

**Theses on the Article of
Justification (2019)
as Taught in
Holy Scripture and the
Confessions of Christ’s Holy Church
with Special Attention to “Objective Justification”**
prepared for the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation by the
Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

Preface

In 2013, The Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches (ACLIC), a body with which the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America was in fellowship, raised a concern regarding our possible reception of a pastor into the diocese. The particulars of their objection made obvious the need for a clear confession on what Holy Scripture teaches concerning the article of Justification. Accordingly, the bishop of the ELDoNA asked for a set of theses to be drawn up in the old tradition of “theological disputations.” These theses would be discussed during that year’s Colloquium and Synod of the diocese.

Prior even to the composition of our theses for disputation, some from the ACLIC sought to preempt the discussion by drawing up theses of their own—not of the type for a theological disputation, but as a statement of their position in theses and antitheses. What they set forth was determinedly against any formulation other than that used by their former church body (The Evangelical Lutheran Synod), which had been a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (henceforth, “Synodical Conference”).

The diocese, concluding from a study of Scripture and the Confessions that the direction set forth in the ELDoNA-prepared theses for discussion was correct, modified them into a positive statement of what is and is not to be taught. However, due to the somewhat hurried nature of this process, those theses were not as easily readable as one might wish. Therefore, in celebration of the 500th anniversary of Luther’s posting of his theses for disputation concerning the power and efficacy of indulgences, we now set about providing a more readable presentation of what was confessed in our previous “Theses on the Article of Justification” (2013). First, we present this similarly-detailed set of theses setting forth the teaching of Holy Scripture and the Confessions, and the indisputable teaching of the Lutheran fathers concerning these matters and the objections of those who hold to the later teachings that are contrary to the same. Second, we present a briefer summary of the Scriptural and Confessional teaching on Justification for the sake of those who wish to know the truth without having need of a detailed discussion of the erroneous position. The following is by no means a departure from what was presented in 2013, but a clearer presentation of the chief things presented there. Some of the topics in the former document may not be taken up in what follows, but may be revisited at another time because of their applicability to other articles of doctrine.

Thesis 1

It is our unanimous understanding that the Christ paid for and made full satisfaction for every sin of every person ever to enter this world, including all of the sins of all those who are ultimately lost. (John

1:29; 1 Timothy 4:10; 1 Timothy 2:4; 1 John 2:2)

The teaching of any sort of “limited atonement” is, therefore, condemned, as is any notion that would make Christ’s atonement less than sufficient, such as any idea that an individual’s salvation is in any way dependent upon himself. (Ephesians 2:8–10)

Thesis 2

It is our unanimous understanding that the benefit of Christ’s atonement is received by the individual sinner only through faith. (Romans 3:22–26, 10:10; Ephesians 2:8–9)

None are to be regarded as saved except through faith in Christ’s atonement for all sins. (Hebrews 11:6; John 3:18; Acts 4:12; John 17:6–10)

Such faith is (in keeping with the previous Thesis) not a work of man, but a gift from God, given through His appointed Means of Gospel and Sacrament. An emphasis on the reception by faith is, therefore, an emphasis on God’s gift and not on man’s work. (Romans 10:10, 17; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Matthew 28:19–20; Ephesians 2:8–10)

Thesis 3

It is our unanimous understanding that God has elected or predestined only in connection with Christ. (Ephesians 1:5–6; 2 Timothy 1:9)

Further, we confess that in such election He has both foreseen and caused to be all things needed to bring men to faith and to keep them therein. That is, to “elect in connection with Christ” includes both the active and passive obedience of Christ and how this righteousness of His is applied to the elect (and genuinely offered to all sinners). Thus, the work of God the Son and of God the Holy Ghost, the establishment of the Gospel, the Sacraments, and the Office of the Ministry, as well as the Gospel actually being brought to the elect and effectively working faith in them, are included in God’s will from before the foundation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4–6; Acts 13:48; John 17:6–10)

As clearly set forth in the Lutheran Confessions, the Calvinist doctrine that God desires only some to be saved and has, by absolute decree, predestined others to eternal condemnation is entirely rejected by us as contrary to God’s Word. (1 Timothy 2:4; Acts 13:46–48; Acts 7:51; Romans 9:22–23; Matthew 25:34, 41; John 3:16–18)

We also reject the idea of Huber, which was first rejected by the Wittenberg faculty, that God has actually elected all to salvation but some, somehow, fall away by failing to grasp the “General Justification” made at the cross and pronounced in the resurrection. (Matthew 20:16, 28)

Again, no form of Arminianism (including any Arminian-shaded concept of election *intuitu fidei*) is to be received. (Romans 8:28–30; Ephesians 2:8–10)

Thesis 4

The bodies of the former Synodical Conference cling to the terminology of “Objective and Subjective Justification.” Not all of their clergy necessarily hold to (or even know) the original and authentic teaching of the same. When our pastors are asked if we reject “Objective Justification,” we have to ask what each questioner means. Yet, the meaning of this term has been set forth clearly enough in the formal writings and official documents of the bodies of the former Synodical Conference. For example, Pieper, in his *Christian Dogmatics*¹ textbook, sets forth the official position of the LCMS, adopted in its *Brief Statement*.²

From these and other historical and officially-accepted documents, the clear definition of “Objective Justification” is that it is the dogmatic assertion that a forensic declaration was made by God in the resurrection (because of a change in His heart effected by the atoning death of the Christ) that man is without sin. That is, that mankind has been not only atoned for by Christ, but actually declared free from sin by God prior to faith. In the resurrection, it is said, God actually and effectively absolved the world. (There seems to be a bit of a difference between the writers of the LCMS and WELS as to what “the world” means. Those of the LCMS do not generally state that “all men” are absolved, but “mankind” or “the world,” so that the ‘class’ is absolved, but no persons in particular. Those from the WELS, however, do not seem to maintain such a distinction.³) Those holding to this position also refer to it as “General Justification” or “Universal Justification,” putting these forth as interchangeable terms.

