GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

JUSTIFICATION AND COSTLY GRACE:

LESSONS FOR LAZY LUTHERANS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE GUSTAVUS DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION

IN COMPLETION OF THE RELIGION MAJOR

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SAINT PETER, MINNESOTA

MAY, 2005

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ABSTRACT

Christians, and Lutherans in particular, have allowed themselves to fall into a pattern of cheap grace: "Since I am saved by grace, I don't have to do anything!" This thesis examines the theologies of these two theologians and discusses how we ought to live in the world today as Christians, that is, as disciples of Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says "cheap grace" is not the implication of the call to discipleship, and indeed Luther, despite his misinterpreted doctrine of justification, would agree.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

I have often described myself as "Lutheran to the core." Coming from a staunchly Lutheran family, including a father, an uncle, and a grandfather who are Lutheran pastors, this can only be expected. I come from a long line of theologians. As a result, many people assume that I, too, must know a lot about theology. I get asked a lot of questions by both Christians and non-Christians, and one that pops up quite frequently is, "Am I going to hell if I don't believe that?" I am of course totally ill-equipped to answer this question, as are all Lutherans, since it is not possible to know this according to Lutheran teaching. In fact, no one in this world can answer this question, for what human being can know such things about the afterlife? How can we even know for sure that there is an afterlife, let alone know who is going where after they die? Taking this question to the next level, we may ask if there is anything we can do to affect what happens after we die. For Christians, are there things that we should or even must do to be in God's favor? Are there particular works that one should or must do to be saved? What is our duty as Christians? Is it to be kind to others? To go to church every Sunday? To read the Bible? If we do not do these things, will we go to hell and have eternal separation from God, even if we have led otherwise faithful lives? Though humans do have the capacity to ask such questions, we cannot answer them, and that is why we look to a higher being, a God, to answer our questions. I certainly cannot answer these questions with any sort of ultimate authority, but I can

look to the roots of my Lutheranism and my personal faith for guidance and as a structure in which to think about these things.

This is what started me looking seriously at the works of Martin Luther. To rightly claim to be so Lutheran, I needed to become more than casually acquainted with Luther's theology, which is the basis – albeit not the end all – of Lutheran doctrine. One of the main emphases in Luther's theology is "justification by grace through faith alone." This, however, leaves us with questions. What is justification, and what does it mean to be justified? What is grace? What is faith, and what are its implications? How does what Luther wrote five hundred years ago apply to us today? What does this imply for our lives as Christians or non-Christians?

We can begin examining this phrase by first defining some of Luther's terms very basically. *Justification*, in Luther's terms, means to be declared righteous in the eyes of God, even though we are sinners, and this has nothing to do with our merits. As Luther says, we are *simul iustus et peccator* – at the same time justified *and* sinners. Justification is a gift from God – it is received because of God's *grace*, which is given freely. The last component of this small but powerful phrase is *faith*. This is the reception of God's grace, a belief and a whole-hearted trusting in Christ. It is an acceptance of God's declaration of justification.

With this staple of Luther's theology in mind, we are met with three main problems. First of all, even with Luther's terms defined, this concept of justification by grace and faith alone is a very hard one to grasp. Although "faith" is discussed from the very beginning of a Christian's life, from the very early Sunday school years and onward, it is by no means simple. Even the most brilliant theologians have grappled with this concept many times over, for how does one define something as abstract and bigger-than-life as faith? To say, then, that we are justified by grace *through faith* means nothing to us, for what is faith? How are we to know how

we can be justified if we do not even understand the means by which our justification is declared?

It is helpful, when dealing with such an abstract concept, to define the concept in terms of something concrete. For faith, it is helpful to define faith in terms of works. Luther says that although we do not need and indeed *cannot* rely on works for our salvation, they are still an important aspect of being a Christian. But why is that? In what way? In looking at works, we realize we need to define just what a work is. The Sacraments – the Lord's Supper and Baptism – are things that the Word says we must do. The word "must" implies that these acts are necessary for salvation, and the word "do" implies that they are an act in which we, our bodies, souls and minds, must participate, and perhaps even initiate. If we are justified by grace and faith alone, however, then *must* we really participate in the Sacraments? Of what benefit are they to our salvation? In a different sense of the word "works," Luther is very adamant about the Christian vocation to help and love our neighbor – where does that fit into his notion of salvation? Is loving and helping our neighbor something that we *must do*? Where does the law fit into this notion of works? Must we or should we follow the law, like the Ten Commandments? If so, then why? Is following the law or doing good works a result of faith? Is there a reward? Do we do good works because we enjoy them? I will be examining the place of these "works of piety" (acts within the religious community) and "works of charity" (acts that take place in the world) as well as the place of the law within the notion of justification by grace through faith alone.

The second problem concerns time and context. We must take into account that Luther wrote his theology five hundred years ago, and was thus in a very different context than we are today. His was a time of plague and other disease, as well as a time before the technological and

social advances of the modern world. Luther's context is important to consider: he was writing in a time of Church corruption and he was trying to help people see that corruption. He was, in a way, trying to convince people of something: that salvation could not be bought, among other things. How can we possibly relate Luther's distinctly contextual writings to our lives now? Can we simply repristinate this sixteenth century Reformation writer and his theology? How do we make a theological claim that was stated five hundred years ago work in our lives *now*? It should not be difficult. The Word, after all, encompasses much more history than five hundred years, and Luther himself was writing fifteen hundred years after Jesus and Saint Paul, and even longer after the Psalter and other Old Testament books were written. If he could apply those books to his life in the sixteenth century, then there is no reason we should not be able to do the same in the twenty-first century. And yet, Luther talks about loving our neighbor as our Christian vocation, and in America, a country that is 80% Christian, one out of ten families is hungry.[1] This is very telling as to how well we prioritize helping our neighbor. Luther's view of vocation is certainly applicable.

To show how Luther's theology is still useful and even essential for us now, we can study it in conjunction with a modern theologian, namely Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). Bonhoeffer's context is important to discuss; his context was that of the Holocaust and Nazi Germany. By studying Luther and Bonhoeffer conjointly, we can show that Luther is indeed still relevant. Although the two did not have exactly the same theology, they fit very nicely together, and the influence that Luther's theology had on Bonhoeffer is clear. What is especially interesting about studying these two influential theologians together is that although their contexts are so much a part of their respective theologies, there is still a timeless aspect about

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[1] www.elca.org. (listed statistics change periodically – this particular one is no longer on the site)

each of them. When we can see theological concepts that apply in the sixteenth century Reformation as well as the twentieth century World War II, it is clear that they can also apply to us now in the twenty-first century.

Although Luther's and Bonhoeffer's theologies fit together very well, there is one potential incongruency, which brings us to the third problem I will address in this thesis. Bonhoeffer, in his *Cost of Discipleship,*[2] discusses the difference between "cheap grace" and "costly grace." The most straightforward – but not terribly descriptive – distinction between the two is that cheap grace is *not* grace, and costly grace is *simply* grace. Another more helpful definition is that cheap grace is justification of the sin, but not of the sinner, where costly grace is the entire giving up of one's self to obey Christ's command to follow him. It costs us our lives, but we gain a life in Christ. Bonhoeffer is adamant that cheap grace is destructive to not only the Church, but to justice and order in society. Cheap grace is faith in grace, not faith in Christ.[3]

Where does Luther's doctrine of justification fit into this? Here we come to one of the major issues in the Church – and especially the Lutheran Church – today: does "justification by grace through faith alone" encourage cheap grace? It is very easy to look at this and say, "I am saved by grace? I don't have to do anything? Great!" This, however, is not the life of a Christian, says Bonhoeffer, and indeed Luther would agree. Although Luther's doctrine of justification has created a number of lazy Christians who have come to rely on faith in grace rather than faith in Christ, I argue that this was not Luther's intention. Rather, his intention was

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[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, trans. by R.H. Fuller from German text of 1937 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963).

