

Responsibility for the World

Luther's Intentions and the Effects from South African Perspective

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I Introductory remarks

Because the topic as it stands is rather pretentious and too broad to be covered in a short paper like this one, I hope I will be forgiven if I take liberties with it by focussing my discussion primarily on Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone and its relevance for the South African situation. I believe that it should still be possible to touch on those broader issues that are implied in the theme assigned to me. Although my focus shall be on Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the law, I have deliberately chosen not to: 1) go into detailed explication of this doctrine, 2) analyse the various meanings of the term »justitia« during Luther's time or during the intervening period to our present time, 3) try to defend Luther's teachings on this doctrine. As a result I have not burdened the text with a lot of footnotes or proof-texts. Rather I have presupposed the general understanding of Luther's teaching on this basic doctrine by all the members attending the congress.

In the light of the above disclaimers then, I need to explain the very modest aim which the paper intends to achieve, namely: to appropriate and interpret Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone for my particular South African situation. To be more precise, the aim of my paper is one of trying to contextualize Luther's teaching for my situation. This will of necessity involve a sort of a giant leap to try to bridge the chasm of more than 500 years between the doctrine of justification by faith as propounded by Luther then and as interpreted by me in the present South African context. In hope that my attempt to contextualize Luther's teaching will not distort his views to a point of disturbing the Reformer's sleep in his grave. In any case, I believe that he too did what I intent doing with his writings, when he appropriated the teachings of St. Paul, St. Augustine and other church forebears for his own time.

Let me, in passing, also mention the fact that as a Black Lutheran living in a racially segregated and White dominated society, I do not return to the Refor-

mer's writings, or for that matter to the Bible, for their own sake. Neither do I study them for the sheer pleasure of studying them nor out of curiosity to try to find out what these writings might say on this or that theological issue. Rather I study Luther's writings and other ancient Christian symbols as a Black Christian who is deeply perplexed by the enormity of the evil of White racial oppression which is perpetrated against all the people of colour, hoping to find in them something of value which might shed some light on the problems confronting us today. Naturally, as I read them, I cannot help but ask the following questions: If Luther were a Black Christian living today under a White dominated political ideology of Apartheid, which negates the being and dignity of Black people, what sort of questions and problems would he tackle? How would Luther relate his teaching on the justification by faith alone to the concrete life as lived in White dominated societies? What sort of tentative answers would he give to the problems of colour and concomitant discrimination and deprivation which daily confront Black people as they struggle for freedom and social justice? These and similar questions are asked because, as Frederick Herzog correctly points out, Luther »would plunge into the concrete church dilemmas, as he did in the 16th century« because »the great reformer was unafraid to tackle the whole range of life among his people«.¹ Because he could speak so decisively and relevantly both theologically and politically to his generation in church and society, Luther's thoughts had a wider influence even among those people who did not count themselves as his followers.

Therefore, it is from the perspective of being a Black Christian who is also Lutheran that I read and interpret what Luther tries to teach to the church. This means that I cannot for a moment pretend that I read Luther's theology as a neutral or objective person but as an extremely interested and conditioned Lutheran who hopes to find solutions, however indirect, to the problems that confront us. Indeed, my only reason for not ignoring Luther's writings, or for that the Bible, is because I believe that there are resources in Luther's theology which I can use and thereby overcome the problems which I and other discriminated people of colour face in a White racist South Africa. Having then put my cards, as candidly as I can, on the table I now proceed to outline the significance of Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the law.

1 Frederick HERZOG: Luther and liberation. *Christian century* 97 (Chicago, IL 1980), 1035.

Because the situation in which Luther lived and out of which he operated as a theologian, was marked by a »religious culture«, one in which religious activities were not neatly separated from »secular« activities such as the political, economic and socio-cultural concerns – as it is the case in modern times – it is often very difficult for some of us to fully appreciate the relevance of the issues and concerns with which the reformer was pre-occupied for our contemporary situation. This is because Luther's language is saturated with a heavy dose of theological rhetoric. However, when one strips Luther's vocabulary off of its religious cloak, and tries to delve deeper into what the reformer was trying to say to his generation, one is startled to discover that Luther was wrestling with ordinary issues of life and death, issues which are not really different in kind from those that concern ordinary people in our own time.