Such a teaching of “Objective Justification”, its teachers state, requires a ‘second part’ for justification to be enjoyed by any person: that he personally and *individually* receive what God has already objectively declared of all *together*. This part they call “Subjective Justification.”

This debate is not about—and never has been about—whether there are “objective aspects” of Justification, whether Christ paid for the sins of all, nor about any of the grotesque and extreme conclusions of some who teach “Objective Justification” (declarations of “saints in Hell,” that all in Hell are righteous, and the like), but purely about whether the position espoused by Walther, Pieper, and the Synodical Conference bodies, as given above, is in agreement with Scripture, the Confessions, and the fathers of the Reformation and Lutheran Orthodoxy or not.

It is our unanimous understanding that there is a substantial difference in the understanding of Justification between the earlier Lutheran theologians and the position of the Synodical Conference and the bodies which comprised it. Both the language and the concept of “Objective Justification” is different from and contrary to⁴ the understanding of the Confessions and the writers and first teachers of the same.

Thesis 5

Some have suggested that “Objective Justification” supplies a useful correction of what they suppose to be an insufficiency in the Lutheran Confessions. They then proceed to read their formulation back into the Confessions and the Lutheran fathers in an attempt to show that they are in agreement with the Reformation understanding of Justification. They say that they have simply fleshed out and refined what was already contained therein.

Yet, we read in the first Article of the Formula of Concord, “As regards terms and expressions, it is best and safest to use and retain the form of sound words employed concerning this article in the Holy Scriptures and the above-mentioned books,”⁵ (Thorough Declaration of the Formula of Concord, I:50). Such attempts not only fail to walk that safest path, but overturn it; one cannot ‘refine’ any article of doctrine in any way that contradicts that “form of sound words.”

It is our unanimous understanding that one cannot correct a supposed insufficiency by contradicting what has been confessed. Clearly, attempting to clarify a teaching by contradicting it actually sets aside and rejects the previous teaching.

In addition, the recycling of terminology that was attached to an already-condemned false teaching (i.e., “general justification” or “universal justification”) contradicts the sound reasoning of Thorough Declaration I:50.

Thesis 6

It is our unanimous understanding, and a position with which we are in full agreement, that the Confes-

sions and the fathers of Lutheran orthodoxy considered righteousness to be *acquired* by Christ, but *not imputed to anyone* until its distribution through the Gospel and Sacraments—neither to any individual, nor to all mankind. The Gospel both distributes Christ's righteousness and creates faith in Christ and Christ's acquisition of righteousness for us. His righteousness is received, so that a person stands forgiven and justified (declared righteous by God), through that faith alone.

The fathers expressly rejected any justification prior to or apart from faith:

Hence Paul, when he expressly discusses justification in Romans 3 and 4, does not know of a justification apart from faith, and especially as Galatians 2 plainly says, “Man is not justified except by faith in Jesus Christ.”

Hunnius, *Theses Opposed to Huberianism*, Concerning Justification, Thesis 6

But how did the righteousness of Christ overflow to all men for justification, since not all men are justified? We reply: The Apostle is not talking about the application of the benefit, but about the acquisition of the benefit. If we want to descend to the application, that universality must be restricted to those who are grafted into Christ by faith. For as the unrighteousness of Adam is communicated to all those who are descended from him by carnal generation, so the righteousness of Christ is communicated to all those who are grafted into Him through faith and spiritual regeneration.

Gerhard, *Adnotationes*, on Rom. 5:18⁶

3) If we wanted to go beyond the limits of the Apostolic comparison, someone could infer from the same that the righteousness of Christ is propagated to us through carnal generation, since the unrighteousness of Adam is communicated to us in that manner. Likewise, one could infer that the righteousness of Christ is propagated to all men together, without any regard for faith or unbelief, since the sin of Adam is propagated to all through carnal generation.

4) But since that is absurd, a distinction must fully be made between the acquisition and the application of the merit of Christ; or between the benefit itself and participation in the benefit. The acquisition of the merit, or the benefit itself obtained by the death of Christ is general. For as Adam, by his disobedience, enveloped all of his posterity in the guilt of sin, so Christ, who suffered and died for the sins of all, also merited and acquired righteousness for all. But this benefit is only applied to those who are grafted into Christ by faith, and only they become participants in this benefit.

