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The Doctrine of Soteriology from a Comparative Perspective: A Dialectical Approach from the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Contexts

Dominic Onsongo Nyambisa, MTH

<https://Orcid.Org/0000-0003-0399-6782>

St. Paul's University.

Abstract

Although the doctrine of soteriology (salvation) is core to Christianity, it has divided ecclesiology for over five centuries, since the Protestant reformation of the sixteenth century. There is a misunderstanding on the role of grace and works of faith in the process of attaining salvation, especially between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants, particularly the Lutherans. The misunderstandings have been visible in the process of teaching and practice of this doctrine to their respective memberships; and many Christians are in dilemma in regard to work or not to work so as to earn salvation. The teaching on justification that leads to salvation deals with how both grace and works are involved in the process that leads to salvation. The use of the Hegelian dialect, in this article, helps us to find and propose a common way of understanding soteriology. It also guides us in understanding the teachings from the proponents of salvation by grace alone and from those who antagonistically propose that both God's grace and a believer's works play a role in God's salvific plan in an individual. We therefore aim at finding a way of teaching Christians in our contemporary world in matters regarding soteriology from its doctrinal perspectives. It is anticipated that this will help in addressing the rift that obtains in the teaching of the doctrine of soteriology. Hence, this article will strive to shed more light on how one could receive justification in order to be in God's salvific plan.

Key words: Soteriology/salvation, Roman Catholics and Lutheran perspectives of Salvation, Hegelian dialectics of soteriology

1.1. Introduction

Sitting with my daughter, one evening, as we talked about her planned confirmation that was scheduled in a few days' time, she raised a serious concern that was rather intriguing. She narrated on how at their catholic school they are taught about the importance of works for salvation. So, as a Lutheran, she was confused on how one can be in God's salvific plan to the very end. This is due to the fact that while Lutherans teach about salvation being obtained only through God's grace alone through faith, the Roman Catholics teach that salvation could be obtained through both God's grace and by exercising works of faith. This made it impossible for her to establish what to believe, as both theo-doctrinal schools, noted above, seemed theo-biblically grounded and appealing. Therefore, although soteriology is a core church doctrine, understanding how one obtains salvation is central to the understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

As noted, Lutherans teach that justification for salvation is obtained through God's grace alone through faith. Further, its catechism teaches that salvation is an undeserved gift gotten from God that

humankind can never earn. It shows that God's grace is amazing, not only because it 'saves' humanity, but also sustains believers daily, a that 'leads' them home. It is that power behind all life that is 'unconditional and unchanging' (Schmalzle 2008:158). Martin Luther taught that through faith, we get the gift of God's saving grace that freely saves us from evil and death, and gain reconciliation to achieve a righteous relationship with God (*Luther's Works* Vol 26.1955-1986). Basing his perspectives on Romans 1:17, 3:24, Ephesians 2:1-9, Galatians 2:16 and Titus 4:4-8, Luther concluded that we can only obtain salvation by God's grace alone through faith. Lutherans accuse Catholicism of 'legalism,' for insisting on role of works of faith. *The Book of Concord* reads:

... we receive forgiveness of sin, and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness... (2000:39).

However, the Council of Trent responded to the Lutheran claims by saying that "faith is not a saving faith if it does not go along with hope and charity though gotten by grace." Therefore, men can fail to obtain salvation if they do not 'possess' such works of faith (McBrien 1981:309). This Roman Catholic teaching is also based from Biblical texts like James 2:12-26 and Romans 2:13-15. The teaching has been upheld throughout the centuries through Papal Decrees like in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* and *Codex Iuris Canonici* as proper and acceptable. They accuse Lutherans of 'antinomianism' for making faith look easy and make congregants lazy. They teach that salvation is obtained both by relying on God's grace and by exercising works of faith. Doing works of faith is the only way to guard the "grace-received gift" and hence "merit", both for "ourselves and others," this "gift of salvation" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* par 1821, 2010). It insists saying:

Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification....

... with the grace of God, to persevere 'to the end' and to obtain the joy of heaven, as God's eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ.

It is through such tough and varying catechetical statements that many questions arise such as: When does one obtain salvation? How is salvation effected? When can one be counted as justified and saved? Do people have a role in the act of salvation? If there is, what is it? How does the grace of God work? Is it limited? Does one need to perform works of faith in order to be justified? When do these works of faith come in? Again, are not all these questions "obsolete and dealt' with "already'? Of what importance are they to the modern believer? (Kung 1977:582). According to Mana (2004:1), it is worth noting that these questions are worthy because salvation has always been a "problem for humankind", and an essential problem for it deals with the "meaning of existence" and for the "ultimate orientation of life."

This led to an observation made in the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC), whereby it was noted that there were cases of different questions raised by the parish members about the issue relating to the role of God's saving grace and works of faith in salvation in meetings like cell groups, catechetical classes and Bible studies. Members seem at crossroads about the role that both God's grace and works of faith play in salvation. Some have problems about whether to stick to the Lutheran teaching of salvation by grace alone or by grace and works as taught by Roman Catholics. It is a Biblical-based problem because the members also read about it from the Pauline letters which seems to bring more problems rather than to solve or harmonize it. A good example is that found in different interpretations from Romans 3:24 and Ephesians 2:4-8 against that of Romans 2:13-15. This becomes more complicated for the members because they feel that both these issues are biblical hence hold them to be true, yet seemingly contradicting one another.

The problem is compounded by many questions raised from some of the new members who join Lutheran church from other denominations. Mostly, these new members came from churches like the charismatic churches and Roman Catholic church that uphold the teaching about the role of works of faith in their salvation process. It was also noted that during their integration process, they asked questions regarding more like the ones stated above.

