Justification in Late Medieval Theology and Luther's Thought

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I FEEL privileged, indeed, to have been asked to present a lecture named in honor of Martin Rist. As most of you know, I studied many long hours under him, and largely because of my work with him, I went on for further graduate work in historical studies. In my work with him I always appreciated his analytical mind and his many wide-ranging interests. I trust I absorbed some of these scholarly attributes and took them on with me to further study. I remember especially a comment in one of his courses in the Reformation, to the effect that if we were to understand the theology of the Reformation fully, we would need to take the work of William of Occam more into consideration than we had done heretofore. At that time I was working on another project and did not follow up this suggestion. Several years later when I began to specialize in Reformation thought in graduate school, I remembered this comment concerning William of Occam, and began to see that Luther's theology was an outgrowth of, and a reaction to, the Scholasticism and Nominalism of the Late Medieval period. I found out, specifically, that Martin Rist was right—and that this relationship of Nominalism to Reformation thought is one of the most fruitful areas of research at the present time.

INTRODUCTION:

When we begin to analyze historical thought we immediately chop it up into manageable units — usually on some more-or-less arbitrary pattern. This very arbitrary method has been the reason why the Late Medieval period has received far less than its share of scholarly concern up to very recent times. From the Roman Catholic standpoint there has been little reason to analyze thought after 1274, the death of Thomas Aquinas, for increasingly it was assumed that this philosopher-theologian had solved most of the problems. After 1300 recent Catholic scholars have seen only "heresy," "unorthodoxy," and what Gilson called "Dissolution of Scholasticism," and "Journey's End."[1] As long as Roman Catholic scholars considered this period mere dissolution and anti-climatic, there was no incentive to indulge in scholarly work in this era.

Likewise, the Protestants developed an arbitrary concept. It was tacitly assumed by many that the real beginning of Protestant thought was October 31, 1517—or the night before perhaps when Luther wrote his theses. Protestants too easily assumed that Luther skillfully skipped over all the "errors" of the Middle Ages and went back at least to Augustine—or even to Paul for his theological foundations. Consequently, there was no reason to study Scholasticism, or Late Medieval thought with the possible exceptions of the "Morning Star," John Wycliff, or John Hus of Bohemia, who were exceptions in the sea of irrelevance extending from about 1300 to 1517.[2]

Within the last thirty years or so a "renaissance" has developed—paralleled

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[1] Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Random House, 1954), parts ten and eleven.

[2] The suggestion that the Reformation arose because of the need for moral reform, augmented by theological consideration of Wycliff and Hus, is exemplified by the popular work of James MacKinnon, *The Origins of the Reformation* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1939).

by a similar "renaissance" in Calvin and more hesitatingly in Zwingli studies. This reassessment of the Reformers is based frankly on a deepened theological analysis of their work.[3] Historians have recognized that a more adequate understanding of the Reformation movement can be obtained only after a thorough analysis of the theological ideas involved; while theologians have been reminded that analysis of theological developments without a knowledge of the historical context is only a partial explanation. We need both a historical context and a theological content to make these two disciplines inter-related in Historical Theology.[4] Luther's reformation was, thus, more than a moral or an institutional reform.

In the past, studies of the origin of the Reformation have sometimes suffered because the context in which the Reformation arose has been too sketchily analyzed: Hegel, for example, argued that this was a movement toward individualism.[5] Wilhelm Dilthey suggested that this period was the beginning of the modern world.[6] Liberal historians of the last century suggested that the main contribution of Luther was the emancipation of man from a churchly hierarchy and authority.[7] Others argued that Luther introduced the idea of freedom of religion. After careful study of the sources, I suggest that each of the approaches proves at least partial; most of them are absolutely false. Many of these approaches, it seems to me, were based on a partial understanding of Luther's work—or on some preconceived concept of historical development. In any case it was a pattern into which Luther just did not comfortably fit. Indulgences became the occasion for, but not the cause for, the beginning of Luther's movement.