Adnotationes, Rom. 5:19

The proponents of “Objective Justification” will often claim that the passages under consideration, while strictly teaching justification by faith, allow for a broader interpretation which includes a general justification of all men. But when Hunnius and Gerhard say that St. Paul knew of no justification apart from faith, and when they say that the righteousness of Christ being propagated to all men (i.e., a general, universal, or objective justification) is “absurd,” this is no mere treatment of the verses under consideration in a narrow use that allows for a broader use. Rather, it is an outright declaration that such a claimed broader use is ruled out.⁷

Thesis 7

The teachers of “Objective Justification” put it forth to provide an already-established and external reality to which one might look for assurance of salvation, rather than to one’s own works or feelings of holiness. While “Objective Justification” sends sinners to a forensic declaration of God (namely, that He now sees all mankind as righteous prior to and apart from any faith in the merit of Christ) as its already-existent and external reality (in spite of having no such declaration in Scripture), the Lutheran Fathers directed sinners to the “Throne of Grace,”⁸ Christ the Mediator Himself with His benefits—that is, His merit and the promise of Justification to those who trust in Him.⁹

They spoke of this “Throne of Grace” (*Gnadenthron*; i.e., the Mercy Seat) as a ‘new location’, as it were, to which the sinner may flee to be judged on the basis of the Christ's having borne all sin and acquired righteousness sufficient to save all men, rather than being judged at the seat of justice according to the Law.¹⁰ This they put forth in accord with the clear ‘mercy seat’ language of both Testaments (cf. Exodus 25:22; Hebrews 9:5 and Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2, etc.) of which Christ Himself was the fulfillment.

It is our unanimous understanding that Christ stands as the eternal Mercy Seat, at which all who will by faith receive what He acquired for them (and for all) find forgiveness and eternal life, because His righteousness then stands as their own.

Those who “flee to the Mercy Seat” are only such as are drawn and brought to it by the Gospel, which alone gives them confidence in the merits and righteousness of Jesus. That is, such fleeing is God’s work alone, who provides the righteousness, the proclamation, and the faith that receives His gifts in this way.

Thesis 8

Those who wish to find “Objective Justification” in the orthodox fathers in order to establish a teaching that, as we have seen, they resoundingly condemned, often grasp at isolated statements in their writings that may easily be seen as homiletical or illustrative devices. Such statements must be understood in the light of their writings as a whole. The proponents of “Objective Justification” often fail to take into account the context of such statements even within the same piece of writing.

For example, they will say that Walther's saying “Christ was absolved in the resurrection” is based on Gerhard's having said the same. Yet, as has already been shown, Gerhard called the concept they cling to “absurd.” The fact that the Christ was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) and bore our sins as His own (Psalm 69:5) does not require Him to be absolved, since, again, He was not forgiven for our sins (forgiveness requiring someone else to pay the debt). Instead, He Himself paid the debt. Rather, by the Christ’s vindication, absolution is won and, indeed, created for us as a benefit to be applied through faith. Christ's absolution is the forgiveness He won for us. That is, by His bearing the judgment for our sin upon the cross, He has made a new way—a new ‘location’—for our judgment to take place: rather than being judged at Sinai, all who believe are judged at the Throne of Grace, where the Christ’s perfect active obedience is credited to us because His perfect passive obedience has made payment for all sin. Christ is Himself our absolution; apart from Him there can be no absolution.

To be more clearly in agreement with the rest of what he wrote, Gerhard might more aptly have reserved ‘absolution’ for that which declares one innocent in spite of one’s guilt and inability to pay for his transgressions. This would be in contrast to the Christ’s ‘justification’, which is the vindication of One who is both innocent by nature and by conduct and who has paid for the sins of all others.¹¹ Regardless, Gerhard clearly does not agree with Walther's conclusion that Christ being absolved means that all mankind stands absolved. Indeed, Gerhard's teaching allows for the absolution of all if, and only if, all are brought to faith in Christ and thus receive His righteousness in the only way that it can be received.

It is our unanimous understanding that we stand righteous before God because we have been absolved—we have been given Christ's righteousness in place of our sin. Again, that Christ stands righteous before God because of His perfect life and death, His vindication being made obvious by His resurrection and ascension, as declared in Philippians 2:5–11.

Similarly, when an appeal is made to Luther’s comments in his lectures on Galatians (AE, Vol. 26, p. 280), that in Christ’s death the world was set free from sin, one must also hold that there is no longer any

death for the unbeliever, as “death is conquered and abolished in the whole world so that now it is nothing but a picture of death.” Luther, of course, holds to neither absurdity. Instead, he makes his intent clear when he says, (p. 285) “‘I believe in the holy church.’ This is plainly nothing else than if we were to say, ‘I believe that there is no sin and no death in the church.’” Again, even more clearly, (p. 286) “Therefore, wherever there is faith in Christ, there sin has in fact been abolished, put to death, and buried. But where there is no faith in Christ, there sin remains.”¹²

Those who attempt to diminish the Wittenberg faculty of the late 16th and early 17th centuries (belittling them as having devolved into “Lutheran Scholasticism”) or who claim that they left behind Luther’s supposed teaching of “Objective Justification,” ought to mimic the honesty of Robert Preus: “Martin Chemnitz (and his successors) believes, teaches, and confesses with Luther every aspect of Luther’s doctrine”¹³ and “confessional Lutherans until the late seventeenth century were remarkably dependent upon Luther and the Formula of Concord in their exegetical and dogmatic writings.”¹⁴ The unity in teaching concerning Justification shown among the orthodox Lutheran fathers simply echoes the teaching of Luther, as embodied in the Confessions. The rejection of anything and everything like “Objective Justification” is a part of that teaching and is precisely in accord with what we have just seen in Luther’s lectures on Galatians, which make it clear that, where there is no faith in Christ, the world has *not* been set free from sin.

