includes the process of transformation and renewal that Calvin identifies with "sanctification" or the second benefit of union with Christ. The second issue focuses upon the basis of justification, which in the language of the Council of Trent is referred to as the "formal cause" of justification. Contrary to the Protestant insistence that justification is solely based upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is granted and imputed to believers by faith alone, the Roman Catholic view insists that justification is based upon an infused or inherent righteousness. Justification includes the renewal of believers in obedience to the commandments of God. Though the justification of believers begins with the prevenient grace of God, it is maintained and increased by works that "merit" further justification. The third and final issue relates to assurance of salvation and favor with God. While the Protestant view affirms the assurance of salvation, which is based upon the free favor and acceptance that justification declares, the Roman Catholic view rejects the ordinary possibility of assurance, since believers cannot know whether they will persevere in cooperation with the grace of God and enjoy final justification. Within the terms of the traditional formulations of the Protestant and Roman Catholic doctrines of justification, therefore, any ecumenical effort to resolve the historic dispute over the doctrine of grace would have to address these three key points of disagreement.¹¹⁵

VII. Recent Ecumenical Discussions on the Doctrine of Grace¹¹⁶

Until recently, the Protestant and Roman Catholic views of justification were stable components of their respective traditions. The traditional points of dispute that we have identified seemed intractable. Though some dissatisfaction with the traditional Protestant view of justification surfaced within the orbit of liberal Protestant scholarship in the after-

¹¹⁵ For an extensive delineation of the key issues in the dispute between Roman Catholic and Protestant views of justification, see Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2002), 127-221. Lane also identifies these three issues as among the most important.

¹¹⁶ Some of the material in this section is a revision of my chapter, "Justification by Faith: The Ecumenical, Biblical and Theological Dimensions of Current Discussion," in the volume *Always Reforming*, ed. Andrew McGowan.

math of the Enlightenment, the principal features of the Protestant view in distinction from that of historic Catholicism remained relatively intact.¹¹⁷ However, recent decades have witnessed a burst of new interest and deliberation about the doctrine of justification. Undoubtedly, the most prominent expression of this interest in the doctrine of justification is the one that has arisen within the context of an ecumenical desire to resolve the long-standing disagreement between Roman Catholic and Protestant understandings of the gospel.

Though these recent ecumenical discussions of justification have taken place between a wide variety of church communions, our summary will only feature two of its more important expressions: (1) the discussions between representatives of the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches; and (2) the discussions between evangelicals and Roman Catholics.¹¹⁸

1. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Discussions

Perhaps the most striking instance of ecumenical discussions of the doctrine of justification is the sustained dialogue that has occurred in recent decades between representatives of the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran churches. Since the Lutheran churches represent the first branch of the Protestant church, these discussions are of particular importance. The principal reason for the separation between the Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church was the disagreement regarding justification. The remarkable feature of the discussions in recent times between Lutherans and Roman Catholics is not that such discussions are taking place at a level unsurpassed since the early years of the sixteenth-century Reformation; what is most remarkable is that these discussions have produced joint statements that claim real unity has been achieved in an understanding of free justification.

During the course of the discussions between Roman Catholics and Lutherans, a series of documents have been produced, which argue that the old divisions of the past need no longer separate them. The earliest indication of the course of these discussions was provided by the Helsinki Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in 1963. Even though this Assembly spoke only for the Lutheran churches, it did draw the conclusion, based upon a series of conferences with Catholic representatives, that there was really no longer any substantial difference between Rome and the Lutheran churches on the doctrine of justification. Subsequently, three major declarations by Lutheran and Catholic representa-

¹¹⁷ For a significant, recent survey of the history of the doctrine of justification, see Alistair E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 1986).

¹¹⁸ For an extensive summary of these ecumenical discussions and documents, which includes a thorough bibliography of primary and secondary sources, see Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 87-126. Lane also treats high-level ecumenical discussions between Catholic and Anglican, and Catholic and Methodist, representatives. For our purposes, we will only summarize the discussions between Catholics and Lutherans, and Catholics and North American evangelicals. Though discussions have taken place between Reformed representatives and Roman Catholics, they have not produced the kind of joint statements that these discussions have.

tives were issued that claimed to show a growing consensus on the meaning of the gospel.¹¹⁹

The first of these declarations is included in the document *Justification by Faith*, which was the seventh in a series of joint statements by representatives in the United States of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Ministries, a branch of the Lutheran World Federation.¹²⁰ This document included a “Common Statement” that begins and ends with the affirmation that “[o]ur entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Christ Jesus and on the gospel whereby the good news of God’s merciful action in Christ is made known; we do not place our ultimate trust in anything other than God’s promise and saving work in Christ.”¹²¹ While admitting that this affirmation did not resolve all of the remaining differences between Roman Catholic and Lutheran views—including the Lutheran insistence that “God accepts sinners as righteous for Christ’s sake on the basis of faith alone”¹²²—the authors of the joint statement maintained that these differences were not “church-dividing” in nature.¹²³ In the opinion of participants in the discussions that produced this statement, a consensus on the essential teaching of the gospel was achieved, which was sufficient to overcome the most significant historical differences between their respective traditions.