This remains true even though for many people in South Africa Luther's question such as: Is there a merciful God? is not their primary and first question. Instead, it is the questions which have to do with social justice, human freedom, self-determination, political participation and human rights which dominate their thinking.

It is my thesis that Luther developed the doctrine of justification by faith alone in order to make sense of life, to discover its deeper meaning and thus answer the burning questions of life and death which his generation asked. Some of those questions were: In a culture which was saturated with and filled by religious activities and symbolism, yet which appeared unable to save people, how do I as an individual obtain salvation? How can I as a sinful person become justified before the righteous God, so that I might not lose my life here and in the next life? How do I lay my hands, as it were, on those things that make for life?

From these and similar questions, it is clear that at the heart of Luther's theological response lies the concern and quest for finding a life which has meaning and is fulfilling for individuals. For where there is forgiveness and justification for the sinner there also one finds life, its meaning and blessings.

II The medieval church's view on the source of life

Luther's concern and quest for life was also the concern of the late medieval church of which the reformer was a member and practising Christian. The difference between Luther and the church of his time, as we shall see, lay

primarily in the answers they gave regarding how the sinner could have a blessed and meaningful life in the face of the seemingly overpowering reality of sin even in the life of Christians.

The late medieval church argued that the means or the resources that an individual could use to protect oneself against the power of sin and therefore against the possible loss of life resided in the church. The church alone, it was argued, had the power to unlock the doors of life through the ordained ministry which Christ had entrusted to it. In consequence, it was maintained, there was no salvation for individuals outside the church (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). Put somewhat differently, the late medieval church taught that because the church was the way to God, then it followed that God was unreachable except through the instrumentality of the ministry of the church which was entrusted to it by Jesus Christ. The church was thus understood to stand between God and human beings, and it alone was charged with the responsibility of mediating God to humanity through the sacraments.

The self-understanding of the church and reasons given to justify its privileged position provided powerful and persuasive argument which sounded fair enough. But its practical import gave the medieval church enormous powers over the lives of the ordinary Christians. For by having the monopoly to the keys that lead to God, it was implied that the church alone had the authority to decide who was qualified or justified to have life, according to the church's own differentiated scale of moral or spiritual achievement. The church was thus placed in a position of having the final say concerning who should and who should not have access to the source of eternal life. In order to perform this rather onerous task, it became necessary that the church should construct the self-help system of earned merits so that it could be able to decide fairly well who is and who is not holy or justified before God.

The problem arose when the church became aware that so many people were not moral achievers, and therefore could not be declared justified automatically by virtue of their own merits. In consequence, the church found it useful to devise the system of indulgences so that the gates of heaven could be opened a little wider so that even those who failed to achieve an acceptable moral or spiritual standard would have a chance of getting a meaningful life here and in the life hereafter.

But even under this merciful system of indulgences, it is obvious that the medieval church had enormous power over the lives of ordinary men and

women. For by maintaining that the church alone was the way to God because it controlled the treasury of merits earned by the saints or Christian achievers, it claimed that it alone could dispense or withdraw the means of forgiveness of sins. Yet, for the church to claim that it alone could decide whose sins were to be forgiven by dispensing merits was to claim too much for any human institution, which is as sinful as the people who constitute it. Not surprisingly, it became a matter of time before the church and the papacy would be looked upon as an oppressive human institution which had to be opposed. This is what Luther did by declaring that penitent sinners are justified by faith alone, apart from the works of the law.

III God's grace alone received through faith is the source of life

Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone was and continues to be revolutionary. It constitutes a real threat to the institutional church. For it pulls the rug out from under those powerful human beings who would be tempted to arrogate to themselves the power to decide on the ultimate questions of life and death, something which God alone can do. Why? Because it declares that life or salvation is a gift which God alone can give. Hence, the Gospel teaches that in and through Jesus Christ human beings can and do encounter a merciful God who freely gives meaningful life, when God accepts the sinner unconditionally in and for the sake of Christ. That is, faith in God's promises embodied in what has happened to and in Christ is sufficient to make the most unworthy and unlovable sinner the child of God. Indeed, the central thrust of the doctrine of justification by faith alone is that resources to life do not reside in human hands. Neither does the gift of life depend on human ability to please God, nor does it depend on our human natural worthiness or background or wealth or achievements. Rather access to life depends on the merciful God who gives it to those who dare to believe in God, the Saviour. It is for this reason that God allowed Jesus Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners and therefore unacceptable on our own merits.²