[3] Jonathan D. Sorum, "Cheap Grace, Costly Grace, and Just Plain Grace," *Lutheran Forum* 27.3 (1993): 20-23.

much more like what Bonhoeffer discusses in *The Cost of Discipleship*, as well as *Ethics*[4] and *Letters and Papers From Prison*.[5] My hope is, finally, to define Luther in such a way as to show that his theology is in fact congruent with Bonhoeffer's definition of costly grace, and that he did not intend to encourage cheap grace among Christians.

To attack this task, and bring these problems and solutions to the fore, I plan to go first to the source itself – that is, I will use the works of Martin Luther, who will be an essential primary source for this paper. Luther was quite a prolific writer and has many treatises, letters, and sermons on the topic of faith and works specifically as well as on related topics. This includes writings on the place and meaning of the Sacraments as well as writings on our Christian vocation – how our faith can and should be active in the world, as in loving our neighbor and other such charitable works. Luther and interpreters of Luther have addressed these issues extensively, so I will be using both Luther's writings and secondary sources on Luther. Using these sources, I will discuss in greater depth Luther's doctrine of justification and the place of grace, faith, and the law within that doctrine. I will also discuss the place of charitable and pious works in faith, according to Luther.

I will then turn to Bonhoeffer, for whom I will also use both primary and secondary sources. Mainly, I will be using *The Cost of Discipleship, Letters and Papers From Prison,* and *Ethics* by Bonhoeffer. In addition, I will read some secondary sources on Bonhoeffer, especially for background information on Bonhoeffer, since his context – that of Nazi Germany – is so essential in the development of his theology. Knowing this history is important in unpacking Bonhoeffer's theology. Using the works of Bonhoeffer, as well as works about Bonhoeffer by

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[4] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics,* trans. by Neville Horton Smith from German text of 1949 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955).

[5] ---, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953).

other scholars, I will define more thoroughly what he means by "cheap grace" and "costly grace," and to reveal how this relates to the aforementioned Luther writings, as well as how the Luther writings relate to Bonhoeffer. I will also highlight Bonhoeffer's version of what Luther calls our Christian vocation, which is duty and responsibility, and what this means for how we are to live as Christians in the world today.

Ultimately, I hope to reveal why both of these great theologians are important for us to continue studying even today, and what we can learn from them. In studying them together we can hope to gain a greater understanding of our personal faith, and this can in turn be applied to a greater good. Examining the theology of Martin Luther in juxtaposition with that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer shows us that Luther's doctrine of justification does not imply what Bonhoeffer calls "cheap grace"; the two theologians show us what it means to have faith and be justified, and how we should live as Christians in the world today. We live in a world ridden with pain, hunger, and sadness, and although not all of that can be remedied simply by learning about Luther and Bonhoeffer's theologies and how they relate to our personal lives, we can at least see our place in this world and have a better grasp on how we should spend our time here on earth.

CHAPTER 2

JUSTIFICATION AND THE LAW

The first step in unpacking Luther's theology is to dissect his doctrine of justification. The place to start is with the term "faith." We are justified by grace, but it is through faith that this occurs. What does it mean to "have faith"? The most straightforward definition for faith is trust: faith is trusting God. It is utterly relinquishing oneself to Christ, admitting that God is in control of everything we are and do. This trust implies not the will of humans, but an act of God. One might say that trust involves a choice, but in the case of salvation, there is hardly a choice. If I were drowning, I would certainly grab hold of the loving arm extended to save me. I would grab it without reservation, putting complete trust in that loving arm.[6] So it is with trusting, and thus having faith, in God. God is the loving arm, extended to save us, and we can either grab it or sink. In this way, faith is also something that reaches out to grab us that we, in turn, can choose to receive, accept, and embrace. God reaches into the water to grab hold of us, and we accept and gladly take hold of the arm. Paul Tillich, in his *Dynamics of Faith*, defines faith as "the state of being ultimately concerned," and says that genuine faith is "total surrender to the subject of ultimate concern."[7] Total surrender. Complete trust. We leave nothing in our own hands, but give our whole lives to God.

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[6] Robin Bruce Barnes, "The Assurance of Salvation in Luther," *Lutheran Quarterly* 3 (1989), 215.

[7] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 3.

The next step in dissecting justification is to define grace. It is because of God's grace that we are saved, and it is because of God's grace that we have Christ. The mere fact that God would justify us, despite being sinners, is an example of God's grace. We do nothing to earn God's love and forgiveness, we do not follow God's commandments, and yet God does not cease loving us. If there is nothing we can do to earn grace, and it is not based on our merits, then how do we receive God's saving grace? We receive it through faith in Christ. If we have faith in Christ, we also will receive God's grace.

Now that we have defined the means by which justification occurs, we can further define justification itself. What does it mean to be justified by God? Justification is, simply put, God's declaration of our righteousness. This is not because of anything that we have done or can do. It indeed cannot be based on any sort of merits, because our human merits would always fall short. It is based entirely on God's divine grace, received by faith. It is an act of God, uninfluenced by human action. This is where it can become confusing, for it sounds like we could just as well be entirely unconcerned with God and still be justified in God's eyes. In Luther's doctrine of justification, however, the essential component here is faith. We are justified by grace *through faith* in God and Christ.

Even though we are justified, however, we never cease to be sinners. God loves us and forgives us in spite of our sins. God knows that we will never be perfect beings, and yet God still declares our justification. This notion is well described Luther's phrase: *simul iustus et peccator* – simultaneously justified and sinners. This is one of Luther's famous paradoxes – how can one be both righteous and a sinner? Luther explains this by describing the two-fold nature of humans. Humans have a bodily nature and a spiritual nature. The two are not separate, and indeed cannot be separated, but rather are both present and intertwined in the make-up of every

human being. These two natures are somewhat contradictory, says Luther,[8] though they also complement each other quite well. That is, the body does what the spirit or soul cannot, and the soul does what the body cannot.

The inner person, the soul, is the part of us that is made righteous upon God's declaration of justification. Faith, Luther says, resides in the inner person, and because of this faith and because we are baptized, the inner person is renewed every day.[9] This inner person does not need works or laws, and indeed is harmed by them if one believes one can be justified by them. The inner person is already righteous, and has been so since baptism, without laws or works. What the inner person must do, then, is to bring the outer person along with it. Thus, faith that is in the soul grows more each day as the bodily nature tries to achieve that state of faith.

Returning to *simul iustus et peccator*, we understand that it is our souls that are justified, not because we have done anything to deserve it, but because God says so. Yet at the same time, the body (outer nature) continues to sin. Hence, we are at the same time justified in our inner self or soul and sinners in our bodily actions, and all we can do is strive to bring our bodies to the righteous level of our souls.

In discussing justification, it is helpful to examine what Luther calls "alien" righteousness, which he discusses in his treatise, *Two Kinds of Righteousness*.[10] Alien righteousness is actually the righteousness of Christ, which "covers" us as if it were ours. Through faith, the righteousness of Christ becomes ours, and indeed Christ himself becomes

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[8] Luther, "Freedom of a Christian," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 596. (Lull's anthology will hereafter be abbreviated *MLBTW*.)

[9] Ibid., 596.

[10] Martin Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," in Lull, *MLBTW*, 155-164.

ours.[11] This is better than any righteousness we could achieve by our own merits because it is infinite and unfaltering, while anything we could achieve as humans would be finite and imperfect. It is, in fact, the only righteousness we can receive – righteousness that is not ours, but is from outside of ourselves, from Christ.

An important question that arises in the discussion of justification is that of the place of the law. Whether or not we are justified, there is still a divine law that we should follow, a law that was written on our hearts by God, the knowledge of which is instinctive for us. What is the place of God's law in our lives and what is its use if we are already justified? Luther discusses two uses for the law: the political and the theological.[12] The political or civil use is to maintain order and pursue justice. It can be found in God-instituted offices like those of government, parents, teachers, and also through civil laws.[13] Luther advocates the upholding of this use through his interpretation of the fourth commandment, "Honor your father and mother," in which he tells us to honor and respect not only our parents, but all authority. The second use, the theological use, is to accuse sinners and drive them to God's promise. This is the true and genuine meaning of the law.[14] The purpose of the law, then, in both the political and theological realms, is for discipline. Luther discusses the law in his *Preface to the Old Testament*. He says that "the Old Testament is a book of laws, which teaches us what men are to do and not to do," and that the Old Testament is "the teaching of laws, the showing up of sin, and the demanding of

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[11] Ibid., 156.