Shortly after the appearance of this first statement in 1983, a Joint Ecumenical Commission on the Examination of the Sixteenth-Century Condemnations, which was composed of a number of Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians, produced a second statement, *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era*.¹²⁴ The impetus for the formation of this Commission was a visit by the Pope to Germany in 1980. This papal visit stimulated interest among Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians in the question whether justification was still a doctrine that divided them. As the name of this Joint Commission suggests, its task was to examine the condemnations of the Reformation period, particularly the Canons (with their anathemas) against the Protestant view adopted at the Roman Catholic Council of Trent and the condemnations in the Lutheran con-

¹¹⁹ For a survey and critical evaluation of these Lutheran-Roman Catholic discussions, written from a confessionally Lutheran standpoint, see Robert D. Preus, *Justification and Rome: An Evaluation of Recent Dialogues* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997).

¹²⁰ H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *Justification by Faith. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985). For a summary of the biblical discussions that form a background to this report, see John Reumann, *‘Righteousness’ in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982). For a recent discussion of these discussions, see David E. Aune, ed., *Rereading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

¹²¹ Anderson, Murphy and Burgess, eds., *Justification by Faith*, “Common Statement,” par. 4, 157.

¹²² “Common Statement,” par. 157.

¹²³ “Common Statement,” par. 4.

¹²⁴ K. Lehmann and W. Pannenberg, eds., *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). A chapter by W. Pannenberg, “Can the Mutual Condemnations Between Rome and the Reformation Churches be Lifted?” (pp. 31-43), describes the process followed by the Joint Committee. The original document was printed in German: K. Lehmann and W. Pannenberg, eds., *Lehrverurteilungen-kirchen-trennend? I: Rechtfertigung, Sakramente und Amt im Zeitalter der Reformation und Heute* (Freiburg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986). It should be noted that, though most of the participants in this project were Catholic and Lutheran, a few Reformed theologians also took part.

fessional documents. The principal outcome of the work of the Commission was the sweeping conclusion that the mutual condemnations of the Reformation era no longer apply to the teaching of the contemporary Roman Catholic and Lutheran communions.¹²⁵

Due in part to the divergence of opinion over this second statement, discussions between representatives of the Roman Catholic church and the Lutheran World Federation continued. The outcome of these continued discussions was perhaps the most remarkable chapter in the yet-unfinished dialogue between the two communions: the issuing of a *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in 1999.¹²⁶ This statement, which includes a supplementary “Annex” that clarified some issues of continuing debate and an affirmation of the *sola fide* formula by Rome, was signed by official representatives of the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church on October 31, a date chosen because of its association with the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Two statements in this *Joint Declaration* capture its tenor and emphases. In a section of the *Declaration* entitled, “The Common Understanding of Justification,” the common teaching of the two communions is summarized: “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.”¹²⁷ In a final section of the declaration, entitled “The Significance and Scope of the Consensus Reached,” the two communions conclude that a fundamental consensus now exists on the nature of the gospel, despite some differences in formulation and theological expression:

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. In light of this consensus the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis in the understanding of justification described in [section 4] are acceptable. Therefore the Lutheran and the Catholic explications of justification are in their difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding the basic truths.¹²⁸

In its exposition of this common understanding of justification, the *Joint Declaration* is organized into seven sections. Each section contains a statement of consensus, which is followed by a distinctly Lutheran and Catholic perspective. In this manner, the *Joint Declaration* acknowledges

¹²⁵ For a summary of the various responses to this document, see Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 101ff.

¹²⁶ An English translation of this declaration was issued by the Lutheran World Federation and The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). The original declaration was published in German: *Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre* (Frankfurt am Main: Otto Lembeck, 1999).

¹²⁷ *Joint Declaration*, par. 15.

¹²⁸ *Joint Declaration*, par. 40. For a critical appraisal of the *Joint Declaration*, one that is written from a confessionally Reformed standpoint, see W. Robert Godfrey, “The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Declaration,” *The Banner of Truth*, Issue 432 (January, 2000): 17-20.

a measure of agreement between the two traditions, while admitting that significant areas of difference remain.¹²⁹

In the first section on the doctrine of justification (4.1 *Human Powerlessness and Sin in Relation to Justification*), the authors affirm that Lutherans and Catholics “confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation.” Though it is also acknowledged that all persons are “incapable of turning by themselves to God,” the Roman Catholic perspective insists that believers are able to “cooperate” in preparing for and accepting justification.” The Lutheran perspective rejects this idea of cooperation, even though the full personal involvement of believers is affirmed.