Although re-assessment of the central ideas of Luther's Reformation may not materially alter our study of the specific aspects of the development, it will strongly affect the reasons we give for some of Luther's own theological reactions. I assume that the central idea or concept around which a culture revolves is its "ultimate concern"—to use Tillich's term. In our own day we sometimes have difficulty finding the central concern which motivates a culture—and when we do find this clue we conclude that it is not theological because it is not stated in traditional theological terms. In our midst we have many concerns which do not sound theological—but which functionally are theological because they speak to the central issues of our day. These are some of the problems facing us in being **Honest to God,** living in the **Secular City,** and not becoming **God's Frozen People.** As we wrestle with the central problems of a particular generation, we are often forced to expand our concept of what we call the "theological task."

While we are engaged in attempting to assess the "ultimate concerns" of our day, which tax our imagination, it is encouraging to note that the central concern for Luther was stated in more traditional theological language. I take

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[3] The Luther "renaissance" was begun by Karl Holl who in 1917 published his essay "Was verstand Luther unter Religion?" (What did Luther mean by Religion?), reprinted in *Gesammelte Aufsaetze zur Kirchengeschichte* (2 vols., Tuebingen, 1928).

[4] Roland Bainton made many suggestions in this direction in his historcal lecture, "Changing Ideas and Ideals in the 16th Century," *Journal of Modern History,* VIII (1936).

[5] For example: "Everyone has the right to settle for himself what his faith is. Thus the faith of every individual Protestant must be his faith because it is his, not because it is the Churches." G. F. Hegel, *Earliest Theological Writings* (trans. T. M. Knox, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 121.

[6] Dilthey's suggestion is contained in his *Gesammelte Schriften,* trans. by Mrs. Edna Spitz in Lewis W. Spitz, ed., *The Reformation: Material or Spiritual* (Boston: D. C. Heath, "Problems in European Civilization," 1962), p. 8-16.

[7] Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (1910), VII, 14-16.

his central concern to be the relationship between man and God, which is still an ultimate concern in the culture of our day, but we do not express it in theological terms. Luther did use theological terms—summarized in the idea of JUSTIFICATION—making man right with God. This immediately causes us to look at Luther's concept of God and also his concept of man. Futhermore, we must be conscious of the relationship between the two as expressed in the theological idea, the GRACE OF GOD. I propose today to outline some of the ways in which Luther's "ultimate concern" of JUSTIFICATION was constructed as he reacted against Late Medieval Nominalistic theology.

JUSTIFICATION IN LATE MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY:

If we analyze the concept of Justification as a representative doctrine of both the Late Middle Ages and the Reformation, we can show how the Later Middle Ages developed ideas significantly different from the Scholastics which preceded 1300. Indeed, the very significant aspect of the theological renaissance of Luther studies concerns his debt to, and reaction against, certain scholastics of his own generation. The Scholasticism with which Luther came into contact was a Nominalist type. We do not know how familiar Luther was with the writings of Aquinas and Duns Scotus, but he wrote these specifically against both Occam and Gabriel Biel, the German Scholastic who died in 1495, when Luther was a boy,[8] Some of Biel's students were teachers of Luther.[9]

The scholastic best known among most of you is Thomas Aquinas. He developed his system around the concept of God as the Prime Mover in all that is. In his system there was no place for freedom of man as we know it. To be sure, man did various actions for merit, but only after the **habitus** of grace had been implanted in man. God infused grace--spiritual substance—into man, and then, because of the previous action of God, man could act for God and for merit. [10] This is, of course, very different from what we mean by free will. At the same time, we must make clear, this was **not** the concept against which Luther reacted.

The idea of limited free will and man's ability to do some good works on his own behalf was a later development, so we must move beyond Aquinas. Duns Scotus, who died in 1308, set the direction which all later Medieval Scholastics, including the Nominalists, were to follow when he introduced a partial freedom of the will into an otherwise deterministic system. He did this by distinguishing two kinds of merit.[11] First, **Meritum de congruo**—which is a merit of fitness. He argued that since man's reasoning powers and will powers were not completely obliterated by the Fall of Man, man could do some small works of merit in turning toward God—hesitating and small—but on one's own he could and must take the first step. This is the first concept of merit introduced by Duns Scotus and augmented by William of Occam and later Nominalists. I repeat, this is the merit of Fitness—it is fitting that man perform as much merit as he has within himself the capacity to perform. This protects the free will and responsibility of man. And, by contrast, if man does not take this first step, God is not obligated to act in any way on man's behalf.