[12] Calvin is known for also advocating for a third use of the law, which is basically the first use of the law applied to believers. Though Luther never mentions it explicitly, it is in the *Formula of Concord*, and many would say Luther implies it. This long-standing debate, however, will not be addressed in this paper.

[13] Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 253.

[14] Ibid., 254.

good."[15] Laws tell us how we ought to act. We are, as humans, unable to act in the way God wants us to, but the law gives us insight as to how God would like us to act.

Luther discusses the purpose of the law, the purpose of the Old versus the New Testament, and commandments and promises in his 1520 treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian.*[16] He addresses issues such as the place of law in salvation, whether keeping the law is considered a "work" by Luther's standards, and the purpose of the law in this post-Jesus world. The Scripture, he says, is divided into two parts: commandments and promises, found primarily in the Old Testament and the New Testament respectively (though both promises and commandments are found in either Testament). Commandments are laws intended to show us what we should do, but they do not give us the power to do them. Because we know the law but are unable, as humans, to follow it, we become aware of our inability to do good. We are able to see our inadequacy, our fallibility. Thus, the purpose of the law is to humble us, to help us realize that there is nothing we have or that we can do that will justify us.

Here God's promise becomes essential; we see the role that Jesus plays in the law. God tells us that we can follow the law by believing in Christ, "in whom grace, righteousness, peace, liberty, and all things are promised." Thus, God's promise is that Christ has fulfilled the law on our behalf. Because it is impossible for us to fulfill the commandments on our own merits, God, in God's grace, gives us Christ. "[God] alone commands, [God] alone fulfills."[17] The law and the gospel go hand in hand and are inseparable. The law is not satisfied by outward fulfillment, and indeed reveals and increases a person's sinfulness. In this way it humbles us and drives us to realize that our own merits cannot be good enough because we realize that we cannot, with even

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[15] Martin Luther, "Preface to the Old Testament," in Lull, *MLBTW*, 119-20.
[16] Martin Luther, "Freedom of a Christian," 600.
[17] Ibid., 601.

the best efforts, follow God's commandments. Once we have been humbled and are at our lowest point, the gospel provides us with the promise from God that Christ has fulfilled the law and that we are therefore justified. The law accuses and condemns, and the gospel contains God's promise in Christ, bringing us God's grace. As Paul Althaus, a well-known interpreter of Luther, writes, "The law by itself without the gospel has no healing power. With the gospel, however, it works salvation. By itself alone, it leads a man into hell; together with the gospel, however, and understood on the basis of it, it leads a man to Christ."[18]

The question arises, if Christ has freed us from the law, is the law still valid for us today? Or is it only for the Jews, who do not believe that Christ has saved them from the law? Luther's answer is that we do still need the law, but for a different reason than the Jews. Again taking our two-fold nature into account, we must go back to *simul iustus et paccator*: even though we are justified we are still sinful beings. Although our souls are righteous, our bodily actions can never fully fulfill the law. Because of this, we are still under the law. In this way, the law also disciplines our minds and bodies. It reminds us that we are sinners and drives us to do everything we can to obey the will of God. Without such a driving force, we are in danger of becoming lazy Christians, too secure and comfortable with our sinful selves. Because of our knowledge of the law we remain conscious of the fact that we belong to God, and as we continually work to do God's will we also try to make our sinful bodies like our righteous souls. As faithful Christians, we want to do God's will, and following the law becomes a joyous thing, something we do out of love for God rather than out of fear.[19] As the Psalms say, "Blessed are those… whose delight is in the law of the Lord…" (Psalms 1:2).

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[18] Althaus, 259-60.

[19] This is the distinction between the first and third uses of the law: in the first use, we follow the law out of fear, but in the third use, we follow it out of love.

We now have a basis for Luther's definition of faith. This still seems to be in the abstract, however. What does it mean to have faith in some sort of practical sense? It is helpful to think of faith in terms of works in order to have something concrete to hold onto. In the next chapter, we will examine how works allow faith to become active in the world.

CHAPTER 3

FAITH AND WORKS

With the promise from the New Testament that we are justified and freed from the law through faith in Christ, the question arises as to the place of good works. Luther insists that good works are indeed a part of a being a Christian. Why are they? What is their place? There are two types of works in question here to address: acts of charity, which are works done in the world such as helping and loving our neighbor; and acts of piety, works done within the religious community such as the Sacraments. This paper will first address works of charity.

I. *Works of charity*:

We discussed earlier our "alien" righteousness, which is the righteousness that we receive from Christ that frees us from the law. The second kind of righteousness discussed in Luther's treatise is called our "proper" righteousness. It is a result of alien righteousness and from the giving of ourselves to Christ. In giving ourselves *to* Christ, we are also giving ourselves *for* Christ. This means that we must act in the world as Christ would. Luther writes, "Just as [Christ] himself did all things for us, not seeking his own good but ours only – and in this he was most obedient to God the Father – so he desires that we also should set the same example for our neighbors."[20] As a result of this righteousness, we live our lives in this way: we do good works, we love our neighbor, and we live "in meekness and fear toward God."[21] Works and our way of living are expressions of our faith. It is not the other way around, and it is not one or the other –

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[20] Martin Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," in Lull, *MLBTW*, 158.
[21] Ibid., 157.

faith is not a substitute for works; the two go together. In addition, we do good works not *in order* to be saved, but rather *because* we are saved. Both faith and works require us to give of ourselves. We do good works not to gain favor with God, but because as creatures of faith, we want to do good works.[22] We love our neighbor because that is what Christ does, and in giving ourselves to Christ, we become his, and we seek to become like him. As Luther puts it, "I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ."[23] All that we do is for our neighbor, and by loving our neighbor and doing good works, we are living devoutly, with the utmost respect for and obedience to God, which is what it means to live "in meekness and fear toward God."[24]

Loving our neighbor as Christ, then, becomes our Christian vocation. Beyond this, all Christian people have a particular vocation or calling – something we are meant to do. This may be to be the President of the United States, or it may be to clean houses. In any case, it is something that you can do, can do well, and are fully able to do. In this way, our vocation is serving God, regardless of its description (with some extreme examples, such as thieves or prostitutes), because it is using our God-given gifts. "It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate.... All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office."[25] In that we all serve God through our particular

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[22] Ibid., 158.
[23] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 619.
[24] Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 157.
[25] Martin Luther, "To the Christian Nobility," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Ulrich S. Luepold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 44:127.

vocations, we are all one body in Christ. We must use our particular gifts to serve the whole body of Christ that Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 12. Luther writes that "everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all the members of the body serve one another."[26] Not to help each other, says Luther, is like the hand not helping the eye when it is in pain. The Commandments say this as well: "You shall not kill," which is interpreted by Luther to mean, "We are to fear and love God, so that we do not endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but help and support them in all life's needs."[27] Not only must we avoid harming our neighbor, but we must actively help our neighbor whenever he or she is in need. That is what defines us as the Body of Christ, and that is what then becomes our vocation as members of that body.

If loving our neighbor is our vocation as Christians, then this also means that doing good works is our vocation. Indeed, loving our neighbor and doing good works is how our faith becomes active. In other words, vocation is faith active in love. First comes the Word, then from the Word comes faith, and then love, and every good work comes from this love.[28] Luther writes, "Here faith is truly active through love [Gal. 5:6], that is, it finds expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward; and for himself he is satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his faith."[29] We do good works because we love God and we love our neighbor. We do not do them because we gain anything; rather they are entirely for the benefit of our neighbor.

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[26] Ibid., 130.

[27] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of theEvangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 352.