The second section of the *Joint Declaration* (4.2 *Justification as Forgiveness of Sin and Making Righteous*) addresses the pivotal issue of the nature of justification itself. Both Lutherans and Catholics affirm that when persons “come by faith to share in Christ, God no longer imputes to them their sin and through the Holy Spirit effects in them an active love.” These two aspects of salvation, the forgiveness of sins and the saving presence of God himself, are “not to be separated.” However, the Lutheran perspective insists upon a clear distinction between God’s forgiving love or favour, and the renewal of the Christian’s life, lest the former come to depend or be based upon the latter.¹³⁰ The Catholic perspective, on the other hand, maintains that God’s forgiving love always brings with it a gift of new life, which in the Holy Spirit becomes effective in active love.

The third section of the *Joint Declaration* (4.3 *Justification by Faith and Through Grace*) considers whether justification is by grace through faith, and whether faith alone is the instrument of justification. The affirmation of this section declares that “sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ.” The faith by which sinners are justified is “active in love,” though “whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it.” In the Lutheran and Catholic perspectives on justification by faith and through grace, the Lutherans insist upon a distinction between justification and renewal whereas the Catholics include both “forgiveness of sins and being made righteous by justifying grace, which makes us children of God.” To use the traditional language of theology, the Lutheran perspective insists upon the formulation, “faith alone,” whereas the Catholic perspective insists upon the formulation, “faith formed through love” (*fides formata caritate*), when it concerns the instrument of justification.

In the fourth section of the *Joint Declaration* (4.4. *The Justified as Sinner*), the Protestant view that the justified sinner is “simultaneously righteous and yet a sinner” (*simul iustus*) is treated. Both Lutherans and Catholics admit in this section that the “justified also must ask God daily

¹²⁹ *Joint Declaration*, par. 19-39.

¹³⁰ It should be observed that the reason the Lutheran representatives insist upon this distinction is paralleled in what we have seen in Calvin’s insistence upon the distinction between justification and sanctification. In terms of our study of Calvin’s view of the “twofold grace of God,” the Lutheran/Protestant view expressed in this section is exactly the one Calvin espoused.

for forgiveness.” According to the Lutheran perspective, the justified person is simultaneously “totally righteous” and “totally sinner” (*simul iustus et peccator*). Though the “enslaving power of sin is broken on the basis of the merit of Christ,” believers always remain under the condemnation of the law and require the continual forgiveness of sins. In the Catholic perspective, “the grace of Jesus Christ imparted in baptism takes away all that is sin ‘in the proper sense’.” Though there remains “an inclination (concupiscence) that comes from sin and presses toward sin,” this inclination is not sin “in an authentic sense.”

The fifth section of the *Joint Declaration* (4.5 *Law and Gospel*) treats the distinction between the law and the gospel. Both Lutherans and Catholics maintain that persons are “justified by faith in the gospel” apart from works required in the law, even though the law remains a proper standard for the conduct of the justified. In the Lutheran perspective, the law functions primarily in its “theological use” as a means of accusing sinners and compelling them to seek God’s mercy in Christ. In the Catholic perspective, believers are reminded by the law of their need to observe God’s commandments. However, this does not remove the need for God’s merciful promise of the grace of eternal life.

The sixth section of the *Joint Declaration* (4.6. *Assurance of Salvation*) addresses the important issue of the justified believer’s assurance of salvation. In this section of the *Joint Declaration*, it is commonly acknowledged that believers “can build on the effective promise of God’s grace in Word and Sacrament and so be sure of his grace.” In the Lutheran perspective, this emphasis upon the assurance of salvation is of special importance. In the Catholic perspective, however, it is also noted that a believer “may be concerned about his salvation when he looks upon his own weaknesses and shortcomings.” According to the Catholic perspective, justification does not preclude a lack of assurance on the part of the believer.

The next section of the *Joint Declaration* (4.7. *The Good Works of the Justified*) addresses the subject of the nature and necessity of good works in the lives of those who justified. Both Lutherans and Catholics share the conviction that good works “follow justification and are its fruits.” For the Lutherans, justification brings full acceptance with God as well as growth in its effects. For Catholics, good works “made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit” are “meritorious,” since “a reward in heaven is promised to these works.” However, Catholics do not deny that these works remain “gifts” and that justification “always remains the unmerited gift of grace.”

This brief synopsis of the most important affirmations of the *Joint Declaration* on the doctrine of justification, completes our survey of the recent discussions between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Though responses to these discussions, including the *Joint Declaration*, have varied among Roman Catholic and Lutheran critics, it is undeniable that they represent a remarkable development. In the course of these discussions, historic differences have been clarified, areas of consensus have been identified, and points of continuing disagreement have also been acknowledged. Whether these discussions between Lutherans and Ro-

man Catholics represent a historic achievement in resolving the long-standing dispute between Protestant and Roman Catholic views of justification, remains to be seen. However, the signing of the *Joint Declaration on Justification* undoubtedly represents the conviction of representatives on both sides of the dispute that such a resolution is within reach.