But having made this small nod toward freedom for man, Duns Scotus says that there is the second form of of worthiness. This second type is merit

[8] The most recent study of the theology of Biel is Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

[9] Especially Jodocus Trutvetter and Bartholomew Arnoldi Usingen at Erfurt. Cf. Otto Scheel, *Martin Luther: Vom Katholizismus zur Reformation* (2 vols., Tuebingen: Paul Siebeck, 1921), I, 157-166.

[10] Reinhold Seeberg, *History of Doctrines* (2 vols., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1958), II, 118-121.

[11] Seeberg, *History of Doctrines,* II, 160f.

which makes one worthy of salvation—and this type of merit comes only as a gift of God—a **habitus** of grace infused into man's will—a spiritual substance added to man's otherwise human nature. Thus while Duns Scotus introduced a concept of freedom in the first type of merit, he included in the second type of merit much the same concept which earlier Scholasticism had developed. The first step toward justification was one man took on his own, thereafter, all was dependent on the infused Grace of God.

When we turn to William of Occam, who died in 1349 during the Black Death, we note that he expands on these tendencies already introduced by Duns Scotus, and he introduced certain theological developments which take his thought to a different level from the earlier Scholastics. Occam was both a philosopher and a theologian, although until our generation his theology was generally neglected.[12] In Occam's attempt to protect both the philosophical conclusions he worked out, and the faith of the church which he accepted, he found he must look at God in two ways —and his concept of God's Justification is also expressed in two ways.

First, Occam assumes what he calls God's **potentia absoluta**—God's absolute power. God is all powerful and can will whatever he wills. God can supercede natural law; God can work in absence of reason or against it. God is thus not bound by any scheme of Church or nature. God, **de potentia absoluta**, can even justify men outside the scheme of the Church—even those without any merits. In fact, the person who is completely faithful and meritorious has no higher right to God's acceptance than one who has done nothing. Therefore, philosophically, if one accepts the idea of God's absolute power, he must agree that these various schemes of men mean nothing to God who not only can, but will supercede them as he wills.

But while Occam could argue in this fashion from the standpoint of philosophy, he was required to protect himself with relation to the ideas of the Church. The Church had, after all, already determined certain channels through which God worked. The second aspect of God, Occam called his **potentia ordinata**—God's ordained power. While philosophically God had all power, yet theologically, he had already revealed certain patterns or channels through which he would work. God's ordained method of operation was the whole sacramental system, the hierarchy of organization and the rites of the Roman Church of Occam's day. Therefore, while God was not bound by any certain pattern he had ordained that he would abide by that pattern—the sacramental system and the merit system of the Medieval Church. Thus Occam talked about God in two ways. First, a God with absolute power, bound by no rules; second, God who had limited himself to a certain pre-ordained path of action.

Arising from these two concepts of God, which seem to be contradictory, Occam was forced to introduce two cor-

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[12] Occam's commentary on the *Sentences of Peter Lombard* has not been published since 1495. Consequently, any analysis of his theology is based on quotations which appear in secondary accounts and brief excerpts in collections. Excerpts of Occam's philosophical writings can be found in the following: S. C. Tornay, ed., Ockham, *Studies and Selections* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Co., 1938); Richard McKeon, ed., *Selections from Medieval Philosophers* (vol. 2, New York: Scribners, 1931); and Philotheus Boehner, ed., *Ockham, Philosophical Writings* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1957). Analyses of Occam's philosophy and theology appear in the following: Meyrick H. Carre, *Realists and Nominalists* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946); Philotheus Boehner, ed., *Collected Articles on Ockham* (St. Bonaventure, New York: 1958); and Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought: St. Augustine to Occam* (Baltimore: Pelican, 1958).