[28] Luther, "Babylonian Captivity," in Lull, *MLBTW*, 295.

[29] Luther, "Freedom of a Christian," 617.

If there is indeed no personal gain from works, then it is true that we do not need them for our personal salvation. Yet, Luther says, we still must do them. Why? Though we do not need good works to be saved, works, as well as the law, are used as a discipline for our human selves. This goes back to Luther's description of our two-fold nature. The spiritual nature is justified while the bodily nature continues to sin. In the previous section we discussed how the law serves as a sort of discipline for the body, and a way to drive us to Christ. Charitable works can serve a similar purpose. By doing God's work here on earth (loving our neighbor, for example), we are reminded that we are God's, and that everything we do is for God. In this, we are also striving to reach the righteousness of our justified souls.

As our external selves strive to reach this righteous level, and we do good works and show love to our neighbor, we are not only showing our own faith and love, but God's love. We are God's vessels, sharing God's love with all the world as well as showing our love for God. For indeed Christ is in each of us, and all believers are part of a common priesthood. As 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Luther discusses this in a very poignant context: after an outbreak of the plague in Wittenberg in 1527, he wrote a letter to a pastor in Breslau, *Whether One Should Flee From a Deadly Plague*. In it, he urges that if someone is willing and able, one should stay and help those in need. He says, quite rightly, that if it were Christ or his mother Mary who were in need, we would be ready to help in an instant.[30] We must consider this and look at Matthew 25:40: "As you did to the least of these… you did it to me." By helping our neighbor – any

[30] Luther, "Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague," in Lull, *MLBTW*, 747.

neighbor, known or unknown, old or young, male or female – we are helping Christ. Luther says,

> There you hear the command to love your neighbor as equal to the greatest commandment to love God, and that what you do or fail to do for your neighbor means doing the same to God. If you wish to serve Christ and to wait on him, very well, you have your sick neighbor close at hand. Go to him and serve him, and you will surely find Christ in him....[31]

To help someone in need is to help Christ. This is how we can show our love for God, and also how God shows God's love for us – by working *through* us. In this way, loving and helping our neighbor is a work of God, and thus faith is a work of God.

Because all of our good works are actually God working through us, that is, our good works are really God's good works, we are in no place to boast. We must be humble, for our merits are nothing. Indeed we have no merits, for all good that we do is God working through us. Luther says in many of his writings that even when people are lower than ourselves or seem undeserving of our attention, we should still help. For example, in *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, Luther says, "[T]he strong, honorable, healthy members do not glory over those that are weak, less honorable, and sick as if they were their masters and gods; but on the contrary they serve them the more, forgetting their own honor, health, and power."[32] A neighbor is a neighbor, no matter who it is, and we are never too good to help them. God is not too good to help and love us, so how can we think that we are too good for any human being? Truly, if it is God who is working through us – that is, if it is not we but God who is actually doing the good works *through* us – then claiming to be better than someone else is an invalid reason to avoid helping and loving our neighbor.

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[31] Ibid., 747.

[32] Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 161.

A beautiful example of humility is in Mary's Magnificat, on which Luther wrote a lengthy commentary. Mary realized that although she was a lowly handmaiden, God, in God's greatness, still regarded her. "When the holy virgin experienced what great things God was working through her despite her insignificance, lowliness, poverty, and inferiority, the Holy Spirit taught her this deep insight and wisdom, that God... does nothing but exalt those of low degree...."[33] Just as God made the world out of nothing, God makes great things out of those who are humble. Mary serves as an example of how we should praise God and of what our demeanor should be as we work in the world. Everything is for God because everything is from God. Therefore, everything we do for others is from God and for God. We are in no place to take credit for any of this.

In addition to knowing God's love for us and for showing our love for God through works, doing good works in God's name also helps us to know God. Luther asks in his *Commentary on the Magnificat*, "How can one know God better than in the work in which he is most himself?" By knowing God's works, we also know God's nature and will.[34] Our acts of love toward our neighbor show us God's love, as well as God's will to help us follow the Commandments and to take care of us. What we must constantly remember, though, is that to know God and do God's works, we must have faith. With faith alone are we able to give ourselves to and for Christ, and it is only with faith that we are able to do good works and help our neighbor to the glory of God. When we have genuine faith, we *want* to do good works. From where does this faith come? This brings us to the next question, regarding the place of acts of piety.

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[33] Martin Luther, *Luther's Commentary on The Magnificat* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967), 11.

[34] Ibid., 49.

II. *Acts of Piety*:

Luther came into major conflict with the Church in the sixteenth century over his understanding of the Sacraments. The Church insisted that active participation in the Sacraments was essential to salvation. For Luther, this came dangerously close to viewing the Sacraments as works meant to obtain favor from God. The question that arises for this paper regarding the Sacraments is whether or not they are considered works. Are they something we must do, even though we are justified by faith alone?

It is first important to note when discussing the Sacraments that they are not just their earthly entities, i.e., what we can see. That is, the Sacrament of Baptism is not merely water, and the Lord's Supper is not merely bread and wine. Although these earthly substances are essential for Baptism and the Lord's Supper, these alone do not make them Sacraments. It is God's Word. Looking first at Baptism: Luther defines Baptism as "water comprehended and sanctified in God's commandment and Word, that is, a divine and holy water because of God's commandment."[35] It is the Word that makes Baptism a saving action. These two cannot be separated from each other, or the water has no meaning. When they are together, Baptism becomes something that cannot be reversed by any human action, "for our work and misuse neither make nor unmake God's work."[36] The water combined with God's Word create such a powerful and vital Sacrament, our merits can truly have no impact. Baptism is a work of God, though it is administered by human hands. It is commanded by God and instituted by God.[37] The Lord's Supper, likewise, is God's work administered by human hands. It is, again, by the Word and not by the earthly objects through which it is administered, that make the Lord's

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[35] Martin Luther, "Baptism," *Sermons on the Catechism*, ed. John Nicholas Lenker (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 229.

[36] Ibid., 233.

[37] Althaus, 353.

Supper what it is, which is an act of forgiveness. Because it is the Word that makes the Sacrament and not the person administering it, it is also true that the status of the administrator does not affect the efficacy of the Sacrament. It remains God's work, and nothing human's say or do can negate or alter that claim.[38]

We will first examine further the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, followed by further discussion of the Lord's Supper. Luther was a strong advocate for infant Baptism, because he believed that Baptism marks the beginning of one's faith and should occur at the beginning of one's spiritual life. Once Baptism has occurred, faith is created. Baptism cannot depend on faith, or the faith will not be sufficient.[39] At the same time, however, Baptism cannot occur without faith already being present. One cannot make a chronological distinction regarding Baptism and faith. The two happen together: the faith needs something to which to cling, and Baptism provides that by receiving the faith. Faith needs Baptism, and Baptism needs faith. When one is baptized, one's faith is realized, and it can be seen and experienced in a tactile, physical Sacrament. Luther explains that faith "must be external so that it can be perceived and grasped by the senses and thus brought into the heart...."[40] It becomes external through Baptism, and thus when faith grasps our souls through Baptism, faith can in turn become something that is better grasped by us as humans.

As God's work, Baptism serves one very important purpose: it saves. As Paul says in his letter to Titus, "[God our Savior] saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal of the Holy

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[38] *The Book of Concord*, 467.
[39] Berhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 305.
[40] Ibid., 460.

Spirit."[41] Baptism redeems us and forgives our sins, and it brings eternal salvation to believers. Each day, we are renewed because of our Baptism. Luther describes this as "the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new creature," that is, Baptism slays the old sinner in us (the natural human), and resurrects the new, righteous human. This continues our whole life long. Luther describes a Christian life, one of doing good works and loving our neighbor, as a daily Baptism that continues forever. This, says Luther, is the correct use of Baptism. It serves as a sign of this daily rebirth. It reminds us to rid ourselves of the old creature, which is "irascible, spiteful, envious, unchaste, greedy, lazy, proud – yes – and unbelieving."[42] With the renewal of our Baptism, these vices decrease more each day and we become a new creature, that is, more like the inner, righteous self of our two-fold nature. This daily reminder helps us to push away the old creature so that the new creature can grow stronger and closer to God each day.