Thesis 9

We must not attribute any speaking to God that is not made in His Word (“I am against the prophets,” says the Lord, “who use their own tongues but say, ‘He says,’” Jeremiah 23:31). Asserting (as “Objective Justification” does) the existence of a forensic declaration by God that is not stated in Scripture, is to say what God does not say and to attribute it to Him.

To proclaim an action (i.e., the Father’s raising of Christ from the dead) as if it were a forensic declaration, there must be proof in Scripture that such is the case. Such proof is lacking. Further, one who asserts a forensic declaration of righteousness upon all mankind proves false any claim he makes of confessing the same doctrine of Justification as the Lutheran fathers. They vehemently spoke against any idea of the world—or any individual—being righteous apart from faith, as has been previously shown.

Thesis 10

So also with such language as “there took place a change in the heart of God”: unlike language asserting a new ‘place’ of judgment,¹⁵ this is an anthropomorphism that denies God’s immutability and/or the full participation of all the Persons of the Blessed and Holy Trinity in the willing and working of salvation (*opera ad extra trinitatis indivisa sunt*). If it was foreordained in the counsel of the Holy Trinity that God the Son should be sent forth to do the work that He did, there is no ‘change in God’s heart.’ Rather, there is a change of the ‘place’ of judgment that is a fulfillment of what He has willed in His immutable heart from before the foundation of the world,¹⁶ an avenue through which a righteousness apart from the Law now avails,¹⁷ by means of which God sees the sinner and the sinner sees God differently from the view that comes through Mt. Sinai.

Thesis 11

As stated in Thesis 7, “Objective Justification” makes the object of faith a pre-existing declaration/judicial pronouncement of forgiveness (‘pronounced’ by an action, without words).

The Lutheran Symbols, instead, fix our hearts on the truly external and objective realities that Scripture forthrightly presents: the person and work of Christ, which acquired for all men the benefit of receiving

a judicial pronouncement of forgiveness; and the Gospel and Sacraments, through which God promises to apply to all men the benefit of a judicial pronouncement of forgiveness. But such a judicial pronouncement is effectively made only upon the one who (solely by God's gift created through those very means) trusts in God's promise.

Thus, among earlier Lutheran theologians we see in Christ's fulfillment of all righteousness for us the *acquisition* of the benefit of a judicial pronouncement of forgiveness and the establishment of a new venue (Christ, the Mercy Seat)¹⁸ through which such a declaration may be received. Among the theologians of the Synodical Conference, though, we see a vehement insistence that such a declaration has already been made without regard to faith. Indeed, Pieper¹⁹ says that the Gospel is gone altogether if such a dogmatic pronouncement that the whole world is righteous in God's eyes is not made. Such a vehement insistence about a dogmatic formulation that seems unknown (other than as something to be condemned as a part of Huber's error) prior to the mid-19th century,²⁰ is not only ridiculous on its face, but injurious to the Church, as it disparages the orthodox Lutheran fathers and leads to a parochialism and a disrespect for older Lutheran writings that is so prevalent today.

Thesis 12

As alluded to in Thesis 4, those asserting "Objective Justification" are often inconsistent, attempting to reframe the term—if only for a moment, if only to mischaracterize our position and that of the Confessions—as referring to the "objective aspects of Justification," or speaking at times of the acquisition of a pronouncement of righteousness as we and the orthodox Lutheran fathers do, but then shifting to the real meaning of the term and dictating that the benefit of such a pronouncement has not only been *acquired* without regard to faith, but has actually been *applied to* all mankind in the form of a forensic declaration.²¹ The innocence with which they make this leap, however, further demonstrates that seeing in Christ's redeeming work the acquisition of the benefit is not only the correct position, but that it provides everything for which it is often asserted that "Objective Justification" is necessary.²²

Thesis 13

Those who formulated the current expressions of "Objective Justification"—Walther²³ (and Schaller²⁴ and Hoenecke²⁵), Pieper, *et alii*—were not unfamiliar with Aegidius Hunnius and the Wittenberg faculty's condemnation of Huber. As with some today who brush aside wholly unconsidered the arguments of that faculty as "Lutheran Scholasticism," however, they simply ignored the dramatic statements of the fathers against their erroneous conclusions.²⁶ Though they seek to distance themselves from Huber's error, they insist on a dogmatic assertion that is foreign to those who came before, and they appropriate his "General Justification" terminology contrary to the Thorough Declaration's good counsel not to depart from the form of sound words.²⁷

Thesis 14

Defenses of "Objective Justification"²⁸ quite often contain a statement of how unfortunate it is that this term has come into use—which one would not expect with a truly useful and unencumbered term. In so decrying their own terminology, they have even substituted Huber's "General Justification" as another option for naming their teaching. Both because of the earlier, condemned use of "General Justification" in Huber's error and because of the number of true and false definitions with which the term "Objective Justification" has been associated, both ought to be discarded, as their use brings no clarity.²⁹ In the bodies that made up the Synodical Conference, this recycled parochial neologism is claimed as much by those who do not really teach "Objective Justification" as by those who do. This is demonstration enough that their appearance of unity in this article consists only in formulaic memorization of their sec-

tarian position without any verification from Scripture, the Confessions, or the orthodox fathers.