The general thought pattern of this period is well analyzed by Gordon Leff, "The Changing Pattern of Thought in the Earlier Fourteenth Century", *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, XLIII, No. 2, (March 1961), 354-372.

responding doctrines of justification.[13] Concerning God's absolute power, justification comes only on God's acceptance —regardless of merit or lack of it. But concerning God's ordained power, justification comes through the pattern God ordained he would use. Consequently, only according to this second concept was the sacramental system the channel for the sinner seeking justification in his religious faith. Only in this second system was merit a consideration, and theological discussion was confined only to the second method of thought—in the merit and sacramental system God had already ordained.

In conjunction with the Nominalists' use of the merit system to produce Justification, we must look at the concept of man which was held—and which must be understood before we can analyze the specific way in which merits produce justification. The Scholastic theological development had weakened Augustine's doctrine of original sin in that they said not all of man's capacities had been obliterated by Original Sin—man's original capacities had been only impaired, as a man who is ill has some of his capabilities impaired. Aquinas used the idea of "medicine."[14] The sick man takes medicine to become whole again. The sinner takes a medicine such as merits, or Grace, to become whole again. Occam carried the idea further. He stated: "Through mortal sin nothing is corrupted nor destroyed in the soul.'[15] Gabriel Biel, a Nominalist Scholastic of a century later, said, "The integrity of his natural will—its freedom—is not corrupted by sin."[16] Thus, man was free before the Fall, and also after Original Sin. He was free to act for merit.

What, then, was the function of merit, and what was the meaning of Justification?

The Scholastic assumed a three-fold concept of man. Man in paradise, before the Original Fall, consisted of body and soul as many think of it now, but in addition, there was original righteousness which man does not now have. This original righteousness is what was lost at the Fall. Original sin was thus the loss of original righteousness a partial loss of man's capacities, but not a complete obliteration of man's capability to do good works. The Scholastic called this extra original righteousness the **donum superadditum**—the added gift of God above Human Nature—a type of Spiritual Substance. [17] Thus the merit of God resulting in infused grace replenished the **donum superadditum**—the original righteousness. Man became more than human, more as he was before Original Sin, for he had been enabled to replace some of the original righteousness lost in the Fall. It is important to see that this implies a real modification of human nature—a human nature which even so was not seriously corrupted.

Based on this idea that God, while being all powerful nevertheless ordained a pattern he would follow, the merit system was as important for the Nominalists as for their predecessors. The Nominalists developed the idea of freedom and merit in the same direction as Duns Scotus—but carried their idea further. The Nominalists finally concluded not only that man had the capacity for taking the first step toward merit, but argued that "from those who do their very best, God does not withhold his grace."[18] So from making man's first step toward justification a possibility for man, we move to the idea that whenever man takes the first step God is thereby obligated to respond. This introduced a type of earn-

[13] Bengt Hagglund, "Was Luther a Nominalist?" *Concordia Theological Monthly* (1957), 441-452.

[14] Seeberg, *History of Doctrines,* II, 116.

[15] Occam, *Commentary on Sentences,* quoted in Reinhold Seeberg, *History of Doctrines,* II, 197.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Seeberg, *History of Doctrines,* II 115, 153, 197.

[18] Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology,* p. 132.

ing one's own salvation—an automatic reaction on the part of God. If I take the step toward merit—so they argued—which is within my power to take, God is almost morally bound to respond. This introduced a type of earning one's own salvation—an automatic reaction on the part of God. If I take the step toward merit—so they argued—which is within my power to take, God is almost morally bound to respond. This places God at the mercy of Man's own actions of his own behalf. To carry the idea further, we would say man was thus earning his own salvation.