Moving on to the Lord's Supper, its purpose is to bring us into communion with Christ by partaking of Christ's body and blood, which was given for us for the forgiveness of sins. That is, Christ came to earth and lived and died for the sake of the forgiveness of sins, and when we partake of his body and blood through the Lord's Supper, we once again experience this forgiveness. This occurs not through the intake of bread and wine alone, but because of the Word that accompanies the Sacrament, just as with Baptism.[43] "*Do this* for the remembrance of me," said the Lord. It is commanded of us, whether we feel we are worthy or not. Indeed, being any more or less worthy does not change the Sacrament because it is God's work and, like Baptism, cannot be reversed or changed in the hands of humans. The Sacrament is merely

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[41] Titus 3:5.
[42] *The Book of Concord*, 465.
[43] Ibid., 467.

administered by human hands, and is wholly God's work when it is accompanied by the Word. It is God's work being made visible through human actions.

Although we are baptized and born again, and God has cleansed us of the "old creature," we still have our old, sinful skins, and so we continue to stumble and fall. The role of the Lord's Supper, then, is as "food for the soul." The Lord's Supper "nourishes and strengthens the new creature."[44] As Baptism is daily rebirth, the Lord's Supper is daily sustenance to refresh our faith and make it stronger. Each time we partake of the real body and blood of Christ, we are reminded of the forgiveness of sins, that Jesus came to earth and died on our behalf to save us from our sins. When we take this, we are taking some of Jesus and his saving action into ourselves to remind us of our forgiveness and sustain us in our faith.

Thus, pious acts present a helpful way to view charitable works: God is ultimately the actor, and we humans are just the vessels, and through such acts, we see God's love for us. They are God's acts in the hands of humans so that God's love and our faith might be active in the world. No, we do not perform Sacraments *to be* saved, but rather we receive them as gifts from God *because* we are saved, and in them we receive God's grace; they are physical, earthly representations of this grace. This clarifies the question stated in the introduction: Are Sacraments considered works, and more specifically, works necessary for salvation? They are works, but rather than works that we must do, they are gifts of God that come along with justification. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, along with other pious acts such as confession and prayer, function not as works of the individual, but as gracious gifts of God with the purpose of drawing us closer to Christ.

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[44] Ibid., 469.

CHAPTER 4

BONHOEFFER AND HOW HE COMPARES TO LUTHER

I. *The Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born on February 4, 1906 in Breslau, Germany. He was the sixth of eight children (one of whom was his twin sister) born to Karl Bonhoeffer, a university professor and leading authority on psychiatry and neurology, and his wife Paula, née von Hase. The Bonhoeffers' household was a proper one, filled with appreciation of the arts, of education, and of openness. Although the Bonhoeffers were not necessarily religious people, they were very intellectual, so young Dietrich's great mind did not come as a surprise.

By the age of fourteen, Bonhoeffer had begun reading theology, and at age seventeen he entered Tübingen University (his father's *alma mater*), where he began his studies of theology. One teacher in particular at Tübingen had a lasting influence on Bonhoeffer, and that was Adolph Schattler. Schattler, and ultimately Bonhoeffer, had a desire to accept the concrete world as fully as possible. The influence of Schattler's teachings, especially, are present in Bonhoeffer's theology, and no writer (except Martin Luther) played such a role in Bonhoeffer's works.[45]

In June 1924, Bonhoeffer began attending Berlin University, where he studied with such important theologians as Harnack, Seeberg, and Lietzmann. He also found himself greatly influenced by the theology of Karl Barth, though he never studied under Barth directly. It was

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[45] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 54.

from Berlin University that, after seven more semesters and a thesis for Seeberg, he earned his theology degree. It was during his time at Berlin University that Bonhoeffer became especially interested in Karl Holl's interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification. Luther's "by grace alone" doctrine (the doctrine by which the church stands and falls) became instilled in Bonhoeffer through his study of Holl. It was also through this study that Luther's phrase *cor curvum in se* (heart turned in on itself) became important for Bonhoeffer. What Bonhoeffer did not like about Holl's interpretation, however, was that Holl made Luther's faith a religion of conscience, because he felt it threatened the assurance of faith.[46] Despite what Bonhoeffer used or did not use from Holl's interpretation of Luther, Holl was an important influence on how Bonhoeffer used Luther.

After Bonhoeffer had completed the work he needed to have a career in either the church or in academia, he decided to go to America, in particular to Union Theological Seminary in New York City. The year was 1930, so America had entered the Great Depression. Although Bonhoeffer was in high demand as a speaker and teacher in many kinds of churches from Lutheran to Unitarian, most of his loyalties lay in one particular area: the black neighborhood district of Harlem near the seminary. He took great interest in this culture, collecting publications of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), reading a variety of African American literature, and even collecting records of spirituals. He worked through the church toward equality for the rights of this faction of American society.[47]

Bonhoeffer was not only interested in the rights of the African American people. He had the utmost concern for all who were underprivileged. For Christmas of 1930, he accepted an invitation to Cuba, where he preached the Christmas sermon at a German school in Havana:

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[46] Ibid., 68-9.
[47] Ibid., 150-1.

> ...it seems strange to celebrate Christmas: with swarms of unemployed right before our eyes, millions of children suffering throughout the world, the starving in China, the oppressed in India and other unhappy countries.... With all this in mind, who would want to enter the promised land, unsuspecting and unbiased?[48]

Bonhoeffer's concern for the underprivileged led to his interest in social issues. He was moved by the willingness of churches and other organizations to take on and try to mend working-class problems. This led him in 1932 to do similar work with his students in Berlin for the unemployed. His work in Berlin helped raise funds and create a youth club.[49] The enthusiasm that Bonhoeffer saw in America's "social gospel" movement made a lasting impression on him, though he stood fast to his fundamental theological principles. Upon his return to Europe, Bonhoeffer reflected,

> My stay in America... made one thing clear to me: the absolute necessity of working together *and* at the same time the inexplicable conflict that appears to make such unity simply impossible. From the perspective over there, our situation and theology appear so localized, and I just can't understand how, in the entire world, Germany and a few men over there should have grasped what the Gospel is. And yet I don't see a message anywhere else.[50]

Bonhoeffer came away from America with a reinforced interest in the concrete reality of the Word of God, but his struggle now was to understand what this concreteness implied, and how it could grow out of the law of God.

Bonhoeffer returned to Berlin in 1931, and in January 1933, Hitler came to power, a situation about which all the Bonhoeffers were pessimistic from the start. While many church leaders supported the Nazis, claiming that swastikas were the symbol of German hope, Bonhoeffer preached against Hitler's seizure of power, announcing that the Church has only one

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[48] Quoted in Bethge, 152.
[49] Bethge, 163.
[50] Quoted in Bethge, 166.

altar, and that is the altar of God.[51] Bonhoeffer soon became known in Germany as one who would and did speak out against Hitler and the Nazi Regime. He even preached and lectured in London, where he spread the word of the true character of the German struggle, believing that the ecumenical movement might have a chance at reuniting the members of the Body of Christ. He tried to help churches put themselves in the context of the whole Church by listening anew to the message of the Bible.[52]

Bonhoeffer returned to Germany in 1935. Already a leader in the Confessional Church, he started an illegal Church Training College in Finkenwalde in Pomerania where young ministers could learn to live in brotherhood. In connection with this seminary was an experimental community known as the *Bruderhaus*.[53] This seminary and community taught how a Christian life could grow if it existed with those who lived entirely with the Lord and in the spirit of brotherly love to one another. It was during this time that Bonhoeffer wrote two of his most influential works: *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*.

Because Bonhoeffer was such a threatening figure to the Nazi party and it was not safe for him to remain in Germany, two of his American friends (Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Lehmann) tried to help him escape to America in 1939. After only two months, however, Bonhoeffer decided that he must return to Germany. He wrote in a letter to Reinhold Niebuhr,

> I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through his difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany, I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.[54]

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[51] Bethge, 257.