From African setting, it also seems that many Christians are concerned with the question of whether "to work or not to work." This is because according to African culture, people 'earn' social status. This necessitates many African Christians to always challenge religious systems in the quest for a more meaningful Christian life because of issues and situations that affect their daily life (Getui & Wasike, 2002). This is brought by the ambiguity and complexity of many Christians who switch churches at will, especially in towns as revealed by the article, and hence the teachings make them confused about what to believe in and what not to.

For Lutherans, justification for salvation is by God's grace alone through faith, and all kinds of works of faith follow suit from one being open to this gracious act of God and not otherwise (*Book of Concord*, 2000). Their counterparts, such as the Roman Catholics, however, are of the opinion that works go hand in hand with the grace in order for the salvation to be effective (O'Malle, 1989). Therefore, this article attempts to establish a way to harmonize the teachings so that we avoid the different connotations and stands that make Christianity to seem divided. Kung (1977) alludes that these are some of the reasons why we have the present kind of crisis in understanding the teachings from the church(es) and their leaders because the ecclesiastical systems have failed to keep abreast to the needs of contemporary times.

In the contemporary context marked by skepticism and relativism of Post modernism, it is difficult to teach a doctrine that appears to have inherent internal contradictions like the one under this article. Such contradictions could make it very difficult to attract young and educated people to the Christian faith. This makes the article and clarification of this doctrine imperative.

On the same issue, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* between Lutherans and Roman Catholics signed on 31st October 1999 reiterated the need to continue discussions about this issue of understanding on justification since there were issues that needed further clarification (LWF No.43, 1999). This shows that there needs a relook at the teachings and keep abreast with the historical failure to which the church's mission is betrayed (Kung, 1977). The article hopes to find a way of harmonizing the teachings so that the congregants can remain in their churches and keep their faith as Christians aided by the church without finding a reason to leave their faith or switch denominational alliances. This is the basis for this article.

1.2 The problem itself

Although Salvation is a central doctrine to the Christian message and faith, there divergent views on how one comes to obtain it. The Pauline passages of Romans 1:17, Titus 3:4-8 and Ephesians 2:4-8 seem contradictory to that of Romans 2:13-15 and that of James 2:12-26. Following such, different church denominations have taken different approaches in the teaching of this doctrine. Therefore, due to lack of proper teaching and understanding on how people come to this salvation; whether it is by grace alone or works of faith or both, believers in both the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church are therefore in dilemma on whether to work or not to work so as to achieve salvation.

1.3 Lutheran perspective on salvation by grace alone through faith

In the doctrine of salvation by God's grace alone through faith alone, Martin Luther taught that it is the inner belief given to us as a gift of the Holy Spirit so as to be able to believe in Jesus Christ. Faith enters our lives through baptism and allows us to realize the truth about the damning consequences of sin and our need to be saved. Faith makes us to continue to trust in God and allow his grace to continue to form and modify us as we grow into Christ-likeness. For Martin Luther, having faith in Christ even as little as the size of a mustard seed is enough (Luke 17:5). For him, this faith helps us to "cling to God's saving grace in Jesus for our salvation". We are not saved by having a lot of faith, but by "that to which our faith clings unto" which is God's grace. He goes on to assert that "if Christian life is not based on faith alone in Christ, then it can never be based upon grace alone" (*Luther's Works* vol 25 1955-1986: 370).

On the issue of grace, Martin Luther taught that salvation is "an undeserved gift of God that we cannot earn". For him, "we can only be saved by God's grace through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Unfortunately, Luther shows that many Christians don't understand this because of different and wrong teachings like believing that they can be saved through having very strong faith, what they have done, or will keep doing or their character. This issue will be dealt with deeply later in this paper. However, Luther shows that through faith, God grants us his free and gracious gift of salvation. In *The Book of Concord* (2000:39), it teaches:

...that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God by our own merits, works or satisfaction, but that we receive forgiveness of sin, and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith when we believe that Christ suffered for us.

Luther demonstrates that God's righteousness is that grace that bestows righteousness upon fallen humans. In *Luther's Large Catechism* (2000:466), he explains thus:

The term righteousness caused me much trouble. Others showed that righteousness is the truth by which God deservedly condemns or judges those who have merited evil and set aside the mercy by which believers are saved. This explanation is most dangerous, besides being vain, because it arouses a secret hate against God and his righteousness. Who wants to love him if he wants to deal with sinners according to his righteousness? Therefore, remember that the righteousness of God is that by which we are justified, or the gift of the forgiveness of sins. The righteousness of God is wonderful because it makes of God not a righteous judge but a forgiving father, who wants to use his righteousness not to judge but to justify and absolve sinners.

This marks the discovery about the righteousness of God as the steadfast love and mercy for a fallen humanity that played a role in the formation of his theology of salvation by grace of God alone through faith. The idea of looking at God as a judge left Luther with "an extremely disturbed conscience" and made him to hate God. But later he discovered at last the righteous shall live by faith. This is where he received the revelation from the gospel where, as a merciful God, he justifies us by faith. In this discovery, Luther claimed he had gotten the sweetest of all words for him and a "treasure... that opened for him the gates to paradise" (Wengert 2004:4).