Thus the Nominalists continued to emphasize their idea of a limited freedom of the will. They also taught that man not only had the power to take the first step toward his own merit—but that man was obligated to take the first step toward God before God would respond in any way. It was their assumption concerning human nature that man had it within his power to act—so was thus obligated to attain the first type of merit—**de congruo**—on his own. Justification was based on a concept of limited freedom, on man's performing the required acts to receive this first merit. Merit in turn accumulated to replace the **donum superadditum**—original righteousness—lost in the Fall. Consequently, in this theology Justification was a process through which a man, partly using his own ability, assisted God to transform his very human nature from that of a sinner to one possessing original righteousness—into a gradually transformed and glorified nature which was more than human. The whole merit system was the key to this process, and man had potentiality for performing the first steps on his own.

JUSTIFICATION IN LUTHER'S THOUGHT:

The status of theological thought on the eve of the Lutheran Reformation is still open to debate among Roman Catholic authorities. Joseph Lortz[19] and Erwin Iserloh,[20] both German scholars, argue that the Nominalist position was "uncatholic" and that this theological aberration is to blame for Luther's reaction. However, at the same time, Paul Vignaux,[21] a French theologian, argues that this Nominalist dialectic between the absolute and the ordained powers of God was necessary to protect the Grace of God from becoming automatic and was also necessary to protect the freedom of God from becoming bound to a human system.

B. Xiberta, a Spanish theologian, recently wrote an article entitled "Merit and Justification in the pre-Tridentine controversy."[22] He argued that there were two approaches to merit and justification in the 15th century and up to the Reformation led by Luther. The first approach was basically Thomistic, in which fallen man could do no good works without the prior grace of God. Therefore man could not take a first step toward his own salvation. Xiberta argues that this was the only tradition true to the Church teaching. However, a very wide-spread aberration was that of Nominalism which argued that man could do some good works within his own nature and prepare himself for the greater Grace which comes from God.

The implication is that if Luther had known about Aquinas and had not taken the Nominalists so seriously he would not have felt constrained to react

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[19] Joseph Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland* (2 vols., Freiburg i, Br., 1949).

[20] Erwin Iserloh, *Gnade und Eucharistie in der philosophischen Theologie des Wilhelm von Ockham: Ihre Bedeutung für die Urschen der Reformation* (Wiesbaden: 1956).

[21] Poul Vignaux, *Nominalism au XIVe siecle* (Montreal: Institut d'Etudes Medievales, 1948).

[22] Bartholome F. M. Xiberta, "La causa meritoria de la justificacion en las con troversias pretridentinas," *Revista espanola de Teologia,* V (1945), 87-106; quoted in E. Jane Dempsey Douglass, *Justificotion in Late Medieval Preaching* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

against the 16th Century Roman Catholic theology. Actually, they argue, Luther reacted against what was at best inadequate if not heretical. We must remember, however, that Luther's reaction was more of an Augustinion reaction than a return to a Thomistic position.

Against this Nominalistic background, Luther was called to make two major clarifications concerning his own doctrine of Justification. First, man in and of himself can do nothing but sin. He never can take the first step toward God. Second, man, even though justified by God, is not a transformed individual; he remains a sinner, although justified.

Among Luther's writings we most often quote his famous 95 theses concerning indulgences, of October 1517. But almost two months earlier he wrote a collection of theses "Against Scholastic Theology."[23] In these earlier theses we see more of the theological distinction he drew between himself and his Scholastic contemporaries than we find in his more famous 95 theses. In September 1517 Luther was Dean of the Theological Faculty at Wittenberg. One of his students was preparing to be examined by the faculty for the degree Bachelor of Scripture. In preparation for this oral examination, Luther wrote these 97 theses against Scholastic Theology, and then presided at the meeting when his student discussed and defended the ideas—in Luther's theological context, of course. A friend of Luther's in Nurnberg read the theses and said that these ought to "restore the theology of Christ."