[52] G. Leibholz, memoir in *The Cost of Discipleship*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 16.

[53] John A Phillips, *Christ For Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 17.

[54] Quoted in Bethge, 655.

Bonhoeffer was dedicated to his fellow Christians in Germany, and he would not desert these oppressed and persecuted people in a time of such need. He would share the fate of his country.

When the war broke out that year, Bonhoeffer was able to avoid having to serve in the Army, and he could thus continue his work with the Confessional Church. With the urging of his brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, this was combined with working as a civil agent in an underground plot to assassinate Hitler. This ultimately led to his arrest by the Gestapo in 1943, along with Dohnanyi and Bonhoeffer's sister Christine. He was brought to Tegel prison outside of Berlin. Even in prison, Bonhoeffer's kind nature, courage, and goodness inspired all those around him, including the other prisoners and even the guards, who were even willing to smuggle out his letters and give him writing paper. In addition to the strict daily routine he developed, which included physical exercise, meditation, and Bible study and memorization,[55] Bonhoeffer was concerned with ministering to his fellow prisoners in whatever way he could: a beautiful and poignant example of loving one's neighbor.[56] It was also during this time that he produced what would become *Letters and Papers From Prison*, a collection of the letters, essays, and poetry that were sent mostly to his parents and his friend Eberhard Bethge. This collection of writings shows Bonhoeffer's emphasis on a theology that is *in* the world but not *of* the world, a poignant point considering the context in which he was writing.

Bonhoeffer was transferred on October 5, 1944 to the main Gestapo prison in the Prinz Albrechtstrasse in Berlin. Following the heavy air raids in Berlin, he was moved again to the concentration camp of Büchenwald and several other concentration camps before finally being executed at the concentration camp at Flossenbürg by special order of Hitler. Dietrich

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[55] Bethge, 831.
[56] G. Leibholz, 18.

Bonhoeffer was hanged on April 9, 1945, only a few days before that camp was liberated by the Allies.[57]

II. *The Luther/Bonhoeffer Comparison:*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was Lutheran, but how Lutheran was he? That is, does Bonhoeffer's theology line up with Luther's? Luther's theology obviously influenced Bonhoeffer's, but in what ways? How much influence did it have? This section will address these questions.

In a very basic way, both Luther and Bonhoeffer rely heavily on faith and grace: *sola fide, sola gratia* (faith and grace alone). We discussed in chapter 2 what faith is in Luther's theology and in chapter 3 we discussed how faith manifests itself in good works. Luther is also very insistent on justification. Much of his theology comes down to these concepts, and Bonhoeffer's does as well.

To begin outlining Bonhoeffer's theology, we will first discuss how he characterizes faith, which is so defining in both theologies. For Bonhoeffer, faith involves relying on something outside of oneself (i.e., God) and founding one's life on this foundation. It is the only thing in existence that is not subject to doubt. Above all, faith is "being held captive by the sight of Jesus Christ, no longer seeing anything but him." Having faith means doing everything for Christ. When one has such faith in Jesus Christ, says Bonhoeffer, one has the assurance of justification; that is, a justified life is one that experiences Christ. Faith is, in fact, the only way to justification.[58]

We can see the roots of this definition in Luther's theology. Returning to chapter 2, where we outlined Luther's definition of faith, we see that faith is trust in God and utterly relinquishing ourselves to God. It is building our lives on a foundation outside of ourselves, just

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[57] Ibid., 22.
[58] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 121.

as Bonhoeffer describes. Our human will does not play a role in faith; faith is God acting on us and in us. Bonhoeffer's primary emphasis in defining faith is on "being held captive by the sight of Jesus Christ." This is also rooted in Luther. Indeed, we were created by God, and everything we have is from God; therefore, everything we do is for God. If our sight rests anywhere but on God and Christ, then we are forgetting the correct origin for everything we have, and neglecting "the essence and the goal of responsible life in Jesus Christ." If we forget this origin, then we are setting up self-made, abstract idols, rather than living in responsibility to Christ.[59]

We saw that for Luther, faith leads to a spontaneous response of doing good works and loving one's neighbor; when one has faith, one does not choose to do good works, or try, or even think about it, because if the faith is genuine, good works happen spontaneously, without necessary effort. When this is true, one is justified. Also important to recall is that good works are never done for one's own benefit, but always for the benefit of the neighbor. When we do this, we are doing God's work; all that we have is *from* God, and thus everything that we do is *for* God. Doing good works for the benefit of our neighbor becomes our Christian vocation.

Bonhoeffer has a slightly different take on this, but it is ultimately the same end. Bonhoeffer also emphasizes tending to the needs of one's neighbor, and even calls this our vocation, as Luther does. He does not, however, call loving our neighbor "good works." Rather, he refers to responsibility, or living a responsible life. In discussing the structure of a responsible life, Bonhoeffer mentions two important factors: "life is bound to man and to God and a man's own life is free." It is because life is bound to man and to God that causes freedom in one's life.[60] Responsibility, then, manifests itself partially in deputyship, which is seen most clearly in situations where a person is in service to another person, as in the case of a father caring for his

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[59] Ibid., 223.
[60] Ibid., 220ff.

children, or a nurse caring for patients. When one is in service to another, he or she is defined, in part, by that service. A father will care for, work for, and even suffer for his children. "He is not an isolated individual, but he combines in himself the selves of a number of human beings."[61] Luther would describe this loyalty to humankind (loyalty to our neighbor) as being a part of the Body of Christ. The hand helps the eye when it is in pain; it would not neglect a part of its body, because when one part hurts, all the parts feel it. So it is with us: if one part of our Body of Christ is in need, we have a responsibility to tend to it.

The other aspect of responsibility, says Bonhoeffer, is freedom. Freedom and responsibility go hand-in-hand. "Responsibility presupposes freedom," writes Bonhoeffer, "and freedom can consist only in responsibility."[62] Freedom is only given in our deputyship to our neighbor. A responsible human acts in the freedom of himself; nothing can answer, think or act for him. One is not to forget, however, from where this freedom comes. It comes from God, and thus all action of the responsible human must be performed in obligation to God, as well as to our neighbor. Although the responsible Christian can observe, judge, decide and act on his/her own, he/she also knows from where this freedom comes, and acts in accordance with that. Thus, a responsible action "is performed without any claim to a valid self-justification" and "in surrender to God of the deed which has become necessary."[63] A responsible action is not a question of right or wrong, but is sometimes one of right and right or wrong and wrong; it is a question of God's will, and the responsible person will always do God's will.

Bonhoeffer's notion of Christian freedom is, once again, straight out of Luther, particularly what Luther says in his 1520 treatise *The Freedom of a Christian.* Luther writes, "A

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[61] Ibid., 221.
[62] Ibid., 244.
[63] Ibid., 245.

Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."[64] Because Christ came to earth, lived as man, and overcame sin and death on our behalf, we are saved and are no longer slaves to the law; we are free. This lines up well with Bonhoeffer's statement that although we are free creatures, our actions, if they are to be responsible, must be in loyalty to Christ and our neighbor. We are free to do whatever we want (subject to none), but as Christians, we do the will of God (subject to all).[65]

For Bonhoeffer, an essential component of freedom is obedience. Obedience and freedom cannot work separately; they must exist together. Without freedom, obedience is slavery; without obedience, freedom is arbitrary self-will. It is obedience that allows us to do God's will, rather than our own. Obedience allows a Christian to know what is good, and freedom enables one to do it. Obedience is blind faith, and freedom asks the purpose. These two contradicting forces are realized in responsibility. If one is to act responsibly, one must stand between freedom and obligation and act as such, but also know that her justification comes from neither freedom nor obligation, but from God, who put her in such a paradoxical situation to begin with. Thus, any deed of a responsible Christian is delivered to God, and not to the Christian's freedom or obedience.[66]

Another important parallel to note in these two theologies is that of vocation. We learned in chapter 3 what Luther has to say about vocation. He discusses our particular vocation (for instance a farmer, a mother, or a house cleaner) as what we do to contribute to the Body of Christ. All vocations, no matter how insignificant they may seem, are important in the Body of Christ, for everyone has a purpose. This can be likened to Bonhoeffer's notion of deputyship.