2. *Evangelical-Roman Catholic Discussions*

It is not only in the broader context of ecumenical discussions between Lutherans and Roman Catholics that the doctrine of justification has been the focus of ecumenical interest. In addition to the remarkable statements of a new consensus on the doctrine of justification between Catholic and Lutheran representatives, similar discussions have taken place between other branches of the Reformation and the Roman Catholic Church. Among the more important of these are discussions that have taken place in North America between a number of prominent evangelical theologians and representatives of the Roman Catholic Church. Arising out of a desire to offer a unified witness in the public square, these discussions have sought to demonstrate that Roman Catholics and evangelicals, as “co-belligerents” in combating the social and moral decay of modern American society, also share many fundamental articles of the Christian faith. This shared faith extends even to some, though not all, aspects of the disputed doctrine of justification.

Like the discussions between Lutherans and Roman Catholics, these discussions in North America between evangelicals and Roman Catholics have produced documents that aim to present a consensus on the doctrine of justification by their signatories. Two documents in particular are of special importance.

The first of these was produced in 1994, and bore the revealing title, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together.”¹³¹ Signed by a number of prominent representatives of the Catholic and evangelical communities in North America, this declaration included a summary statement regarding the doctrine of justification:

We affirm together that we are justified by grace, through faith, because of Christ. Living faith is active in love that is nothing less than the love of Christ, for we together say with Paul: ‘I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Galatians 2).¹³²

¹³¹ “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium,” *First Things* 43 (May, 1994): 15-22. For other printings of this declaration, including discussion and responses by various authors, see Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996); T.P. Rausch, ed., *Catholics and Evangelicals: Do They Share a Common Future?* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2000); R.C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); and Norman L. Geisler and R.E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

¹³² Colson and Neuhaus, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, xviii.

Because the burden of the declaration, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” was to demonstrate the substantial similarities of viewpoint between evangelicals and Catholics, the remainder of the document says nothing more about differences between them on the subject of justification. The doctrine of justification is treated as a point of consensus, rather than a point of disagreement. The brevity of the statement on justification, however, allows for considerable difference of opinion among those who might find it acceptable. Evangelical critics of the statement pointed out that it says nothing more than was said by the Catholic church at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. The chief point of dispute, whether justification is by grace *alone* through faith *alone* on account of the work of Christ *alone*, is glossed by this statement. It is not surprising, therefore, that this declaration was strongly criticized by theologians within the evangelical community.

Due to the perceived weaknesses of “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” a number of its signatories joined with other evangelicals to prepare a sequel declaration. This declaration was published in 1997, and bore the title, “The Gift of Salvation.”¹³³ Written in order to clarify some of the issues that the first statement raised—and to assuage the concern expressed within the evangelical community that some of its authors signed the earlier, ambiguous statement in “Evangelicals and Catholics Together”—the authors of this declaration attempted to offer a more clearly evangelical statement on the doctrine of justification. Regarding justification, this statement affirmed:

Justification is not earned by any good works or merits of our own; it is entirely God’s gift, conferred through the Father’s sheer graciousness, out of the love that he bears us in his Son, who suffered on our behalf and rose from the dead for our justification. Jesus was ‘put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification’ (Rom. 4:25). In justification God, on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but his forgiven friends. And by virtue of his declaration it is so. We understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone.¹³⁴

The language of this statement is far clearer than that of the earlier “Evangelicals and Catholics Together.” It affirms several traditional features of the Protestant view of justification, particularly that it is by grace alone, apart from works, and received through faith alone. Despite the apparent consensus on key elements of the doctrine of justification, however, this statement also noted that there were areas of continued disagreement between Protestant and Catholic. These areas included:

¹³³ Like its predecessor, this document was printed in several publications: Timothy George, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: A New Initiative,” *Christianity Today* (December 8, 1997), 34-8; “The Gift of Salvation,” *First Things* 79 (January, 1998): 20-3; and R.C. Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right: The Tie that Binds Evangelicals Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 179-84. For critical assessments of this declaration, ones that are written from a classic Protestant perspective, see Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right*, 45-93; and Mark Seifrid, “The Gift of Salvation: Its Failure to Address the Crux of Justification,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (1999), 679-88.

¹³⁴ *Christianity Today* (December 8, 1997), 36.

[T]he meaning of baptismal regeneration, the Eucharist, and sacramental grace; the historic uses of the language of justification as it relates to imputed and transformative righteousness; the normative status of justification in relation to all Christian doctrine; the assertion that while justification is by faith alone, the faith that receives salvation is never alone; diverse understandings of merit, reward, purgatory, and indulgences¹³⁵

The admission of these areas of continued disagreement suggests that this second declaration, though offered to address criticisms of the earlier declaration, has not produced anything like a consensus within the evangelical community in North America. Not only are these declarations unofficial in character, and therefore without any ecclesiastical authority within the Catholic and evangelical communities; but they are also the subject of continued discussion and even considerable criticism within the evangelical community. In the context of this discussion, a third statement was drawn up by representative evangelical theologians, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Affirmation*.¹³⁶ As the title of this document indicates, it is intended to serve the evangelical community as a unifying testimony to the doctrine of justification in its Protestant understanding. Since the publication of this statement, discussion and controversy within the evangelical community in North America has ebbed.¹³⁷ Whether the doctrine of justification will be a further subject of discussion in the future between Catholic and evangelical representatives remains to be seen.