This was a revolutionary teaching by Luther because, in the context of medieval church, it meant that now life was no longer open to the few, the successful achievers who could please God. Instead, life was now open to the

2 R 5, 6.

weak, the poor, the powerless and the unsuccessful classes who felt deprived of dignity and meaningful life because the prevailing religious, socio-political and economic arrangements had declared them unwanted failures or losers. As to be expected, when Luther taught and upheld the dignity and human worth of every individual before God who accepts penitent sinners unconditionally in Christ, many people, especially the underdogs and the downtrodden, enthusiastically embraced his teachings of justification by faith alone. In short, Luther was seen as a friend and liberator by simple men and women who, despite the Reformer's protests,³ believed that his teachings had something to do with human struggle for freedom, human rights and self-fulfillment on this side of the grave.

IV Justification by faith as a basis for the struggle for human rights South Africa

When it is realized that the issues about human life and how to live it meaningfully are what were at stake in Luther's teaching of justification by faith alone, it is possible for us to see some relevance, however indirect, to the socio-political problems that confront Black South Africans at present. We too are asking questions about the meaningfulness of human life. And some of our questions are: How can we find a meaningful life, life worth living for in an unjust socio-political structures – structures that were designed to deny the people of colour their humanity and dignity? What conditions must be met or fulfilled in order that every person may live a life in which he/she is granted dignity, justice and human rights? These and similar questions are what most people are asking in South Africa. For the struggle in our society is also a struggle over those forces that deny life of quality to the oppressed and powerless Black masses, while at the same time these forces give everything to the powerful and the dominant in our society.

Before these questions are answered on the basis of Luther's teaching of justification by faith alone, it seems important to highlight the situation as it exists in South Africa. Talking about the concrete life in South Africa's divided land is to talk about what in the Lutheran theological language is commonly known as the sphere of and existence under the life-denying and death-dealing law, the law of Apartheid system which really kills Black people, not metaphor-

3 WA 33, 658, 13 - 668, 9 (11f).

ically but literally and therefore physically. For in its particularized sense, existence under the law in South Africa means nothing else but existence in a multi-faceted layers of group identities in which the colour of one's skin and social status carry enormous socio-political values, values which determine the fate and the quality of life which is open to each and every person. Put differently, it is an open secret that the political system of Apartheid is one which cruelly places weighty significance on the fact that a person is born either white or black. For it is on the basis of such assigned identities that a person is declared by law justified or unjustified to belong to a particular community and to enjoy certain economic, political, and cultural rights and privileges. In other words, in South Africa where law is not understood as the instrument by which human beings are to order society in such a way that each person is given justice, freedom and human rights, law is misused by the political powerful as an instrument to legitimize and further socio-economic interests of the White ruling oligarchy. Accordingly, in pursuit of this political dispensation the state often finds it necessary to intervene to break up families in order to maintain racial segregation, thus in effect telling individuals whom they can become neighbours to and associate with. In order to maintain strict residential segregation, thousands upon thousands of people have had to be moved, shuffled and resettled at enormous financial and emotional costs to individuals and communities. Since it is the Black communities that have borne the brunt of this deliberate attempt to segregate between the »worthy« and »unworthy« human neighbours, it is not surprising that to the Black masses South Africa does not connote an experience of nationalistic pride, a feeling of security and justice. Rather the present socio-political arrangements in South Africa symbolize the negation of the people of colour, a negation of their humanity, dignity, security and justice. Put more bluntly, Apartheid is viewed as a symbol of total rejection of Black people as unworthy persons, persons from whom the »worthy« White people must distance themselves at all costs. At the same time, the Apartheid regime tells White people that they deserve a particular life-style and enormous socio-political and economic privileges which are due to them by natural right, by virtue of their calling as guardians of the Black races.