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[64] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 596.

[65] Bonhoeffer's and Luther's potentially differing concept of freedom will be further discussed in the next chapter.

[66] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 248-9.

We all have a job to do – a father, a nurse, a farmer – and by carrying out that job we are contributing to the Body of Christ. Bonhoeffer writes, "Vocation is responsibility and responsibility is a total response of the whole man to the whole reality; for this very reason there can be no petty and pedantic restricting of one's interests to one's professional duties in the narrowest sense." [67] One vocation is no more important than another. In addition, we all have a common Christian vocation, and that is to love our neighbor and act responsibly. Our calling is to serve our neighbor, and thus serve Christ. (We will learn more about what Bonhoeffer says about this in the next section about *The Cost of Discipleship.*)

An important component of Bonhoeffer's theology regarding vocation is our call to live *in the world.* To truly live responsibly we must live wholly in the world, but (Bonhoeffer distinguishes) not *of the world.* That is to say, we cannot live like so many people in the world live, with little or no regard for God's will or for doing good. At the same time, we cannot remove ourselves from this. God, after all, lived in the world for our sake; God came down to the level of humanity and "reconciled the world of man with God."[68] So we, too, should live in the world but not of the world, just as Jesus did. What does it mean to live in the world? Bonhoeffer address this in his *Letters and Papers From Prison.* To live in the world means "living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In doing so, we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God."[69] If we do this and know that God did this, too, through Jesus Christ, then we are able to focus on doing God's will, even in the world today. This brings us into the next section, which outlines Bonhoeffer's

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[67] Ibid., 254.
[68] Ibid., 225.
[69] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 370.

notion of cheap and costly grace and examines how we must keep this in mind when seeking to define our Christian vocation in this world today.

CHAPTER 5

BONHOEFFER'S COSTLY GRACE AND THE LUTHER PROBLEM

The problem in Lutheranism today, as we discussed in chapter 1, is that it is tempting to look at Luther's doctrine of justification and believe that since we are saved by grace, we do not need to do anything. We have convinced ourselves that we are "off the hook," so to speak, because grace has us "covered." Bonhoeffer calls this "cheap grace." He defines this, as well as "costly grace" and what it means to be a disciple, in *The Cost of Discipleship*.

Cheap grace is grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system, not as a means for faith. It is well-defined as justification of the sin without justification of the sinner. It says that all our actions – the things we do, think and say – are okay because of grace, but it does not address the person, the soul. This, in turn, destroys faith, because it allows the Christian to live in the world *as* the world, and does not distinguish him or her at all.[70] In this way, cheap grace encourages disobedience. It hardens us in our disobedience, making us feel comfortable and even secure with the ungodly living to which we have become so accustomed. Bonhoeffer describes this cheap grace as even more destructive than works because it destroys the whole vision of what it means to be a disciple.[71] It is not God's grace, but rather grace that we bestow on ourselves; it is faith in grace, not faith in Christ. Cheap grace is grace without the cross, without Christ, and without discipleship.[72]

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[70] Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 43-4.
[71] Ibid., 54.
[72] Ibid., 44.

Costly grace, then, is the antithesis of cheap grace. Costly grace is grace in its pure form. It is active; it calls us to follow as disciples. We would give up anything and everything for it, even our own life. It is costly because it costs us our life, but in giving up our life we receive a life in Christ. Indeed, it cost God the life of God's son, so it cannot come cheaply to us.[73] What does it mean to be a disciple, to give up our life for God? Discipleship is adherence and obedience to Christ. Christ calls us to follow, and we accept that call, not for our benefit, but merely for the sake of the call. We must be willing to give up our lives, our desires, our personal goals; all this must be sacrificed, and in letting go we are able to find our lives in Christ.[74] As Matthew 10:39 states, "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." We give up everything to find our life in Christ. This unreserved obedience to Christ is the bedrock of Bonhoeffer's definition of discipleship.

How did such a destructive notion as cheap grace come into being? Bonhoeffer explains that as Christianity has spread during the last 2000 years, grace has progressively become cheap. He writes, "The justification of the *sinner in the world* degenerated into justification of *sin and the world.*[75] Costly grace was turned into cheap grace without discipleship."[76] Cheap grace could, in short, meet more people where they were, and so as more people converted to Christianity, cheap grace was the easy way to be "in the club." In the monastic life, costly grace was still present; the monks knew the meaning of discipleship, and what it meant to give up one's life for Christ. This also, however, became destructive because there was a maximum and a minimum standard of Christian obedience. The monastic life, in turn, became the justification for the secular life: "Whenever the Church was accused of being too secularized, it could always

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[73] Ibid., 45.
[74] Ibid., 58-9.
[75] My italics
[76] Ibid., 50.

point to monasticism as an opportunity of living a higher life within the fold, and thus justify the other possibility of a lower standard of life for others." As a result, monasticism, whose goal was to preserve Christianity and the costliness of grace, actually had quite the opposite effect in that it made secularization appear to be okay for everyone else. Because of this, monasticism put itself above the rest of Christianity, claiming itself as genuine.[77] Thus Christianity was left with a few monastic disciples of Christ and a large pool of supposedly justified believers in cheap grace. Christians were left without a solid sense of how they could live outside of the cloister as disciples of Christ.

Bonhoeffer does an in-depth analysis of the Sermon on the Mount, in which he explains how we must give up everything to be disciples of Christ. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." They have nothing; they have given up everything for God, even themselves. It is because of this humility that the kingdom draws on them, just as Luther explains in his *Commentary on the Magnificat*. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Bonhoeffer defines mourning as refusing to be a part of the world or to lower oneself to the standard of the world. Those who mourn are bearing sorrow and suffering for the sake of Christ, and are able to accomplish this with Christ's strength, not their own.[78]

There are some similarities and differences mentioned in this chapter and the last between Luther and Bonhoeffer. We will now discuss more particular ways in which Luther's theology of faith and works and his doctrine of justification line up with Bonhoeffer's theology of costly grace and responsibility to our neighbor. The goal here is to alleviate the problem in Lutheranism that tempts us to view Lutheranism as a reason to be "easy" Christians who rely on cheap grace, as it may seem Luther's doctrine of justification suggests we do.

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[77] Ibid., 47.
[78] Ibid., 107-8.

The first comparison to be made is regarding the discussion of vocation. We all have a particular vocation or calling. In Luther's treatise, *To the Christian Nobility*, he says that all of these particular callings are of the spiritual estate because they all use one's God-given gifts, and this is what makes us all a part of the Body of Christ. We also have a Christian vocation (to which we referred earlier) to love our neighbor and to follow Christ. Bonhoeffer argues that it is through the encounter with Jesus that we hear the call of God and the calling to be in fellowship with Jesus. The call we receive from grace brings us into this fellowship. "It is only through the call which I have heard in Christ, the call of the grace which lays claim to me, that... I can live justified before God. From the standpoint of Christ this life is now my calling; from my own standpoint it is my responsibility."[79] Through the Christian vocation discussed in Luther, we see a calling and a responsibility to our neighbor. The grace we receive from God drives us to our calling to earthly duties, such as to love and serve our neighbor, and also to live in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Bonhoeffer's emphasis regarding vocation is primarily on responsibility: responsibility to our neighbor and responsibility to God. By doing good (specifically, our calling) in relation to Christ, we serve more than just our immediate neighbor. We serve a greater good. Bonhoeffer uses the example of a doctor. If I am a doctor, I am obviously serving my patient, but at the same time I am serving the medical field and the science and knowledge of truth in general. It is in serving this whole that my responsibility is being carried out, though it is present and manifest in the immediate care of my patient. So it is with Christ and our Christian vocation or responsibility. I love and serve my neighbor, but at the same time I am serving the Body of Christ, I am spreading God's Word and love, and I am following Christ and doing God's will.