For Luther, grace is the undeserved love and mercy of God that freely breaks into the lives of sinners through baptism, to adopt us into his family and unite us intimately to Christ. It is this same grace that gifts people God's plan for them to be part of his eternal family. Luther argues that grace is all about God is doing, it is not in any way about what we can do to save ourselves. It is not about us trying through our works to become more like Christ but about God's grace that transforms us in becoming more like Christ. To this end, he writes:

We are Christians not because we are religious and try to do that which is right or good, but rather because we take from and draw life from Christ alone. Paul himself shows us in Titus 3:5 saying, "God saved us, not because of any good that we have done, but by his grace, which was given to us" (*Luther's Works*, 1955-1986: Vol 25 p.40,370)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great Lutheran theologian of the 20th century agrees with Luther's expression and writes thus:

... To become more like Christ is not an ideal we can try to obtain by our own. It is not as though we have to try to imitate Christ as best as we can. There is no way we can transform ourselves into his likeness; instead it is the very form of Christ which seeks to be formed in us and is manifested within us (Gala. 4:19). Christ's work is not finished until he has perfected his own form, his own likeness in us. And this is God's loving grace (1995:43)

1.4 Roman Catholic stand on grace and works of faith

The counter-reformation group stressed more on the issues of grace but with an emphasis on the importance of obedience and discipleship basing on human responsibility and accountability towards God (<https://carm.org/catholic/council-trent-canon-justification> accessed 6. 02.2020). McGrath (2005) agrees to this saying that the council suggested that people cannot be saved by God's grace alone, but also by how we effectively use this grace to change our lifestyle (works) and live after we have been saved.

In one of the Papal encyclicals on *perfectae caritatis*, the catholic church teaches that humans are very active in the process of justification by turning in humility to him in faith, crying out for his grace and accompanying all this with good works. This is because God's grace (*gratia*) is based on the words of God and the way he speaks to reveal himself (*Dei verbum*) to bring the works (*gestis*) which are intrinsically connected with each other in a way that they illuminate each other. In fact, it is through this action of God's word coming through grace and manifested through works that God is seen as continually present with his people; and this was what the council of Trent asserted (Balthasar 1994:7 cf MacGrath 2005:221). The council of Trent therefore pronounced anathemas (curses) for those who did not follow its teachings; especially about the issue of justification and salvation. This meant that those who disagreed or who continue to disagree with the doctrines of this Council are cursed; and the curse must come from God himself but through the church

The Council of Trent therefore saw the need of having works and therefore endorsed the sacrament of penance which helped the people who feel into sin to come back into this saving grace of God. In Session XIV, c. I, the council of Trent declared this regarding the sacrament of Penance: "As a means of regaining grace and justice, penance was at all times necessary for those who had defiled their souls with any mortal sin" (<https://carm.org/catholic/roman-catholic-view-justification> Accessed 06.02.2020). Pope Pius XIII (states of perfection address, 1957) defended the council noting that through "penance, prayer, works of penance, and application" to the sacred and common life, there comes a blessed peace.

Alberigo & Komonchak (1995) shows that the Vatican II meeting looked with deeper intent on the role of God's grace on the faithful people in the Christian church. It is the same Grace of God that gives them the gift of being part of the body of Christ that gives them both the "right and duty (*ius et officium*)" to work out their salvation and serve in the church's mission to the world. According to Lamb and Levering (2008:40), the Roman Catholic Church teaches that Christian justification for salvation that begins at baptism through God's grace requires that the righteousness thereof be guarded through personal works as a way to maintain the holiness received. In the Lumen Gentium which says thus:

They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature, they are really made holy. Then too, by God's gift, they must hold onto and complete in their lives this holiness they have received.

1.5 Use of Hegelian Dialectics

Since the doctrine seems Biblically based and held as true, this article opted for use of Hegelian dialect to try and hold the two truths together to find a common ground. Hegelian Dialectics is a logical method that aims to put two seemingly contrasting truths together. The method helps to have a look at "metaphysical situations" that have "oppositions, conflicts, tensions and refutations" or "thesis, antithesis

and synthesis”; something that Hegel shows that there might be a “positive outcome” that can come out of it. The Hegelian dialectics is about “dealing with concepts” and their role in ‘human experience;’ particularly in any possible knowledge, and also in various kinds of “self-conscious” intentional activities that bring understanding (Bieser, 1993:133). Since the two strands of Christianity seem to base their claims in the Bible, out of which we hold both as true, Hegelian Dialects will help to put them in opposite ends and analyze them in the light of the other. This method employs dialogue and consensus-building to help this article to reach projected objectives with the realization that sometimes the resolving of a conflict can be achieved by listening to one’s opposite side of the story because the answer might just be lying there. However, this method has challenges. This is because sometimes the ideas that one may be holding as true may not be truths at all. Without making sure if the two are truths without reasonable doubt. So, the greatest challenge begins by ascertaining whether the ideas to put here are true. But in this case, since both stands are seen as biblical, they are held as true so this method befits.

By applying methodology of Hegelian dialectics, the article tries to resolve the problem that has remained persistent despite the many efforts made by the different church denominations to find a common way to teach their congregants. This is because the dialectical theory is often seen as a consultation that highlights differences and places of agreement in order to find ways of coming to work together. Since the researcher holds that both claims of how to obtain justification for salvation are biblically based, and hence held as true, Hegelian dialects helps to find and propose a common way of looking at this perennial problem and offer a solution. Because of the two conflicting strands, it uses its “thesis, antithesis and synthesis” method to find a solution to the two conflicting ideas.

Since the Hegelian dialectic is used to find a way of bringing an understanding between two conflicting ideas or assumption, the researcher works to bring these two seemingly contradicting ideas to the table to analyze them. This seemingly contradictions come up due to churches doing selective reading of texts in the Bible (Kiboi, 2015). This selective reading occasions support for some doctrines while castigating others or even sanctioning them. Luther and the Lutherans have chosen texts which favor their view of justification by God’s grace alone through faith; while the Roman Catholics have also selectively gone for texts that favor their teaching of justification through grace and doing works of faith. Therefore, the use of instantaneous and progressive revelation allows us to use the Hegelian Dialectics since it has not been used before to try and solve this conflict.