Theses in Summary of the Orthodox Teaching of Justification

Thesis 15

The sins of all men have been imputed to Christ and He was punished (completely) for them all, as He cried out, “It is finished.” His bearing the full punishment for the sin of the world was complete, and the store of both active and passive obedience was filled full. Nonetheless, Holy Scripture does not teach that mankind is now seen as sinless apart from or prior to faith, but only that God’s desire is to judge them through the Mercy Seat or Throne of Grace, which is Christ. Those not so judged are still dead in their sins, as St. Paul says to the Ephesians (2:1), etc., as Luther also clearly teaches (cf. Vol. 26, p. 285–286).³⁰

Thesis 16

Thus, while all the merit and righteousness necessary for every sinner to be declared righteous have been accomplished and acquired by Christ, unless the sinner is reconciled to God through God’s gift of faith in Christ’s merits and righteousness, he is not indeed reconciled, is not justified. Thus, we continue in the ambassadorial work of bringing the Word that reconciles, even as our Lord Himself proclaimed it (cf. 2 Cor. 5).³¹

Thesis 17

The orthodox Lutheran position, as easily demonstrated from the fathers of the Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy, is this: by His resurrection, Christ is declared the Son of God with power and is vindicated (shown to be righteous by merit), by having obediently borne the sins of all mankind and having suffered for them until there was nothing left to punish. His righteousness now avails for every sinner and He—with His merit and the promise attached thereto—is the proper object of our faith. It is through faith in this merit and promise alone that the sinner stands justified before God, since he is thereby judged at the Mercy Seat, the Throne of Grace, so that God sees him as entirely righteous in connection with Christ.

Conclusion

If all that were meant by “Objective Justification” were the acquisition of righteousness by Christ for all mankind so that there is a *basis* for God to declare an individual righteous (through the God-given gift of faith receiving God’s pledge to consider him entirely righteous and forgiven purely for the sake of Christ), we would merely caution against the term.³² Since, however, it means more than that—since it entails a declaration that all mankind is sinless before God before and apart from faith in Christ—this teaching is not only dangerous in its grossest abuse (crass universalism), but is in itself contrary to God’s Word and the exhibition of the same by the Symbols of Christ’s Church.

That the foregoing theses correctly reflect the doctrine of the symbolical books is demonstrated by the writings of the earliest generations of orthodox teachers of the faith confessed in the Book of Concord. Thus, the doctrine of “Objective Justification” (both the teaching and its terminology) is hereby rejected.

These theses, like those which our diocese has previously written and agreed to, are not seen by us as additions to our vows to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, which vows are unconditional. These theses may change as the issues are further clarified. However, we do see them as defining the limits of our fellowship with regard to these issues until such time as we are convinced otherwise from the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions, or until further clarification is needed. We are keenly aware of the fluid nature of such statements. We are also keenly aware of the clear lines of distinction they draw

among those who call themselves Lutherans, and we intend to draw such lines.

Acceptance of these theses is not, of itself, a declaration of fellowship. Those inside our fellowship voluntarily agree with these theses and support them, but we also wish to have these theses function as a marker of agreement between Christians who are not yet necessarily in fellowship. Therefore, we invite all who agree with these theses to express their agreement without necessarily committing themselves to fellowship.

We hope and pray that these theses will be yet another building block in establishing a more healthy and orthodox Lutheran Church in our time, and in this country. With this hope, we, with joy and profound thanks to our Triune God, accept and confess these theses.

Approved Unanimously by the Diocese
Festival of St. Athanasius of Alexandria
2 May 2019

Endnotes

¹ *Christian Dogmatics*, II, 347–351.

² *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, p. 6.

³ Cf. “This We Believe,” IV:1, <http://www.wels.net/what-we-believe/statements-beliefs/this-we-believe/justification>; Dr. Siegbert Becker’s 1982 essay, “Objective Justification,” p. 1, 14, <http://www.wlssays.net/files/BeckerJustification.pdf>; Forrest Bivens’s essay, “Getting The Right Message Out—And Getting It Out The Right Way,” in the section where he abuses Romans 3:23–24, <http://www.wlssays.net/files/BivensMessage.pdf>; John Schaller in his *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Volume 1, p. 459, 466–467; and David Kuske in his comments on 2 Corinthians 5:19 in “Making Use of Our Lutheran Heritage—‘Objective Justification’ in Our Mission Outreach Based on an Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:18–19,” p. 7, 9, 11, <http://www.wlssays.net/files/KuskeOutreach.pdf>.