To summarise: because a person is declared by political law either justified or unjustified to enjoy certain privileges and rights, life of quality and security in South Africa has come to be seen not as a gift from God but as a reward of what individuals have earned on the basis of this or that natural worthiness such as

one's race, culture, and economic status. The good life of quality is accordingly given to the fittest and racially qualified people who happen to be Whites. Here we have the best example of the misuse of law and political power when the dominant White minority theologizes politics, thereby confusing the civil and theological uses of law. For here the government uses law to try to save and protect White people both in soul and body. To obtain that objective, human beings have devised a system of self-justification, self-salvation and self-preservation on the basis of which White people are given life in all its fullness while Blacks are condemned to sub-human existence.

It is against this political system which declares some people justified to live a particular life, and to enjoy certain socio-political and economic privileges on the basis of some inherent worthiness, such as the colour of one's skin, that Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone should be tested for its relevance, however indirect to situations such as in South Africa. For it reminds us that all human beings are unworthy, unacceptable, and sinners before God, and therefore that no race or group of people is any better than the another. Rather God in Christ accepts (justifies) sinful people not on account of their merits (racial worthiness) but solely out of sheer divine grace and mercy. Put differently, the relevance of Luther's teachings lies in its insistence that all human beings, especially Christian, are children of God by grace alone because none of them can claim to be acceptable and lovable on their own accord. This is the most important insight which all South Africans ought to learn for their own good, for without exception all people often fall short of the expectations that God and their neighbours have of them. Therefore, that they continue to live and are not destroyed is solely due to the fact that God and their human fellows suffer them, tolerate and accept them despite their sins, despite their insufficiency, and despite their lack of perfection. The theological name for this unconditional acceptance of the unacceptable sinner by God in Christ is what Luther referred to as the justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the law.

V Justification and confessions of iustice in society

The central focus of my paper has been the attempt to link Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone and the contemporary human struggle for justice and freedom in South Africa. The question might be asked: Should such a link be

made given the fact that Luther developed his teachings in the 16th century completely unaware of the burning social issues of justice and human rights, especially of the racial injustice and oppression in South Africa, with which we are confronted in our time? Does not the discussion of justification and social justice, faith and ethics lead to the problem of work righteousness from which Luther wanted to free Christians in the first place? These are legitimate questions which must not be ignored. But I believe that Luther's teachings rather than being a hindrance can provide useful insights in answering some of these questions. Also, Luther's theology should be viewed as a resources which can shed some light even on the contemporary discussion on justice and human freedom. In this regard, I align myself with Wolfhart Pannenberg's perceptive observation, when he writes: »The impact of the Reformation on the course of modern culture is far more evident in the perspective opened by the issue of freedom than in entering into the technicalities of the doctrine of justification. And it seems to me that especially the continuing contribution of Lutheran doctrine to the social and political context of our time, as well as to the ecumenical situation of contemporary Christianity, can be more effectively articulated in the language of freedom and liberty than in the traditional language of the doctrine of justification.«⁴ Furthermore, Pannenberg notes that in Luther's perspective the notion of Christian freedom was equivalent to justification by faith (*iustitia* = *libertas*). In consequence, in 1520 when Luther made his last attempt to communicate the central teachings of the Reformation directly to Pope Leo X, he entitled his booklet »The freedom of a Christian« (*Tractatus de libertate christiana*). Therefore, because in Luther's view the notion of Christian freedom is equated with justification, it seems legitimate to discuss and link the doctrine of justification and social justice.

Indeed, even where we might disagree on details regarding the conclusions that Pannenberg has drawn, it remains true that human beings in our time are in need of freedom from various forms of oppressions as much as they were in need of freedom during the time of the Reformation. Luther's teachings on justification by faith alone met that need, thus going a long way toward freeing individual men and women from the bondage to which feudalistic ecclesiastical tyranny had subjected them. In our time, men and women in South Africa are

4 Wolfhart PANNENBERG: *Freedom and the Lutheran Reformation*. *Theology today* 38 (Princeton, NJ 1981), 288.

also in need of liberation from the bondage to which the White racial tyranny of that »golden calf« known as Apartheid has subjected them.