The Hegelian dialectics puts the two contradicting ideas into “a frenzied circular pattern of thought and action” through dialogue and consensus building so that at the end the intended objectives are achieved. In its proper use, the conflict sometimes gets solved when one realizes that a solution may be achieved at by one’s opposing idea (Bieser, 1993:124). Thereby, it’s the researcher’s intention to put together the two conflicting ideas, analyzing one another from the perspective of the other so as to find a solution. It is important to note that maybe these selected Biblical texts could work together for the common good.

1.6 Instantaneous and Progressive Revelation

Different church traditions have different versions of how one comes to obtain salvation. We witness a variety of ways in which this doctrine, which is the very “essence, nature, idea and genius” of Christianity, has become an “object of intensive theological discussion;” taught differently as seen in previous chapters (Beeck, 1992:100). Hence, we hear Christians claiming that their denomination follows the Bible and their teachings are true, and being skeptical of other churches as not being Biblical hence bringing divisions, accusations and separations.

The contemporary atmosphere of creative scholarly skepticism has stimulated the development of fundamental theology where educated Christians want to think for themselves. They do so by critiquing orthodox church teachings. Hence, the church needs to endorse and adopt standards of integrity through appropriate and adequate methods that can help them to understand the teaching of justification according to their contemporary context.

The article agrees with Beeck (1992) who applauds such developments that have brought an agenda of the quest for the true essence of Christianity in the modern times. The dissatisfaction with the present "narrowly particular, impenitent state of Christianity" has generated a quest for a living faith which demands for the reform of the church in the light of its true universalist vocation through instantaneous and progressive revelation (1992). Instantaneous and progressive revelation, like every divine revelation for different denominational realms, has the aim of revealing God's nature and purpose to his people. It includes the already-revealed (Bible) and the not-yet revealed, both instantaneous and progressive kind of revelation because God is able to continue his self-revelation since he is transcendent (Kiboi, 2015).

Since reconciliation between God and humankind is central to Christianity, this kind of revelation will help the faithful to feel free to practice their faith with love in an unbroken way (Nygren, 1973). The researcher notes that this is because denominations need to understand that the church exists for people and not rely on theologians who lead them, for they also err. Sometimes, what was right then may not be right for the present contemporary community of believers. Instantaneous and progressive revelation helps, therefore, the church to move from being faithful to itself to being faithful to its essence; away from denominational affiliation to being obedient to God in faith and trust (Kung, 1977). Denominations should not stick nor take pride in their old practices, but find a way to cooperate and proceed with their God-given mission within the contemporary society beyond denominational affiliation.

This kind of revelation goes beyond blind obedience to the laid down church doctrinal specification to move to understanding the signs of the contemporary times so as to fulfill the will of God for the modern humankind. Blind following has been seen to make believers unhappy, watched and enslaved. Hence instantaneous revelation aims at helping the church, despite its failures before, to retain the intent of being relevant to the message that it bears and its mission to the world. This recovers responsible retrieval of the Christian faith from the profusion of the scholastic disputes, ecclesiastical abuse and popular religiosity (Beek, 1992). This kind of revelation can help the two contradicting groups find a solution that is worth to bring a common perspective for the two church traditions.

1.7 The fundamentality of faith in Justification

Although the two church traditions have different understanding about faith, they accept it as a fundamental element in justification. Both the Protestants and Roman Catholics agree on the vitality of faith salvation holding it as that unmistakable entity in the justification process (Romans 1:17). They believe in duty to teach about faith in a contemporary world surrounded by historical, philosophical and theological advances that seem to affect the understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

Arguably, both denominations accept that having faith in the salvific act of Christ on the cross as the core and backbone of justification leading to salvation (John 5:24). Both believe that the work of Christ on the cross changes the believer from being a sinner to a justified child of God; to exchange his righteousness with our life of sin; for it is where we become justified before God. Both agree that faith is essential, but they differ on its understanding and practice.

1.8 Grace and Works in salvation

This article has brought forth the discovery that both denominations (Lutherans and Catholics) agree that the beginning of any salvation process must begin and end by God's grace through having faith and trusting in the salvific work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It was noted that, while Lutherans view justification for salvation to be efficaciously accomplished by God's grace alone through faith, the Roman Catholics on the other hand teach that works must go hand in hand with the grace of God. Thereby, article out found that the contest between them lies on whether the works of faith are involved in the process of obtaining justification for salvation. In the following section, what the researcher argues the findings on the two perspectives of salvation.

1.8.1 Role of God's grace in justification

The article brings forth the view that both denominations accept God's grace as essential to receiving justification. Believers are called to God's saving grace through the Word by which he speaks his message to all people. Luther referred an open Bible as the "cradle of Christ" through which we come to "know" of God's love and grace in our lives, graciously and openly given to all for salvation. The Word of God becomes the first grace of God for us; it is the one that breaks into our lives to connect us to the transforming power of Christ's salvific work. Through God's word, we come to know of this saving grace of God that brings death to our sinful ways and gives us 'New life' in Christ. So, even coming to believe is a mere gift (grace) of God that no one can claim to be their own. Both churches agree that God reveals himself to us in visible and audible signs; greatest of which is the written word. Through the Bible, people learn what God's grace means for them; learning of God's love for a fallen world and how he is reconciling it to himself (Romans 1:16-17, 3:21-26).

For Paul, it is just by God's grace that whoever believes Christ receives the justification that God himself provides that satisfies his own character and which brings reconciliation between humanity and himself. Luther took up this idea from Paul to foster his view of justification by God's grace 'alone' through faith. The researcher found the contest to be on the word "alone" as used by the Protestants. While both agree to salvation by God's grace through faith, Roman Catholics avoid this word and add "together with works of faith". It is evident that this is what brought the different teachings.

Lutherans view that Christ had taught that none can be saved except "from above" and no one can boast of having any way of attaining this salvation (John 3:3). It is God who sent Jesus Christ to die a sacrificial death on the cross to appease and propitiate over the sins of humanity and grant us, not only an atonement, but also reconciliation with God. It is this same God who forgives all of our sins on the basis of Christ's sacrificial death to offer us salvation and eternal life.