VIII. Summary

Though it is difficult to evaluate these recent ecumenical discussions between Roman Catholics and Protestants, they minimally confirm that the doctrine of justification has become again a focus of interest. Not since the Reformation of the sixteenth century have representatives of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches debated the differences between them on the doctrine of justification in this way. The achievements of these discussions should neither be downplayed nor exaggerated. It is no small achievement that representatives of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches have engaged each other in sustained and frank discussions over a period of decades on the doctrine of justification, which was the most critical point of dispute in the Reformation and continues to the present day. In the course of these discussions, areas of doctrinal agreement have been identified, while remaining differ-

¹³⁵ *Christianity Today* (December 8, 1997), 38.

¹³⁶ For printings of this declaration together with responses and critical evaluation, see R.C. Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right*, 95-195; *Christianity Today* (June 14, 1999): 51-6; J.N. Akers et al., eds., *This We Believe: The Good News of Jesus Christ for the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); and P.R. Hinlicky et al., "An Ecumenical Symposium on 'A Call to Evangelical Unity,'" *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (2000): 133-49.

¹³⁷ Though there has been a waning of interest in these earlier discussions between evangelicals and Catholics, a recent symposium at Wheaton College, which was devoted to current debates regarding the justification and imputation, indicates that the subject of justification remains an important one for contemporary evangelicals. For a printed version of the papers presented, see Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, eds., *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

ences have been acknowledged. Measured by the standard of the history, these achievements have few, if any, antecedents in the long history of division between the Roman Catholic and Protestant communions. They may well represent, therefore, a historic opportunity for ecumenical discussion and progress at the highest level, particularly on the much-disputed doctrines of grace and justification.¹³⁸

It would be an exaggeration, however, to conclude that some of the key points of disagreement between the Protestant and Roman Catholic doctrines of justification have been overcome. If we were to judge the statements produced by these discussions in terms of the three key points we identified earlier, none of them has yet become an undisputed point of consensus. From the Roman Catholic side, greater clarity and emphasis seems to be acknowledged on the priority of God's grace in Christ in the justification and salvation of believers. In the *Joint Declaration on Justification*, for example, the language of justification "by grace alone" (*sola gratia*) is affirmed from both sides, and a qualified sense of justification "by faith alone" (*sola fide*) is even admitted. From the Protestant side, the necessity of the believer's renewal in righteousness for salvation has been clearly affirmed. Despite these significant affirmations, however, substantive differences remain on the key issues we have identified, namely, the nature of justification, the role of good works, and the assurance of salvation. Though representatives of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches have exhibited a greater willingness to respect their differing views on these issues, these discussions do not appear to have resolved some of the most basic points of contention between them.¹³⁹ Though the anathemas of the Reformation period have been muted or withdrawn, a careful reading of the joint statements produced thus far indicates that consensus on the doctrine of justification remains elusive.

IX. Calvin's Doctrine of the "Twofold Grace of God": Clarifying the Dispute Regarding Justification

Now that the traditional Roman Catholic critique of the Reformation's view of justification, as well as some of the recent ecumenical discus-

¹³⁸ For two different assessments by Protestant theologians of the achievement of these discussions, see Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 223-31; and Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 178-80, 232-3. Lane judges that real progress has been made in the direction of "convergence" on the doctrine of justification, though substantial differences remain in other, related areas of doctrinal teaching. Noll is even more sanguine, when he maintains that Roman Catholics and evangelicals now believe "approximately the same thing" on the doctrine of justification (p. 232). For a good critical assessment of the theological weakness of Noll's book, see Scott M. Manetsch, "Discerning the Divide: A Review Article," *Trinity Journal* 28/1 (2007): 37-63.

¹³⁹ It should be noted, however, that there are related doctrinal emphases in contemporary Catholicism that remain points of dispute from the standpoint of the Protestant doctrine of justification. These emphases include the Roman Catholic teachings regarding Mariology, the "treasury of merits" accrued by the saints, the procuring of indulgences for the remission of sins, the sacrament of penance as a means to restore a lapsed sinner to a new state of further justification, the freedom of the will, and the like. I have chosen to restrict my focus in this article to the principal issues in dispute.

sions between Protestants and Roman Catholics regarding the doctrine of grace, have been summarized, it is possible to consider the contribution Calvin's position on the "twofold grace of God" might make toward clarifying, if not resolving, the historic Protestant-Roman Catholic dispute regarding the doctrine of grace. Since Calvin consciously formulated his position in response to the Roman Catholic view, also as it was expressed at the Council of Trent, his position clarifies the principal points of dispute. More than in the writings of Luther, whose insights were formulated at the outset of the Reformation, Calvin's understanding of justification was shaped during the course of the Reformation, and was in part directed to the emerging Catholic response to it. This accounts for aspects of Calvin's view that move in the direction of answering Catholic objections or that tend to lend greater clarity to the key points of divergence.