As already sufficiently pointed out, the problem both in the medieval and contemporary society lies in the attempt by some human institution (religious in one case and political in another case) to arrogate to itself the power to decide on matters of life and death, that is by trying to control and monopolize the resources that make for the life of individuals as well as of the community. In both situations we are confronted with the problem of the justice of God in the face of human suffering at the hands of some human institution which denies resources that make for life. In consequence, human beings are forced to ask: Is God just when there is so much suffering? In what sense is God just? How are we human beings made just when we wrong each other and God so much? In answer to these and similar questions, Luther declared that the just shall live by faith. That is, God as the subject of justice in the Christ-event creates the just person of faith. This faith »seizes us and puts us outside ourselves, lest we rely upon our power, conscience, person and works, and it makes us rely upon that which is outside ourselves, namely, upon God's promise«.⁵ This justification of the sinner is not merely a dead, »juridical matter« but is a divine transformative act which creates and regenerates the sinner, thus creating a new person with new attitudes and behaviour pattern.

As Pannenberg correctly points out, Luther added the notion of trust in his reinterpretation of faith in order to emphasize that: »faith, by way of ecstasis, participates in the reality of Christ himself and therefore transforms the faithful into Christ's image . . . that the personal center itself changes in the act of trust, because the trusting person surrenders to the one in whom such confidence is entrusted«.⁶

Put somewhat differently, by creating a new person of Christ's righteousness within and yet extra nos, God's act of justification sets the individual free to do good works »in the liberty of the spirit« not to obtain salvation but to »serve others freely and out of love«. That is, to be united with Christ by faith entails a participation in service to the world, as Luther points out in the second part of »The freedom of a Christian«.⁷ Here Luther argues that the persons of faith who

⁵ WA 40 I, 589, 25-28.

⁶ Pannenberg: *Op. cit.*, 291 f.

⁷ Am 3 I, 358-373 $\triangle$ WA 7, 59, 24 - 69, 23.

are created just in Christ, rather than live in idleness or wickedness thinking that faith frees them from doing good works, are called to the responsible task of doing good works to please God and to serve their human fellows. Over against the medieval theological basis for doing good works in order to attain salvation, Luther proposed the Reformation principle of faith active in love.⁸ According to Luther, the fruit of faith was not to run away from society into monasteries but service of God and the neighbour. Therefore Christians must become involved in activities which help our neighbours in their need because it is in society that Christian faith must demonstrate itself through the fruits of love, namely, good works. Thus serving one another in love makes possible for human rights and justice to become the common property of all God's people.

In the same vein, already in 1519 in his sermon entitled »The two kinds of righteousness«, Luther discusses good works which, as the fruits of faith active in love, Christians are called upon to perform as fellow servants of one »another in accordance with the example of Christ« who came not to be served but to serve.⁹ Applying, with deep insight, the doctrine of justification by faith to the everyday living, Luther, distinguishes between Christ's righteousness by means of which God justifies, sanctifies, and redeems the sinner, and the social righteousness of the believing Christian which manifests itself in good works. Here, in a persuasive manner, Luther shows how the righteousness of God in Christ is received and is related to the life of the Christian, and writes: »There are two kinds of Christian righteousness, just as man's sin is of two kinds. The first is alien righteousness, that is the righteousness of another, instilled from without. This is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith ... The second kind of righteousness is our proper righteousness not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness. This is that manner of life spent profitably in good works ... slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to the self ... This righteousness consists in love to the neighbour ... is the product of the first type, actually its consequence ... This righteousness follows the example of Christ in this respect and is transformed into his likeness. It is precisely this what Christ requires. Just as he himself did all things for us, not seeking his own good but ours only – and in this he was

8 George W. FORELL: Faith active in love: an investigation of the principles underlying Luther's social ethics. NY 1954.

9 Am 31, 302 $\triangle$ WA 2, 148, 32f.

most obedient to God – so he desires that we also should set same example for our neighbours.«¹⁰

Underscoring the vital link between justification and social justice, Luther argues that the fruits of our justification, whose very existence depends on faith in Christ, makes it possible for Christians to seek the good of their fellows, to engage voluntarily in works love, to deal justly with the neighbour, and thus live devoutly toward God.¹¹ As they serve one another in love, Christians thus provide God masks or covers in and through which God preserves other lives, shows mercy to the poor and comforts the afflicted.¹²