⁴ As Aegidius Hunnius writes against Samuel Huber: “Our Churches have always taught and still teach the justification that is by faith and that pertains to believers, but that by no means extends to the whole world.” (Hunnus, *A Clear Explanation of the Controversy among the Wittenberg Theologians Concerning Regeneration and Election*, p. 57)

⁵ I.e., the other accepted confessional documents;

⁶ Chemnitz says the same:

Because Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and yet not all are saved through Christ, therefore it is necessary that there be an application of those things which Christ by His obedience has merited and acquired, an application to each individual who has been ordained to eternal life.
(Martin Chemnitz, *Loci theologici*, J.A.O. Preus, tr., CPH, 1999, p. 494)

⁷ While his sons vehemently state that the Rev. Dr. Robert Preus never personally rejected the false teaching known as “Objective Justification,” his academic integrity brought him to flesh out late in his life the statement he had already made in his 1982 CTS Press monograph, “Justification as Taught by Post-Reformation Lutheran Theologians,” where he said on the second page, “The term justification is never used as taking place prior to faith except in a few passing statements or by implication in the exegesis of certain passages. Rather it is said that justification was procured, obtained, acquired, and brought about.” Writing in his posthumously-published *Justification and Rome* (St. Louis, Concordia Academic Press, 1997), he sets out to show—as he said was necessary—that “the great Lutheran teachers through the period of orthodoxy” were “until the late seventeenth century...remarkably dependent upon Luther and the Formula of Concord” and that the “tense situation” brought about by the Council of Trent and its defenders “served to solidify the later Lutherans in their commitment to the Lutheran Confessions, particularly in regard to the doctrine of justification” (p. 121). Thus, he quotes these fathers as saying, for example:

Although Christ has acquired for us the remission of sins, justification, and sonship, God just the same does not justify us prior to our faith. Nor do we become God’s children in Christ in such a way that justification in the mind of God takes place before we believe. (*Justification and Rome*, p. 132, quoted within fn. 74 from Calov, *Apodixis Articulorum Fidei* (Lüneburg, 1684), 249, to supplement a quote from Quenstedt.)

Preus contrasts this imputation-at-point-of-faith to Rome’s infusion through a process of justification and sanctification. Until then, he writes, Rome holds to forgiveness and righteousness as mere “possibilities,” instead of confessing that Christ did already “*acquire* forgiveness of sins and righteousness as *objective realities* which are offered in the Gospel” (italics Preus). Note that such a statement in connection with this quote of Calov (and that of Quenstedt that leads to the footnote) is to say that the “objective realities” are forgiveness and righteousness that are *not imputed prior to faith*. The “objective reality” is that Christ has merited and procured these for us, but we do not have them applied to anyone prior to or apart from faith: there is no “justification in the mind of God,” as Calov says, no seeing mankind “in connection with Christ” apart from faith.

Preus gives us the following from Quenstedt:

It is not the same thing to say, “Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us” and to say “Christ is our righteousness.” For the imputation did not take place when Christ became our righteousness. The righteousness of Christ is the effect of His office. The imputation is the application of the effect of His office. The one, however, does not do away with the other. Christ is our righteousness effectively when He justifies us. His righteousness is ours objectively because our faith rests in Him. His righteousness is ours formally in that His righteousness is imputed to us. (*Justification and Rome*, p. 72–73, where fn. 76 (found on p. 132) gives the source as *Systema*, Par. III, Cap. 8, S. 2, q. 5, *Observatio* 19 (II, 787))

Thus, Preus himself summarizes:

When does the imputation of Christ’s righteousness take place? It did not take place when Christ, by doing and suffering, finished the work of atonement and reconciled the world to God. Then and there, when the sins of the world were imputed to Him and He took them, Christ became our righteousness and procured for us remission of sin, justification, and eternal life. “By thus making satisfaction He procured and merited (*acquisivit et promeruit*) for each and every man remission of all sins, exemption from all punishments of sin, grace and peace with God, eternal righteousness and salvation.” (*Justification and Rome*, p. 72, where in fn. 74 Preus gives the source of the quote as *Systema*, Par. II, Cap.3, Memb. 2 S. 1, Th. 44 (II, 363), followed by the quote from Calov, reproduced above.

Preus continues:

But the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the sinner takes place when the Holy Spirit brings him to faith through Baptism and the Word of the Gospel. Our sins were imputed to Christ at His suffering and death, imputed objectively after He, by His active and passive obedience, fulfilled and *procured* all righteousness for us. But the imputation of His righteousness to us takes place when we are brought to faith. (*Justification and Rome*, p. 72)

It is in the realm of “felicitous inconsistency” that Dr. Preus did not formally repudiate “Objective Justification” by name. In any case, he presents from the orthodox fathers a far different understanding of Justification than Walther and Pieper held and taught.

⁸ Cf. Hebrews 4:16. Melancthon uses this Scriptural terminology and Chemnitz follows suit:

Likewise it says in Heb. 4:16: “Let us ... come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” [KJV]. He understands the throne of grace to be the Mediator Himself, as though he were saying: “the throne which placates the wrath of the Father.”

Melancthon, P., & Preus, J. A. O., *Loci communes*, 1543, p. 92, St. Louis: CPH, 1992.

Paul everywhere describes the article of justification as a judicial process wherein the conscience of the sinner, accused before the tribunal of God by the divine law, convicted, and subject to the sentence of eternal damnation, flees to the throne of grace and is restored, absolved, and freed from the sentence of condemnation and received to eternal life for the sake of the obedience and intercession of the Son of God, our Mediator, which is laid hold of and made one’s own through faith.