Certainly, it is because of the gracious work of God who has offered to make us new creatures through Jesus Christ that Christians could begin to be different (Titus 3:4-5). Through his loving kindness, he is the one who washes us clean and gives a new birth and renewal of our lives; moving believers from being sinners to becoming heirs of eternal life. For them, Paul's claim is "worthwhile trusting in" (Titus 3:7-8). Christians unanimously accept this as an act of total, pure and divine grace of God; translated from the Greek word *charis*. It is God's grace alone that transforms a sinner to justify them before God. This is what Lutherans regard as sheer grace of God that we receive, as 'a free gift' gotten without any kind of work, apart from just believing.

Luther uses Paul's expression in Ephesians 2:4 to make Christians realize that while people are always disobedient, rebellious and sinful, God is always gracious, merciful and loving. Hence in v5, Paul celebrates because of this saving grace of God that has found us even when we had done nothing to

deserve it. Luther related this to the act of God sending his son to die a sacrificial death on the cross as a ransom for the fallen humankind; for everyone who just believes (John 3:16). Just by believing, God's grace makes us alive in Christ, raises us with him and seats us with him (Ephesians 2:5-6). Luther purposely uses Paul's idea here that it is God who does all these to all who believe, just because of the incomparable riches of his grace (v7). Therefore, for him, justification cannot be counted on human thoughts and efforts through works; that God in his grace saves us when we respond to him in faith is incomparable to anything. From this perspective, we note Luther's assertion that if we do not rely on this gracious gift of God, then we can only rely on our works that in themselves could not atone for our sins nor make us justified. Paul's example of Abraham in Romans 4:1-8 explains a lot about justification by God's grace through faith. In v1-2, he shows if Abraham had believed to be justified by works, he would have had something to boast of. Clearly, God knew that Abraham could not secure his own righteousness and so he credited it to his faith. Genesis 15:6 agrees: "Abraham put his faith in the LORD, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness." This seems to be where Luther roots his idea that it is just by God's grace that we are saved if we believe; works are just fruits of our faith.

Luther exegeted the term 'credited' which means to put something into one's account as written by Paul in Romans 4:1-8(v3). From literal sense, one's account can be credited as a result of remuneration (for work done) or merely as gifts (or grants) for nothing done. For Luther, as was for Paul, it is the second part which appeals to us as sinners; God's grace as a gift. They take the example that Abraham's belief was 'credited' as righteousness; it was not on any work that he had done. Just by believing in God's Promises, he was counted righteous. He was justified long before he responded through actions springing forth from his faith. This is where the meaning for Greek word for *χαρις* is witnessed. For Lutherans, Abraham's example remains a great indication that no rites or works will lead us to be justified and be declared righteous; we only respond by faith. God, in his amazing love, grants us his saving grace to make us be counted as righteous.

In Romans 1:16-17, Paul shows that God has given us his word, the power to move us to have faith. Through faith, God grants us his saving grace, an undeserved gift that 'credits' us with his righteousness. It is something that is totally undeserved and unexpected from God, but he grants it anyway. This way, the Roman Catholics fail to note that even coming to faith is not our work, but an act of God's grace alone. For anyone responding in faith, God's grace is received and begins fulfilling the God-given purpose. It begins acting at baptism to bring to fulfillment the promises of God to the believer by 'giving birth' to them from above through baptism, and making them new creatures (2Corinthians 5:17); and leading us to eternal life (Mark16:16).

Both denominations agree that in baptism, God's grace washes us clean of our old sinful nature and then implants in us a seed of faith. Through this faith, Christ's righteousness is imprinted upon us and his presence begins to dwell amongst us (Romans 6:10-11, Galatians 2:15-16). Both agree that through the very act of believing in Jesus Christ, one is justified by God through God's grace. However, Lutherans maintain that it is just the grace of God alone through faith that draws us to Christ and which justifies us before God.

For Luther, if we include works in justification, then God will be 'rewarding' the works of the believers; for the one who works gets his "dues" or "merit" in return. But the one who has not worked but believes in the one who justifies has his faith reckoned as righteousness by the one who justifies. This kind of reckoning forms the basis for his perspective of justification by God's grace alone gotten through faith. For him, just by having faith in Jesus Christ and his salvific work on the cross, believers receive justification by God's grace alone. While Luther goes for the idea of being justified by God's grace alone,

Roman Catholics have avoided the word "alone". Instead, they have added 'and by works of faith'. Let's now turn to this second version of the Roman Catholics.

1.8.2 Role of works in justification

It seems that controversy arises here between Roman Catholics and Lutherans. While Lutherans view works as fruits growing out of encountering the saving grace of God through faith, their Roman Catholic counterparts, view works as being part and parcel of the justification process for one to obtain salvation. Roman Catholics view that Luther's idea makes believers 'lazy'; hence accuse Lutherans of antinomianism. They believe that without works, believers become passive and don't see the meaning behind the justification process. For them, the faith of the believers gets meaning if they have the idea of justification by both grace and works of faith; hence humankind plays a role in the justification process to obtain salvation.

Roman Catholics view that people will be judged for condemnation or acquittal (in legal terms) based on what they have done from what they have known. They claim that good works are a way of dealing with sins after baptism. This idea made them to be accused by Luther of legalism. They teach that all people have a moral obligation to exercise acts that are consistent with their faith; failure to which leads to fall into sin.