Calvin's most important and abiding contribution to this dispute in controversial theology is the emphasis he placed upon the distinct, yet inseparable, relation of justification and sanctification. Calvin's particular development of the doctrine of the "twofold grace of God" constituted a sustained answer to the principal Roman Catholic criticism of the Reformers: that their understanding of justification minimized the importance of good works and an actual renewal in righteousness in the salvation of believers. While Calvin affirmed Luther's original Reformation emphasis upon justification by grace alone through faith alone, he also developed a position on the doctrine of grace that emphasized the integral and necessary gospel benefit of sanctification in the salvation of the believer.

It is especially important to note that the position espoused by Calvin was not considered a viable alternative by the Council of Trent.¹⁴⁰ In the statements of the Council, the impression is given that the Reformers taught a doctrine of justification that excluded the necessity and the reality of inward renewal in salvation. The Council emphasizes that justification is a process that produces a genuine righteousness inhering in us. Justification is an inner transformation that expresses itself in a life of good works performed in obedience to the law of God. However, the Council fails to acknowledge that a similar emphasis is found in the theology of a Reformer like Calvin, though he ascribes this process and inward renewal to sanctification or the second aspect of God's grace in Christ. Consequently, the real difference between the Council of Trent and Calvin does not pertain to the importance or necessity of an inward renewal and good works in salvation. Our summary of Calvin's position makes it abundantly clear that Calvin is anxious to insist upon the inevi-

¹⁴⁰ Ch. Moeller, "Théologie de la Grâce et Oecuménisme," *Irénikon*, XXVIII (1955), 41: "Of central importance is the distinction introduced by Calvin between justification and sanctification. This distinction was not taken into consideration in the definitions of Trent. The Council was satisfied to affirm in regard to *justification* a series of things which the Reformation refused to admit, preferring to attribute them instead to *sanctification*. This point must be carefully considered." Also cf. Georges Bavaud, "La doctrine de la justification d'après Calvin et le concile de Trente, Une conciliation est-elle possible?" *Verbum Caro*, XXII (1968), 83-92. Bavaud makes the same point as Moeller, and adds the note that Calvin's distinction seems to have support in the Pauline epistles.

table transformation in righteousness that is effected in the lives of all who are united to Christ through faith and the ministry of the Spirit. The Roman Catholic complaint that the Reformers' doctrine minimizes the necessary transformation of the life of the believer in salvation does not seem to hold against Calvin's view.

In this connection, it should be noted that a significant feature of the dispute between Roman Catholic and Protestant views relates to a difference in nomenclature. What Trent chooses to ascribe to "justification," Calvin chooses to ascribe to "sanctification" or "repentance." Consequently, if one were to substitute Calvin's terms, "regeneration," "repentance," or "sanctification," for the Council of Trent's use of "justification," the meaning would be fairly similar, though not identical. Nowhere does Calvin deny what Trent argues takes place through the power of God's grace within us. As a matter of fact, when Trent speaks of "merit" in relation to the righteousness that God effects within us, its position bears some affinity to Calvin's understanding of a "second justification," in which God rewards those good works that he himself has effected in us.¹⁴¹ Clearly, Calvin envisions salvation to include the effecting of a real, and not merely a nominal, righteousness in the lives of believers.

It is crucial to note this difference in nomenclature, as well as Trent's tendency to overlook the possibility of an alternative viewpoint like Calvin's, since it confirms that the dispute between Roman Catholic and Protestant views of salvation is not over the question whether salvation effects a change in the life of the one saved. The special contribution of Calvin's position is that it clearly draws the discussion away from this issue and re-directs it elsewhere, where it really belongs. The real point of disagreement between Roman Catholic and Protestant views has to do with the character of God in his gracious action in Christ, and the quality of the relationship between God and those whom he redeems.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Calvin's view of a "second justification" has been cited as a possible point of contact with the Roman Catholic position on justification. See Anthony N.S. Lane, "Twofold Righteousness: A Key to the Doctrine of Justification," in *Justification*, ed. Mark Husbards and Daniel J. Treier, 205-24; idem, "Calvin and Article 5 of the Regensburg Colloquy," in *Calvinus Praeceptor Ecclesiae*, ed. H. Selderhuis, 231-61; and idem, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue*, 46-60. The Roman Catholic view of God's reward for good works is succinctly stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2008: "The merit of man before God in the Christian life arises from the fact that *God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of his grace*. The fatherly action of God is first on his own initiative, and then follows man's free acting through his collaboration, so that the merit of good works is to be attributed in the first place to the grace of God, then to the faithful" (emphasis in the original). The chief difference between this view and Calvin's doctrine of a "second justification," is that for Calvin the reward cannot be said to have been "merited" in any sense, because it rests upon the prior, free justification of our persons.

¹⁴² Cf. Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964), 195ff., who touches upon this difference in connection with his discussion of "grace as graciousness." The traditional Catholic idea of grace as "*habitus*" tends to make grace a substantial something, intermediate between God and its recipient, which we must possess in order to be pleasing to God. The Reformers, including Calvin, understand grace primarily as God's graciousness or his being favorably inclined toward us, despite our unworthiness. As Küng notes, the decline within Catholic circles of an emphasis upon a substantialist understanding of grace has improved the prospects for agreement. This change of emphasis is evident in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 1996, which defines grace as "favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life."