Gerson has some wonderful thoughts about the tribunal of God’s justice and the throne of His grace. For if we are discussing our common position before the tribunal of God, we are all subject to the tribunal of His justice; and because before Him no living person can be justified but all are condemned, therefore God has also set up another tribunal, the throne of grace.

When in this way you turn away with your mind, your will, and your heart from looking at your sins and feeling the wrath of God and begin to look to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, that is, when from the sentence of damnation pronounced upon you through the Law you flee to the throne of grace, to the propitiation the heavenly Father has set forth in the blood of Christ, it is necessary to add trust. With firm persuasion it concludes from God’s Word that God gives, communicates, and applies to you the benefits of the promise of grace and that you in this way lay hold on and receive unto righteousness, salvation, and eternal life those things which the free promise of the Gospel offers.

Chemnitz, M., & Preus, J. A. O., *Loci theologici*, p. 480, 482, 502, St. Louis: CPH, 1999.

⁹ The use of the word “promise” by, e.g., Chemnitz in this regard shows that one is not looking backward to a declaration, but to a declaration in the future, i.e., one that exists only as a promise until it is received by faith:

In the third part of [Melancthon’s] definition [of faith] we have a description of the formal cause or principle, namely, how justifying faith relates to its object. The answer is: not with a general or superficial assent or with some Epicurean persuasion, but in such a way that with a true and earnest desire of the mind, the will, and the heart, it desires, seeks, grasps, receives, and applies personally to individual believers the promise of free reconciliation for the sake of Christ the Mediator, so that it may find rest in it unto righteousness, salvation, and eternal life.

Chemnitz, M., & Preus, J. A. O. (1999). *Loci theologici* (electronic ed., p. 501). St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

¹⁰ Cf., e.g., Aegidius Hunnius:

Justification is the act of God by which He deigns to consider the man who is frightened by the awareness of sins and who flees to the Throne of Grace with pure mercy, through and for the sake of the merit of Christ, apprehended by faith; and, having forgiven him his sins, He reckons him as righteous, free from damnation, and also an heir of eternal life, without any human merit and without any view of God toward the virtues or the works of man (as quoted in Rydecki, “The Forensic Appeal to the Throne of Grace,” p. 20).

So, Chemnitz:

The meaning of the word “justify” in this article is judicial, namely, that the sinner, accused by the Law of God, convicted, and subjected to the sentence of eternal damnation, fleeing in faith to the throne of grace, is absolved for Christ’s sake, reckoned and declared righteous, received into grace, and accepted to eternal life. And although John does not employ the word “justify,” yet he describes the doctrine in judicial terms: “He that believes is not judged; he does not come into judgment.” “He sent His Son into the world, not that He should judge the world.” And 1 John 3: “We have passed from death to life.” In Acts 3 Peter says that “sins are blotted out.” Paul explains this when he says, Col. 2, that the hand writing which was against us has been blotted out (*Examination*, Vol. 1, 474).

¹¹ On this, cf. the words of J. A. Quenstedt, who makes it clear that, while our sins were truly imputed to Christ, they remained extrinsic to Him (which would indicate that our guilt and punishment were reckoned to Christ, yet the overcoming of them was by His innocent life and His righteous suffering and death in our place, to the end that He would win vindication, with no need of being personally absolved):

The righteousness of Christ is not our own formal righteousness. Neither is it a righteousness that inheres in us subjectively but is our real and sufficient righteousness by imputation. We do not through this righteousness become righteous by a righteousness inhering in us, but through the imputation of this righteousness we are formally justified in such a way that without it there is no substance of our righteousness before God. From this fact that the righteousness of God is extrinsic to us we conclude that it does not dwell in us formally and intrinsically. And yet it does not follow therefore that righteousness cannot be reckoned to us extrinsically and objectively. For certainly our sins were extrinsic to Christ, and yet they could be imputed for punishment and guilt to Him and reckoned to Him. *Justification and Rome*, p. 71–72, where fn. 72 (found on p. 131) gives the source as *Systema*, Par. I, Cap. 8, 5, 2, q. 5 (II, 775 ff.).

We note, also, how Quenstedt speaks of this “objective aspect” of Justification, but utterly repudiates any idea of “Objective Justification”:

It is not the same thing to say, “Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us” and to say “Christ is our righteousness.” For the imputation did not take place when Christ became our righteousness. The righteousness of Christ is the effect of His office. The imputation is the application of the effect of His office. The one, however, does not do away with the other. Christ is our righteousness effectively when He justifies us. His righteousness is ours objectively because our faith rests in Him. His righteousness is ours formally in that His righteousness is imputed to us. (*Justification and Rome*, p. 72–73, where fn. 76 (found on p. 132) gives the source as *Systema*, Par. III, Cap. 8, S. 2, q. 5, *Observatio* 19 (II, 787))

¹² We commend to the reader the Rev. Paul Rydecki’s “The Forensic Appeal to the Throne of Grace,” especially to the quotes which appear in each appendix to that essay (as well as in its body). Unlike the snippets generally adduced by those who wish eisegetically to find the Lutheran fathers as supporters of “Objective Justification,” Pastor Rydecki translates the *context* around such quotes, as well, and thereby demonstrates that those who would thus push the fathers into their service do so unfairly. The paper is available at <http://tinyurl.com/n28ndt6>

¹³ *Justification and Rome*, p. 119–120.