Roman Catholics still use the same example of Abraham to show a faith in action; *fiducia* and not *acsentia*. Since *acsentia* is seen as a mere mental acknowledgement and is seen as being more intellectual than practical. This is what Lutherans are accused of having. But *fiducia* involves righteous living guided by faith. Abraham is hereby seen as a patriarch of faith because his faith moved him to act to fulfill what he believed in (Genesis 22:1-9). Although the Roman Catholics accept that he was not justified only by his actions, they maintain that through actions, his faith was proved. Following this, they seem to conclude very well using James' assertion in 2:26 which says: "...so faith without works is dead."

The Roman Catholics view the two Greek translations of *ergon* (which means work, deeds business) and *ergazoumai* (which means to toil, labor or work) of work could be translated to mean works that have a profit tag; much more like a business. This is because people work with aim of either getting paid or gaining a profit. They could be affiliated to *katergazoumai* which means to "thoroughly work down with an aim at sight" (Young, 1970:1072). Translated from their Biblical bases in Romans and James, they form conviction for the teaching of justification by God's grace and works of faith. It lies on the basis that when people come to faith, they aim at gaining salvation and eternal life; equated to profit. For them, Luther did not realize that justification has a reward tag of salvation and eternal life. They draw from Paul's idea in Romans 2:13-15, if Jews have a moral obligation to fulfill the law, the Gentiles too have a moral obligation relating to their consciences. They view that Paul was condemning the hypocrisy and inconsistent behavior of the new Christians from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds; something James was also responding to in 2:12-18. However, the Roman Catholics adopt the cautionary idea of not bragging about these works since they deserve to come from faith and not from or for personal reasons. However, this seems to be against Paul's explicit idea in Romans 3:21-23 which shows that God's righteousness is only availed to all through having faith in Jesus Christ.

Although this troubled Luther, it is possible that James was trying to put straight the way Christianity should be lived; contrary to people who had been relying on Paul's message of justification by God's grace alone through faith. He gives concrete examples in verse 15 on how our faith should be manifested. For him, as well as for the Roman Catholics, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by works, is dead, implying that such is not a saving faith, but a dying one (James 2:17). This is why the council of

Trent prepared the canons with anathemas as shown in chapter three. Even though the anathemas have been dropped, yet the teaching remains as firmly entrenched by the Council of Trent.

In view of this, we find out that Luther, the greatest opponent, was against incorporation of works of faith in justification though he accepted them as fruits of the sanctification process. If we follow that, we make justification human-centered and removing it from its divine-centeredness as Schneider reveals (2009). For Luther, we are not Christians by what we do or not do, rather how we are saved through God's grace alone. Even if we fail in doing what God wants us, this saving grace continues to adopt us into his family.

Although he denied role of these works, we find out that deeply embedded in the Lutheran Catechism are the faith-nurturing practices taught by Luther himself. Although Luther said that these practices are not a measure of holiness or a way to earn God's grace, blessings or righteousness; they just make our faith have the right conditions for growth. But Luther places this as part of the sanctification process which he teaches comes after and maintains justification. But if these are not works, what can they be called?

Roman Catholics fault the very principle that Luther stood for in the Biblical principle: "the just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17). For them, the words "shall live" means an act/action with a command or obligation. This implies that for justification to be fully realized, humanity has a role of clinging, by living, in faith to God's gift of grace. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says:

...In every circumstance, each one of us should hope, with the grace of God, to persevere 'to the end' and to obtain the joy of heaven, as God's eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ (par. 1821).

Roman Catholics view justification like a treasure in the field that, for the sake of benefits thereof, one goes to great lengths to obtain it. Yes, they agree it's a gift, but it has to be asked for (like a door that one must take the step of knocking at). This almost brings Lutherans almost at par with the Roman Catholic teaching, but deviates to say that only that these works only are just mere fruits from the work of God's grace in humans. For the Lutherans, a faith that is devoid of good works springing from having faith is as good as non-existent; but they are just 'fruits' from the already-achieved justification (Titus 2:16). But for the Catholics, reception of God's gift of his saving grace must be met with works guided.

1.9 Justification and salvation

As mentioned earlier, this doctrine is basic and fundamental, the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* (the article upon which the church stands or falls). This is because for anyone to be saved, as the Christian message proclaims, one has to be justified before God. Whether that justification is obtained by God's grace alone through faith, or through faith in God's grace and having works of faith, it is distinctive and determinative for salvation. Paul claims that justification is not only a matter of vindication of past sins alone. It also signifies the forgiven believers becoming new creatures in Christ for a future with God (2 Cor 5:16-17, Galatians 6:15). Justification, for Paul, means what God has done and gifted to us in a gracious way. Hence, justification for salvation for all humanity depends on God's action through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:16-17).

For Luther, justification by God's grace alone shows the rootedness of salvation that is not a perpetuation of works of the law. This is what made him coin the formula "faith=justification=salvation" or simply "faith=salvation". But Roman Catholics teach that one needs more for salvation to be achieved; hence stick to their formula of "God's grace + faith + love+ works = salvation." Although one can look and say this to be the case for Paul, it seems like there are different variation about this doctrine of justification.

The article has also brought up a historical-ecclesiological perspective that shows Jewish Christians criticizing the acceptance of Gentile Christians without any conditions into the family of God (Ephesians 2:11-21). Historically, therefore, it was problematic in the beginning for the church to accept Gentile Christians into the fold hence making them heirs of the promises of God. In ecclesiological sense, v17 shows that now everyone enjoys the benefits of being justified, through Christ's death which proclaims "peace both to those far off and those who were near." This was Paul's message for a church composed of people with different historical and cultural backgrounds, yet now, by the saving grace of God gotten by faith, sharing the same banner of being justified to receive salvation by God's grace. This is the same for the contemporary church between the denominations; long after the Reformation.