When Calvin outlines his position on justification, it is evident that he is especially concerned to preserve the honor and the reputation of God in his mercy and righteousness, as well as the status of a redeemed creature in being persuaded of this mercy. Perhaps this can best be illustrated by noting again what Calvin means by God's honor in justification and the peace of conscience that free justification produces.

When Calvin speaks of God's honor in justification and salvation, he means to emphasize that God's gracious dealing with humanity in Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit is alone a sufficient basis for salvation. There is nothing that needs to be added or done by us to accomplish what God has himself graciously accomplished in the person and work of the Mediator, and through the ministry of the Spirit. In Christ, God the Father has given an irrevocable pledge and demonstration of his mercy toward the ungodly and his faithfulness toward his willfully rebellious creatures. This is the first and principal benefit of the gospel. Conversely, any emphasis upon free will, merit, cooperation, preparations for grace, and predisposition in the attainment of salvation, implies that this redemptive action is inadequate and insufficient. By introducing and even underscoring these supposed, contributing factors in the accomplishment of our justification, the Council of Trent divides, Calvin maintains, the honor in salvation between God and the creature.

For Calvin the grace of God in Christ constitutes no slight or dishonor to those who are justified. There is no competitive edge to be gained in dividing the honor in justification between God and ourselves, for God has joined his honor and glory to our salvation. Nothing is more characteristic and consistent with the character of God's gracious dealings with us than that he would mercifully accept those who are undeserving. Calvin understands free justification to be a principal article of the gospel because it vindicates and demonstrates this aspect of God's nature. Free justification exhibits God's righteousness in proving himself faithful to us. It also exhibits the manner in which God has joined his glory with the salvation of his people. In no way is God's glory more evidently displayed than in the cross and resurrection of Christ in which we have been graciously judged and accepted by him.

It is at this point that Calvin introduces a further and related reason for rejecting the ideas of cooperation, free will, and merit, in justification. Not only does an emphasis upon these contributing factors tend to deprive God of his exclusive honor and glory in salvation, but it also leaves the impression that God is reluctant to justify the ungodly. In the Roman Catholic view of justification as a process of renewal, unless there is something done by the persons who are justified, God is not disposed to accept them. Only upon the basis of the believer's works, which genuinely merit their reward, is God ultimately prepared to grant eternal life to the believer. Moreover, if such works are not forthcoming and one is shipwrecked through mortal sin, restoration is only possible by means of the sacrament of penance, together with its required auricular confession, priestly absolution and satisfactions. For Calvin, this understanding encourages a "mercenary-like" relationship between God and the sinner, a relationship in which justification is extracted from God on the

basis of the performance of works. The impression is left that there is reason to distrust God's mercy and disposition to receive believers with favor, unless there is something given to him that merits such favor.

Calvin also maintains that, to speak of the merit of works or the procuring of eternal life through a life of righteousness, inescapably introduces the motive of *self-interest* into the Christian life. Since doubt is raised regarding God's disposition and readiness to justify, believers are motivated to perform good works out of a fear of condemnation and a desire to procure salvation. For Calvin, this sets the whole relationship between God and those who are justified in a contractual framework, which is quite distinct from that between a merciful Father and his adopted children. Works done from within this framework, far from being pleasing to God, are displeasing to him, since they do not spring from faith but from mistrust as to his favorable inclination. Neither are they freely performed, since they are not born of a peaceful conscience, which acknowledges God's grace with gratitude and is freely devoted to his service.

That this is the real area of divergence in viewpoint becomes especially evident with respect to the subject of the assurance of salvation.¹⁴³ No other issue better illustrates the difference between the Roman Catholic and Protestant views of salvation. From our exposition of Calvin's position, it is evident that he distinguishes between justification and sanctification in order to preserve the basis for the believer's assurance of God's favor. If our justification is based upon a process within us by which we are made righteous, whatever certainty we may have will rest upon the degree of our own righteousness. It is not accidental, therefore, that the Council of Trent and traditional Roman Catholic teaching rejects any ordinary assurance on the part of believers, except for a "moral conjecture" on the basis of works performed.¹⁴⁴ Since justification does not depend upon God's free mercy in Christ alone, or upon the righteousness effected in his life and death, believers cannot be assured of their salvation on the basis of an exclusive reliance upon the promise of the Word of God. In contrast to this understanding, Calvin insists upon the distinction between justification and sanctification in order to secure the believer's confidence before God. According to Calvin, because justification rests upon the free mercy of God in Christ alone, and because God's chief glory consists in the manifestation of his mercy, believ-

¹⁴³ K ung also fails to see the critical significance of this issue for a resolution of the traditional controversy over justification. His comment on this issue avoids the real issue as to whether there may be an existential and real confidence of God's favor on our part (*Justification* pp. 262-3): "Obviously, Trent did not intend to question the certainty of, and absolute confidence in, that ('objective') justification which took place for everyone in the death and resurrection of Christ. But in the question of certainty as to the ('subjective') realization of justification, and in the matter of trust in this having happened, the Council intended to make sure that its approach was tempered by an awareness of human frailty and sinful unreliability." See Karl Rahner, "Theology of Freedom," *Theological Investigations*, vol. VI (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 191.