¹⁴ *Justification and Rome*, p. 121.

¹⁵ The Throne of Grace, which is nothing other than Christ and His merit, which is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Mercy Seat, by which name Christ is both called and referred to in the New Testament. (Cf. Exodus 25:22; Hebrews 9:5 and Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2, etc.)

¹⁶ Cf. Revelation 13:8, which makes it clear that our salvation was already “in God’s heart” before He created the world.

¹⁷ Romans 3:21,22; note that v. 22 defines the term from v. 21 and may not be artificially separated from it.

¹⁸ Cf. Hebrews 9:5 and Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2, etc.

¹⁹ *Christian Dogmatics*, II:349–351

²⁰ See the second footnote to Thesis 6.

²¹ “Pronouncement of righteousness” = “justification.” “Objective Justification” does not say that such a pronouncement has ‘merely’ been acquired, but that it has already been levied.

²² Note that “the acquisition of a pronouncement of righteousness” without the assertion that such a declaration has already been made does *not* reduce said acquisition to that of a “potential pronouncement” in any way other than one might say that the prophecies that a Serpent-crushing Seed of the Woman or One Born of a Virgin spoke (merely) to a ‘potential fulfillment’. *The prophecies and promises of God are just as certain when they are made as when they are fulfilled*. Rather, the acquisition itself gives the ‘substance’ that is given through the Means of Grace, namely the merit of Christ and the promise of right standing before God, which creates faith so that justification is truly the result that is received.

²³ Cf. C.F.W. Walther, *Justification: Subjective and Objective*, translated by Kurt E. Marquart, Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1982.

²⁴ “The doctrine of universal, so-called objective justification sets forth that the Lord God by grace because of Christ’s redemption actually forgave sins to all men.” Cf., “Salvation is just as perfect and complete for those who are finally lost. This is the only reason, but a sufficient one, why he that believeth not is damned. Unbelief is the rejection of life and salvation achieved and personally intended for every unbeliever.” (Schaller, John. *Biblical Christology*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982. Cited by Beckman, who begins the paragraph in which the first quote occurs, with the comment, “The term ‘objective justification’ is little more than 100 years old in our Lutheran circles.” “Universal and Objective Justification with Special Emphasis on a Recent Controversy,” David J. Beckman, delivered at the District Pastor-Teacher Conference of the South Atlantic District (WELS), January 27, 1983, p. 3. “So-called”—rather than “so-called”—is from Beckman’s text.)

²⁵ “The objective act of justification and the subjective possession and enjoyment thereof in blessed peace.” (*Dogmatik*, Cited by Beckman, *ibid.*)

²⁶ Pieper quotes Hunnius seven times in volume two of *Christian Dogmatics*—always positively—but never cites him concerning this topic, and brushes him aside in volume three with regard to the Lutheran understanding of election. Because of the later use of the term *intuitu fidei* as if man were causing God to elect him, Pieper rejected all of the earlier fathers use of that term with a different understanding.

²⁷ Cf. Thesis 5.

²⁸ At least by Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod writers; Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod writers do not seem to have any qualms about the terminology.

²⁹ Thus: Kurt Marquart in his paper concerning Larry Darby, p. 1 (available through various web sites, including <http://angelfire.com/ny4/lutherantheology.marquartjustification.html>), where he quotes Henry Hamaan’s similar sentiment in *Justification by Faith in Modern Theology*, Graduate Study 2 (St. Louis: School for Graduate Studies, Concordia Seminary, 1957), p. 60; John Buchholz in his essay at the 2005 WELS synodical convention, p. 3, fn. 4; the LCMS’s response to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective*, p. 24–25, similarly; all of these speak of a preference for other terms to be used, and there are others that could be cited.

³⁰ As previously shown, Luther by no means teaches a universal justification in these pages, nor those that go before, as he specifically says “where there is no faith in Christ, there sin remains.” (*AE*, Vol. 26, p. 286)

³¹ Some wrongly believe that what we state in this thesis—that all God needs in order to consider each sinner as righteous has been accomplished—is “Objective Justification.” Such is not the case, however, as “Objective Justification” does not merely state “that what God needs in order to consider each sinner righteous—the exchange of righteousness for sin in Christ—is accomplished,” but that the whole world has, indeed, already been declared righteous and that no sin remains. Again, Scripture and the Confessions distinguish between the obtaining of the righteousness needed for justification and the application of the same, as do the Lutheran fathers.

³² “Objective Justification” is, at best, an ambiguous term by virtue of the various ways it is represented by those claiming to adhere to it; thus, it is terminology that has no place in the Church. As with the Sacraments, in which we maintain the words and elements given us by Christ so that no element of doubt is introduced, language cannot be ambiguous lest the Church is given place to fall into “false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.” Both such ambiguity in the use of the term “Objective Justification” and the false teaching advanced in the historical usage of this term and those given as its equivalent (whether the teaching of Huber and his “general justification” or that of the theologians of the former Synodical Conference, who use both Huber’s term and “universal justification” as equivalents), has led even those among us who formerly made use of it to abandon the continued use of this term in the Church in connection with our desire to reject the false teaching associated with it.