Both denominations accept the basic Christian understanding about being justified is that Christ's death on the cross did an all-time atonement whereby God's wrath is averted and the sins are propitiated. The idea has always been presented even in the New Testament that it is God who saves people from their sins (Matt 1:21) and acts to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). But in this perspective, it is something that happens to us and God is the chief actor of this. Hence, this justification for salvation is that all this happens to us and not to God; and that it does not affect his being in any way. Anselm depicts that any sinner who sins by himself fails to give honor to God and so only damages the order and beauty of creation and universe, but God himself is not affected in any way (Davidson & Rae, 2011). Therefore, it gives the impression that if humankind has to be justified in order to obtain salvation, it has to be in God's own terms and through his appointed way; the salvific and sacrificial act of Jesus Christ's death and received through faith.

However, others view it that although it is done by God, both humans and God himself are affected because justification acts upon the relationship between the two. Since justification makes reconciliation possible between God reconciling and creation to himself, God becomes affected through Christ's death on the cross. God suffered when Christ suffered on the cross. In Romans 5:8-10, Paul shows that it is "at just the right time", in reference to our point of hopelessness, when God shed his utmost love by sending his son to die for us and reconcile us to himself.

The basic understanding of justification before God is that no one can claim to be self-justified before God. This justification is done in God's terms and God is the main actor. It is only through his intervention that people receive salvation. Therefore, justification before God, whether received by God's grace alone through faith or through both God's grace and having works of faith, leads to salvation offered by God through Christ's death on the cross. For anyone to obtain salvation and eternal life, they need to be justified before God himself (John 3:16-18).

2.0 The Already-Not-Yet factor

Obtaining of justification for salvation is not a simple issue. Justification helps people to live their lives knowing that they are in peace with God, and hence stand counted as righteous. Christians believe that through Christ's death on the cross, all of humankind's original sins were drowned and we were given new nature in him. Christ's death on the cross offered the necessary propitiation for the atonement of our sinful nature before God. Christ's self-emptying on the cross manifested God's activity on the human level following a divine plan (Acts 2:23). Christ's work on the cross begins manifesting its full atonement when we respond in faith through baptism and begin to live a life where Christ is manifested to have died for us and living in us.

Since its true that humankind's deserves judgment, closer attention is needed on how the saving work of Christ relates to atonement, sanctification and justification. What brings the difference in

humanity's life is that God acts to bring atonement and sanctification so that the former sinful humanity remains justified before him. God does not only condemn and judge, he also atones, justifies and sanctifies and graciously offers salvation (Davidson & Rae 2011). Christ's death ends people's unholiness to make them heirs in God's kingdom. But the work doesn't end there, rather it continues throughout the life of the believers. This makes justification for salvation as a continuous process rather than a one-time event. True, Christ's dying on the cross was a one-time event, but its effects and results are ongoing. Justification that makes one to obtain salvation, therefore, is depicted to have the 'already-not-yet' character.

After coming into Christ's atoning death in baptism, we are given forgiveness of sins where God puts an end to our sins and get the privilege of stand justified before God. From here, God imputes the gift of the Holy Spirit who begins the process of sanctification in us to help us to maintain our justified status before God by dealing with our continued sinful nature even after baptism. This identified with Augustine's idea of justified sinners: *ex quadam parte iustus, ex quadam parte peccator* (partly justified, partly sinful). Augustine taught that Christians who sin after baptism can continue to go back to receive justification through repentance of their sins. Hence, although they are sinful, God continues to reconcile with them by offering forgiveness of their sins to make them stand justified before him (Romans 5:8). Luther took up this idea to show that our sinful nature begins to be dealt with at baptism and goes on till we die; living as justified yet sinful. Therefore, he coined the Latin phrase *simul iustus et peccator* (we are saints and sinners at the same time). As this work that he called sanctification continues inside, our justification is maintained and we continue to grow into maturity in Christ.

In this case, the Roman Catholics differ with Luther's version by saying: "We are moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification" (*Catechism of The Catholic Church*, (2000) par. 2010). They believe that being justified doesn't end at baptism but through our everyday life where our faith is made visible through our acts of faith. For them, having works of faith is the only way to guard their "grace-received gift." Nevertheless, both agree that works are coming out of the work of God's grace in a believer's life. But they differ on whether they are involved in the justification process. From this perspective, atonement and sanctification are essential for justification to be completed for one to obtain salvation.

This article proposes a different view. The fusion at baptism between faith (from hearing God's word) and God's grace creates an atonement of humanity's sinful nature thereby beginning the process of justification. However, this justification must be maintained with a lifelong sanctification process that lasts till one's death for one to gain salvation at the end. During sanctification, one is obliged to do good works out of their faith in Christ. Salvation itself does not depend in any way on the works but solely on the justification maintained by sanctification process. Salvation only reflects on them as part of the sanctification process and as part of living the faith. This is because some works are done morally and not out of one's faith; for humanity purposes only. If we rely on works, our human nature will definitely make us believe that it is by our responsibility and energy to work that has made us to obtain salvation; against Paul's warning in Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith... it is not from works, so no one may boast." However, he adds that we are his hand work meant for good works; a power that we possess after receiving atonement. This is what makes works worthy for any Christian although the works are not counting towards salvation in the end.