Luther makes it clear that the while the alien righteousness of faith *coram deo* is freely given through the preaching of the gospel, this social righteousness, our proper righteousness *coram hominibus* must be attained by Christians so that they might be made »good and righteous in the eyes of the world«. ¹³ Furthermore, Luther points out that this social righteousness is not less holy work than the faith righteousness because in and through the human good work God distributes temporal blessings to other human beings. Also, because this social righteousness is not an entirely human work but is attained when God works in concert with and under the »cover« or »guise« of human work, Luther holds that this righteousness is the Creator's righteousness. For when God's own way of acting and loving towards finite creatures is embodied and radiated through the good works of the justified person of faith, God's honour is at stake even though human agents too get rewarded by maintaining their virtue, integrity, honesty and clean conscience before their human fellows.¹⁴ To underscore the fact that both the righteousness of faith and civil righteousness are holy and divine work, Luther reminds us that »God himself is the founder, lord, master, protector and rewarder of both kinds of righteousness. There is no human ordinance or authority in either, but each is a divine thing entirely.«¹⁵

Given the fact that the link between justification and social justice is made by Luther himself, we must point out that Christians, as new persons who have been created just in Christ's righteousness, must understand justification as

10 Am 31, 299f $\triangle$ WA 2, 145, 7-10; 146, 36 - 147, 23.

11 Am 31, 300 $\triangle$ 2, 147, 15-18.

12 Am 33, 243 $\triangle$ WA 18, 754, 14-16.

13 Am 46, 99f $\triangle$ 19, 629, 17 - 630, 1.

14 Am 51, 260-274. 299 $\triangle$ WA 36, 352, 30 - 364, 15 (51); 47, 771, 3-16 (22).

15 Am 46, 100 $\triangle$ WA 19, 629, 30 - 630, 2.

having a real transformative power in their lives, thereby making it possible for individual Christians free for mutual acceptance and to work for justice in the society such as South Africa. Indeed, as created just person of faith, Christians should not tolerate a situation where individual men and women piously attend Church services in order to »make everything right with God and then in their daily life continue to hate, exploit, and tear apart« their fellow human beings solely on the basis of the different colour of the person's skin.¹⁶ Because the salvation which Christ has procured for humanity aims at overcoming the sin of alienation between God and human beings and its consequent social alienations among humans themselves, Christians who merely want to be »assured of the benefits of the saving death of Christ bereft of its power to transform« their lives and their social, interpersonal relationships should be reminded that justification which does not lead to sanctification, that is, human subjective response to the divine gift of freedom which is working for liberation and justice for other humans, is not genuine. For as James H. Cone aptly puts it: »Because God's act for man involves man's liberation from bondage, man's response to God's grace of liberation is an act for his oppressed brothers and sisters. There can be no reconciliation with God unless the hungry are fed, the sick are healed, and justice is given to the poor. The justified sinner is at once the sanctified person, one who knows that his freedom is inseparable from the liberation of the weak and the helpless.«¹⁷

In view of the above, it would follow that Christians in South Africa will feel themselves called upon to become involved in the struggle against racial injustice and oppression so that liberation and freedom might be accorded to all. In so doing, they will be underscoring the basic fact that there exists an intrinsic relationship between God's act of justification and human struggle for justice in society. For the claim of the gospel is that God in Jesus Christ has succeeded in breaking up the power of that fundamental sin of the breach of fellowship between God and humans as well as its social consequences, characterized by human hostility, racial injustice, exploitation and oppression. Therefore, by breaking down the wall of hostilities between God and humans and between human beings themselves, the Christ-event has ushered in the real possibility of genuine life of fellowship and acceptance among human beings. It is for this

16 Benjamin MAYS: *Seeking to be Christians in race relations*. NY 1964, 35.

17 James H. CONE: *God of the oppressed*. NY 1975, 234.

reason that justification by faith alone, and confession of and struggle for social justice must be understood as inseparably linked, as it were two sides of the same coin. One cannot hope to have one side without the other.