On the basis of our previous sketch of Late Medieval Scholastic theology, we can see the import of some of Luther's statements. For example, the Fifth statement reads: "It is false to state that man's inclination is free to choose between either of two opposites. Indeed, the inclination is NOT free, but captive. This is said in opposition to common (Scholastic) opinion." (V) The next statement is similar: "It is false to state that the will can by nature conform to correct precept. This is said in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel (Biel)."(VI) Thus Luther insisted that by nature man could not take even the first step toward his own salvation. He reinforced this idea later with these words: "As a matter of fact, without the grace of God the will produces an act that is perverse and evil."(VII) "To love God above all things by nature is a fictitious term, a chimera, as it were. This is contrary to common (Scholastic) teaching."(XVIII)

The **meritum de congruo** of the Scholastics was man's first step toward fulfilling capabilities within himself. It was a type of preparation for the greater Grace of God which came after man did all that was within his power. About this type of preparation, Luther is quite specific: "The best and infallible preparation for grace and the sole means of obtaining grace is the eternal election and predestination of God" (XXIX) "On the part of man, however, nothing precedes grace except ill will and even rebellion against grace." (XXX)

Occam had suggested that **de potentia absoluta,** God was actually not bound to the merit system, but could accept whomever he willed whether meritorious or not. Against this Luther states "God cannot accept man without his justifying grace. This in oppostion to Ockham."(LVI) in case we are not certain just who Luther considered his theological opponents, he is quite specific in emphasizing the same helplessness of man without the grace of God. He made this specific: "With Paul, therefore, we deny the 'merit of congruity' and the 'merit of condignity;' and with complete confidence we declare that these speculations are merely

[23] Harold J. Grimm, ed., *The Career of the Reformer: I* (957), vol. XXI of *Luther's Works,* gen. ed., Helmut T. Lehman (56 vols., Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press (1955-), "Dispute against Scholastic Theology," pp. 9-16.

the tricks of Satan . . . For God has never given anyone grace and eternal life for the merit of congruity or the merit of condignity."[24]

This introduces us to the heart of Luther's revision of many inter-related doctrines. Many years after the events, in a theological biographical sketch, Luther summarized some of his own thinking in his earlier and more crucial years.[25] Luther had entered the Augustinian monastery to fulfill a vow he made to God supposedly in the midst of a severe thunder storm.[26] While in this cloister he took seriously the nominalist teaching that one could prepare himself, using one's own natural powers, **de congruo**, to receive God's greater grace — Justification **de Condigno**. Luther understood all means at his disposal to prepare himself—meditation and prayer, fasting and self torture—and continued to feel unworthy although his superior, Staupitz, urged him to have faith that this was the method he should use. Luther was unconvinced of the nominalist way and continued searching.

Finally he had his answer, and we must see his reaction against the background of nominalistic thought of his own day. His reference to his new understanding of Justification indicates how much he had been influenced by the Nominalist ideas, and how, for theological reasons, he felt constrained to think otherwise. He tells us: "At last God being merciful, as I thought about it day and night, I noticed the context of the words, namely, "The Justice of God is revealed in it; as it is written, the just shall live by faith.' Then and there I began to understand the justice of God, namely by faith."[27]

"This straightway made me feel as though reborn and as though I had entered through open gates into Paradise itself. From then on, the whole face of scripture appeared different. I ran through the Scriptures then as memory served, and found that other words had the same meaning, for example: the work of God with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God with which he makes us wise, the fortitude of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God."—all without the works of man.

As important as it seems to us, we are surprised to note that the doctrine of Justification received no systematic treatment by Luther. Rather, we must cull statements from various sources—and we find they are consistent with each other. For example, in Lectures on Galatians, with reference to Galations 3:5, we read of Justification: "The doctrine of Justification is this, that we are pronounced righteous and are saved solely by faith in Christ and without works. If this be the true meaning of Justification . . . then it immediately folows that we are pronounced righteous neither through monasticism, nor through vows, through Masses nor through any other **works** . . . "[29]

In his preface to the same series of lectures he wrote of that "Single Solid Rock which we call the doctrine of Justification, namely that we are redeemed from sin, death, and the devil and endowed with eternal life, not through ourselves and certainly not through our works . . . but through the help of **another**, the only son of God, Jesus Christ."[30]

When the Pope heard about Luther's work he prepared first a condemna-

[24] Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Lectures on Galatians* (1963), vol. XXVI of *Luther's Works*, pp. 126f.