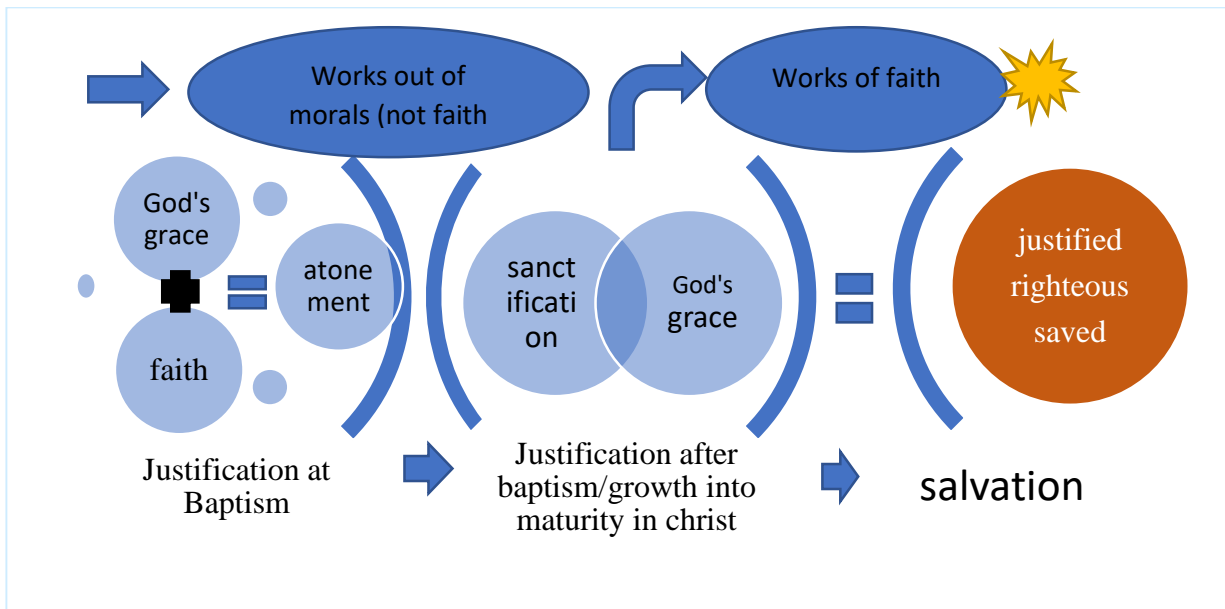


Fig. 1

Paul shows the idea that when we are baptized, our atonement accords us to stand justified before God. It is through being atoned for that we become adopted into the God's kingdom. However, it worth noting that our salvation now will depend on how we remain sanctified after atonement (Romans 5:7-9). In baptism, we become justified before God and are given a new nature in Christ. We don't need to live by any earthly standards but by Christ's standards which can be found in the Bible or through instantaneous and progressive revelation. We only need to respond to the Holy Spirit's work inside of us. Paul says:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. when Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).

This proposed view is based on the way Christ modelled for us. Since works require much of our input through energy, emotions and commitments, it is important to be assertive with them as Jesus was (Luke 10:40-42 & Matthew 6:34) and let faith lead us into what to do and how to do it. Our Christian life is one that is guided by faith and dependency upon the will of God. However, on the process of living our life, works are never negated as the Roman Catholics teach. From the Bible, Jesus' gave examples of how grace alone can be a source for salvation without works being involved. In Luke 7:41-43, Jesus shows a creditor who forgives a large debt by own will. It was not anything that the debtors did on their part that moved the creditor to cancel their debts. On a second account, Matthew 22:1-14 shows a banquet host who freely invites homeless and undeserving guests. Did they do anything to deserve that acceptance? Of course not.

But it is worth noting that works of faith also form an essential part of Christian living. We cannot run away from the fact that we have a moral obligation to stand by our faith. Adeyemo, agrees to this saying that for Christians, faith does not show evidence to these advantages, but rather our actions and motives are what will show who we are; a faith guided by conscience to be obligated by the law (2010). From this perspective, it is important to know that although our salvation is purely based on relying on God's grace, we are not exonerated from works of faith. That is why in the diagram shown above, works of faith remain as a reflector of our faithful living as per the work of God's grace in our lives.

However, if we follow grace and works of faith, our human nature will tend to make us rely on our works of faith more since it is what comes from our part. This will make justification more human-centered and removing it from its divine-centeredness as Schneider reveals (2009). Indeed, as Luther pointed out, we are not Christians by what we do or not do, rather how we are saved through God's grace alone. Even if we fail in doing what God wants us, this saving grace continues to adopt us into his family as we continue to rely on his grace through faith in Christ and his salvific act on the cross.

3.0 Conclusion

Paul places the thesis setting of justification by God's grace alone through faith as well as the antithesis of justification by works of the law or works of faith as laid plain by James. However, theologians agree that believers are saved not because of their faith but through their faith; faith is the foundational element. They disagree on whether (and how) works are involved for salvation to be obtained. Justification is an act of God and done on his terms alone and to fulfill his own intended purpose. Justification begins when one who believes is moved by God's grace to accept baptism where atonement for sins is done. Thereafter, the person, still in faith, depends on the same grace for sanctification as they grow into maturity in Christ showing works of faith as fruits emanating from it. Although salvation itself does not depend on them, it reflects on them. Sanctification maintains ones' justified status before God when one remains in faith and depends on the grace of God.

The conflict over the doctrine of justification between Protestants and Roman Catholics has dominated for five centuries now. Both agree that for believers to obtain salvation, they have to be justified. They accept that faith is fundamental for God's grace to be received and begin justification process but do not agree on how works of faith are involved. They agree that without faith, any act of claiming to do anything to 'earn' justification from the beginning seems inapplicable and inappropriate. They differ on issues of understanding on how its efficacy due to differences in understanding of the process of achieving the justification; they don't agree on how works of faith are involved. From the article conducted, if Luther's assertion that justification is gotten from God's grace alone through faith with works, just as in the case of fruits of the Holy Spirit; and if the Roman Catholics assertion that justification is by both God's grace and Works of faith, then the researcher proposes the idea that justification begins at baptism when a believer responds to the Word of God to being the sanctification process which makes them to maintain the justified status before God; and which, at last, grants them salvation. Moved by God's grace, the believer is empowered by the Holy spirit to do good works of faith, which can illuminate on the salvation although salvation itself does not depend on the works in any way.

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