¹⁴⁴ It should also be noted that Trent assumes that the Reformers did not teach a necessary and invariable renewal in righteousness in salvation. On the basis of this incorrect assumption, it is not difficult to see its reason for concern in respect to a vain and empty presumption of faith.

ers may be confident of their salvation. This is indeed the essence of the obedience of faith: to be persuaded of God's mercy toward us in Christ, to be wholly convinced that what God chooses to be toward us in him faithfully manifests his true disposition and favor.

Though it is possible to elaborate further on each of these points, an analysis of Calvin's doctrine of the "twofold grace of God" suggests that these are the main features of Calvin's contribution to the classical dispute between Protestant and Catholic theology on justification. Though Calvin answers the Roman Catholic objection that free justification undermines the necessary obedience of believers that belongs to salvation, he does not do so at the expense of the Protestant insistence that justification is by grace alone through faith alone. In my judgment, Calvin, perhaps more clearly than any of the Reformers of the sixteenth century, shows how free justification is not inimical to an emphasis upon the renewal in righteousness that is accomplished through God's grace in Christ. Calvin recognizes the genuine interest of the Roman Catholic emphasis upon the effectiveness of God's grace in the lives of those who receive it. He acknowledges the necessity of good works done according to the will and command of God, in so far as they invariably accompany justification in the salvation of believers. The clarity and emphasis with which Calvin makes this point by means of his understanding of the "twofold grace of God," have been inadequately appreciated in ecumenical discussions of the controversial issue of justification. There is in Calvin's position, then, a significant degree of concurrence with a basic Roman Catholic concern, namely, that God's grace is powerful and effective in the transformation of its recipients. A proper recognition of Calvin's insistence upon the integral place of sanctification in salvation would lend clarity to the ecumenical discussion of the doctrine of grace, and enable it to move forward into areas where there are remaining differences.

Even though Calvin's understanding of the "twofold grace of God" clearly answers one of the principal objections of the Roman Catholic Church to the Protestant doctrine of grace, he does not concede any ground on the dispute over the meaning of the doctrine of justification. Calvin's insistence upon the inseparability of justification and sanctification is balanced by an equal insistence upon the distinction between justification and sanctification. The issue of the definition of justification, therefore, remains a fundamental point of dispute between Roman Catholic and Protestant views. So long as the Roman Catholic Church insists that justification includes the moral transformation of believers, it hardly seems possible to envision substantive agreement on the related issues of the basis of justification or the assurance of salvation that free justification warrants. On the issue of the basis of justification, for example, the acceptance of believers is either founded upon God's free grace and favor toward his people in Christ, or it is based partly upon a righteousness that inheres in those whom he justifies. Between these two views, there does not seem to be any alternative that could bridge the gap between Roman Catholic and Protestant teaching. The reason Calvin distinguishes justification and sanctification is to preserve the truth of

salvation by grace alone. However much justification may issue in a renewed and transformed life, it is solely based upon God's gracious turning in Christ toward his creature.

Similarly, the issue of the assurance of salvation seems to remain an especially difficult point of contention between the Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines of grace. Calvin acknowledges the legitimacy of the Council of Trent's concern to repudiate a "vain confidence" of salvation, a confidence objectively established in God's justifying Word, irrespective of the transformation and renewal of believers. Calvin also rejects the vain and presumptuous confidence of an inactive faith, the confidence of a person who seizes upon God's grace as an excuse for continuing in sin and disobedience. He even admits the presence of doubt and anxiety as components of the Christian life of faith, though he regards doubt to stem from a failure to focus upon the gospel Word that announces God's mercy. In these respects, Calvin recognizes the possible abuse to which the Protestant position on the assurance of faith could be subjected. However, the real issue in the assurance of salvation has to do with whether God truly declares his disposition and favor in Christ, and whether faith may embrace with confidence the promise of the gospel. According to Calvin, God's revelation in Christ is an unmistakable revelation of his mercy and favor toward sinners. Faith, to the extent that it is receptive and open to that revelation, must issue in a measure of real confidence and assurance of God's favor.

In each of these respects, Calvin's position on the "twofold grace of God" provides a fruitful contribution to the traditional dispute over justification between Roman Catholic and Protestant. While retaining the classical Protestant view that justification is by grace alone and brings a sure basis of confidence of acceptance with God, Calvin's understanding of the "twofold grace of God" removes any doubt that salvation necessarily includes the transformation of life that is so much emphasized in the traditional teaching of Roman Catholicism. Upon the basis of Christ's saving work and the ministry of his Spirit, believers are simultaneously accepted and renewed in Christ.