[25] Lewis Spitz, ed. *The Career of the Reformer*: IV, (1960), vol. XXXIV of *Luther's Works*. Biogrophical sketch, p. 337.

[26] The controversial evidence to clarify this story of the thunderstorm experience has been summarized in Gordon Rupp, *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), p. 14.

[27] Biographical sketch, see note 25 *supra*.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Lectures on Galatians* (1963), vol. XXVI of *Luther's Work's*, p. 223.

[30] *Luther's Works*, Preface to the *Lectures on Galatians* (1964), XXVII, 144.

tion, lifting forty-one articles from Luther's works and embodying these in the bull **Exsurge Domini,** which Luther promptly burned in December 1520. The Pope condemned specifically an interpretation of Luther which stated thus: "A Righteous man sins in all his good works." (XXXI)[31] Now, if this be qualified, it expresses Luther's idea, that a righteous man, without the grace of God, cannot do anything but sin, no matter how much he tries. Luther read the Pope's 41 articles of condemnation and wrote a reply to each. On this particular one he answered: "This article annoys the great saints of work-righteousness, who place their trust not in God's mercy, but in their own righteousness, that is on sand. What happened to the house built on sand (Matt. 7:26) will also happen to them. But a godly Christian ought to learn and know that all his good works are inadequate and insufficient in the sight of God."[32] That is, man cannot take even the first step toward the righteousness of God—all our works without the grace of God are sin and a product only of self-will. Luther had completed his theological cycle. He had learned of free will in Nominalist circles, had found that this was not in keeping with the theology of Augustine or Paul. Thus he felt constrained to act on his new belief. After three years the pope had culled from Luther's works the main point, and with it condemned the German monk.

Thus, I suggest that we cannot understand Luther's theology thoroughly without knowing the system in which he was reared and against which he reacted. There had been a very definite shift in thought after Thomas Aquinas which was embodied in the two centuries of Nominalistic theology It was not Thomas Aquinas against which Luther reacted, but he reacted against these later Scholastic Nominalists who, to protect man's freedom and responsibility, introduced the idea that man can of his own nature make one step toward his own justification. The particular system against which Luther reacted determinded some of the content of his theology. Consequently, Luther emphasized the Grace of God, and the absolute inability of man to perform any good work without this Grace of God. Likewise Luther went beyond the Nominalists to emphasize the depth of corruption in mankind resulting from original sin. As a collary, he rejected the idea that human nature was renovated through justification, and he denied that any original righteousness was replaced in the believer through merits of any type. In fact, orginal sin was so much more devastating for Luther's thought that as a sinner man had no freedom, no possibility of acting for God or for merit, no possibility of earning any merit whatsoever. Rather, man remained **simul justus et peccator** (at the same time just and a sinner) to one's dying day. How one, always a sinner, is related to God is expressed through Luther's increased emphasis on Christology which we cannot analyze at this point. Through faith in the super-abundant righteousness of Christ, one is clothed in Christ, so Luther says. Thus, one's sins are covered up by the cloak which is Christ, from God's viewpoint God sees only the righteousness of Christ and not man's sin—hence man's guilt is no longer imputed to him because of his sins. Man is just in God's sight—not transformed —because of faith in Christ which covers his sins as a cloak.

In this way Luther felt he had protected the dignity of God, and removed God from dependence in any way on man's actions. Luther had deleted from the faith of his day what he took to be semi-Pelagian or work-righteousness

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[31] George Forrell, ed., *The Career of the Reformer: II,* (1958), vol. XXXII of *Luther's Works,* "Defense and Explanation of all the articles", pp. 3-99. This reference is on p. 83.

[32] *Ibid.,* Luther's "Defense", p. 83.

tendencies. He shifted from a Nominalist theology to a Neo-Augustinian, or Neo-Pauline faith partly because of his own personal frustrations at works-righteousness in the monastery, and partly because this seemed to him the more correct biblical understanding of the majesty of God and, by comparison, the sinfulness of man.