This unconditional acceptance of us by God in Christ is alone the basis on which Christians should build a sound ethic on which they might begin working towards reaching one another in love, thus manifesting the fruits of faith which is active in love. In so doing, they will be working for the creation of new social structures in order to make humans more human and their social world more just, liveable and humane, thus overcoming the divisions based on law which, like the situation rejected by St. Paul (G 3, 23-29; Kol 3, 1-11), threatens to tear them apart.

The discussion as well as the linking of justification and social justice is particularly relevant to the South African situation, because here people pride themselves of being a »Christian nation«, by virtue of the fact that statistics show that more than 75% of the population claim to be Christian. It is was therefore deliberate that we did not want to discuss the problem of social justice, human rights, good works and the civil uses of law under the first Article of the Creed, as I have done elsewhere.¹⁸

I am persuaded that to continue to discuss the human struggle for freedom and justice in relation to the doctrine of creation and law is correct. But in situation in which the majority of people are Christians, we should not ask for minimum good works and virtues which even non-Christians can do. Rather Christians, as created just persons of faith through the justifying act of God in Christ, and who are called to follow the example of Christ into whose image they are being transformed, must be challenged to do far more good works and deal justly with their fellows in society. In so doing, Christians will be manifesting their faith which, active in love, does not seek its own but seeks the good, justice and well being of the neighbour. Indeed, to fail to challenge Christians in the so-called Christian country to show more fruits of their faith will be to forget that there exists an indissoluble link between justification and sanctification, a link which does not allow us to offer people a cheap from of »the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner ... grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living incar-

18 Simon S. MAIMELA: God's creative activity through the law. Pretoria 1984; MAIMELA: Proclaim freedom to my people. Braamfontein, Johannesburg 1987, 121-132.

nate«. ¹⁹ Costly grace is the opposite: it recognizes that justification of the sinner is intrinsically linked to repentance, to personal transformation, and to the creation of a new person with new attitudes who voluntarily does far more good works than what the law commands. ²⁰

This unconditional acceptance of the sinner by God in Christ which gives birth to a new person of faith in response to God's free gift of freedom to all people should be the basis for Christian interpersonal relations in South Africa. It provides a vision of the good person and just society and challenges Christians to want to transform themselves and their society in accordance with the ethos of the Kingdom of God. This insight which Luther, in re-reading the gospel, rediscovered for the Church is one which ought to be preached loudly to people who live under the law of separation. This perspective, grounded as it is in the gospel, is one which Christians ought to embody in word and deed in their relationship with their fellows, so that those White people who hate themselves as well as their Black neighbours might come to know and experience the liberating love of God in Christ, the Saviour. This is the gospel which all fearful South Africans need to hear so they might be liberated from their fears and therefore be liberated from the need to separate themselves from their racially different neighbours – as if they need to defend and save their lives at all costs.

Should most people come to experience this unconditional acceptance by God in Christ, there is no need why Christians in South Africa should not take the lead in showing tolerance toward their racially and culturally different neighbours. In so doing, they will be demonstrating that it is possible for Christians to accept other people on the basis of their unconditional acceptance by God. And should some bigotted Christians still find it difficult to come together and accept their fellow Christians on the basis of their professed justification by God through grace alone, they ought to be asked what right do they have for expecting perfection, purity, worthiness, and acceptability from their fellow human beings, when God has accepted them despite their imperfections. Indeed, they ought to be asked: What right do they have for setting a higher standard of acceptability than the one which God has set for accepting the unworthy and the ungodly? What right do they have for rejecting and

19 Dietrich BONHOEFFER: *The cost of discipleship* (Nachfolge (engl.))/ tr. by R[eginald] H. Fuller. NY 1967, 46f.

20 Am 31, 349f. 358-367. 371-373 ≙ WA 7, 53, 31-33; 59, 37 - 66, 20; 69, 24 - 70, 27.

disassociating themselves from their fellow Christians who God has already accepted and loved in Jesus Christ? For if God has already accepted our unworthy fellow human beings, is it really possible for us to reject our fellow Christians without also cutting ourselves off from God and God's actions of reconciliation between God and human beings and consequently between human beings themselves?