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[79] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 251.

"Vocation is responsibility and responsibility is a total response of the whole man to the whole of reality; for this very reason there can be no petty and pedantic restricting of one's interests to one's professional duties in the narrowest sense."[80] This brings us back to Luther's discussion of our particular vocation. Every calling, be it a stock analyst or a corn farmer, is a part of the spiritual estate because it is serving a larger good: the Body of Christ. All that we do is to the glory of God.

The next comparison we will make is another facet of the "love your neighbor" notion. Luther discusses in his *Whether One Should Flee From a Deadly Plague* how far one must go to help one's neighbor, and what it means to do so. He emphasizes that by loving and serving a neighbor we are really serving Christ.[81] Bonhoeffer discusses loving our neighbor in a similar way in his chapter in *Cost of Discipleship* called "The Brother." The "brother," he says, is everyone. There is no limit to who our brother or neighbor is, for indeed Christ can be found in any face, even those that we seem to hate. If we hate any of our brothers and sisters, we cannot love God, because hating a brother or sister means hating Christ.[82] Bonhoeffer also discusses this in his chapter, "The Enemy – the 'Extraordinary.'" To love one's enemy is the uncompromising definition of love. It is the ultimate in love. We are to love everyone, even our enemies, as Jesus loves us, for indeed in loving our enemies, we are loving Jesus.[83] "Who," asks Bonhoeffer, "deserves our love more than our enemy? Where is love more glorified than where she dwells in the midst of her enemies?"[84] Luther also discusses this sort of humility – that is, the humility that comes from the ability to love even those who may seem in our eyes

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[80] Ibid., 254.
[81] See ch. 3
[82] Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 127-9.
[83] Ibid., 147.
[84] Ibid., 148.

undeserving of our love – in his *Two Kinds of Righteousness*. God is not too good to love us, says Luther, so we are certainly not too good to help our neighbor. Since everything that we do is actually God working through us (just as the Sacraments are God's works through human hands), we are in no place to discern who is worth our love and service and who is not.

It seems from these comparisons that Luther and Bonhoeffer's theologies are very similar regarding love for our neighbor. The question to which we must return concerns responsibility. Does Luther advocate responsibility to our neighbor? His theology says that we ought to love our neighbor and that it is our vocation to serve and love them, but do we have a duty, a responsibility, to said neighbor? Bonhoeffer clearly states this, and the connotation of responsibility is considerably more active than what Luther gives us. Could this be a discrepancy between them? The distinction here is in that of the difference between "freedom from" ("lord of all, subject to none") and "freedom for" ("dutiful servant to all, subject to all"). Bonhoeffer distinctly discusses "freedom for": this freedom implies action. We are subject to all, we have a responsibility to all, we serve all. It is similar to the concept of works serving as discipline for our imperfect bodily nature.[85] Luther's theology also encompasses "freedom from," which is a more passive freedom. At least in *Freedom of a Christian*, his theology describes in more detail our justified spiritual nature; because Christ fulfilled the law for us, we are now free from the law as well as from sin, death, and the devil. We are free – this does not have a connotation of responsibility like "freedom for" and the theology of Bonhoeffer. Is this a discrepancy? No, because Luther also advocates "freedom for," in addition to "freedom from." We are at once lord of all *and* servant to all. Where Bonhoeffer's theology focuses primarily on

[85] See ch. 2

the responsibility aspect of freedom, Luther focuses on both the responsibility and the freedom from sin aspects of freedom.

This description and the previous comparisons show that the two theologians are on the same page on this issue, despite the differing terminology. Although Luther does not explicitly say we have a responsibility to our neighbor, it is implied in his discussion of vocation. All that we do is of the spiritual estate, and is thus serving God and a greater good. It is also implied when he states that Christ is in our neighbor, as in *Whether One Should Flee From a Deadly Plague*. If we belong to Christ and have indeed given our lives to and for Christ, as Luther says we do, then we do have a responsibility to each of our neighbors, no matter how far away they are in body or spirit. Our responsibility to Christ – that is, the responsibility we take on when we give up our lives and become disciples of Christ – translates to the earthly sense of loving and serving our neighbor. In doing this, we love and serve Christ.

CONCLUSION

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

We have defined Luther's doctrine of justification and examined the place of works both pious and charitable in the life of a Christian. We have seen how Bonhoeffer's context shaped him and how, in particular, his theology was shaped by and is similar to Luther's. And finally, we have realized how Luther's discussion of vocation and Bonhoeffer's discussion of responsibility are ultimately to the same end, and that they can, in fact, be reconciled. Examining the theologies of Martin Luther and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in juxtaposition has also allowed us to clear up many of the questions posed in the introduction of this paper, primarily: how do we grasp such a bigger-than-life concept as faith, how do we relate Luther's 500 year old theology and Bonhoeffer's 60 year old theology to our lives today in the 21st century, and how do we avoid interpreting Luther's theology as one of cheap grace, in turn making us lazy Christians?

The third question was answered extensively in the previous section, so we will focus on the former two questions. The first question was answered in terms of works. In defining Luther's doctrine of justification – justification by grace and faith alone – we saw how works spring spontaneously from those with genuine faith. As faithful creatures, we want to do good works, and so we do them, cheerfully and to the glory of God, not for our benefit but for the benefit of our neighbor. We also participate in the Sacraments and can see and better understand God's love for us through these gifts. Sacraments are God's works, administered by human

hands. Because we are *simul iustus et peccator*, works both charitable and pious can serve as a sort of discipline for our bodies, to make our sinful bodily nature more like our justified spiritual nature. Thus, works are an essential component in having true faith, and they can help us to understand our personal faith better because they are a spiritually influenced manifestation of faith here on earth.

The second question regarding the context of these two theologians requires some further explanation than was included in this paper. Both Luther and Bonhoeffer's contexts were discussed, and Bonhoeffer's was used to show the formation of some of his theology, but we did not discuss how the two relate to each other. The two contexts – that of 16th century pre-Reformation, plague-ridden Europe and 20th century Nazi Germany – are very different, so how can they be compared, and how can either of them be used in our 21st century context? Because we are dealing here with a problem that exists in present day Lutheranism, this must be considered; the theologies we use must be applicable today. Although Luther and Bonhoeffer had different contexts, they had a commonality: both dealt with corruption. In Luther's case, this was corruption of the Church, due largely to the Pope, and in Bonhoeffer's case it was corruption of the state, primarily manifest in the reign of Hitler, and the Church's inability to respond to the situation. Both chose to deal with this corruption by using Christ and the Word. In this way, both Luther and Bonhoeffer have a timeless aspect about them, one that is relevant regardless of the time to which it is applied. Christ and the Word are timeless, as are these theologies. Their focus on how to live in the world and on how God works in the world is something that can always be studied and related to the present.

Where, then, do we go from here? What does all this mean for us today? How are we to use this? Perhaps it is appropriate to expand on an aspect of Bonhoeffer's theology, particularly

that found in *Letters and Papers From Prison*, to which we referred once before. Our earthly calling as Christians, he writes, is to live completely *in* the world, profane as it is. "[I]t is only by living completely in this world," writes Bonhoeffer, "that one learns to have faith." He says that by "living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities," we "throw ourselves completely into the arms of God."[86] This is what it means to be a disciple. We must live *in* the world, in all its hatred, homicides, and deception, and still be disciples and witnesses for God. We must live *in* the world, but not *as* the world, that is, we must not accept nor become a part of the profanity. We must love and serve our neighbor, even in the midst of such darkness. This is the implication of the call to Christ.

These realizations by no means leave us without further questions, however. Although I have done my best to present the theology behind doing good works, I do not think that the point at which they become a part of faith can ever be entirely clear. We know that doing good works and responsibility to our neighbor do not *create* justification; we do not do works or fulfill our duty to our neighbor in order to be saved or justified, nor to go to heaven, nor to accomplish whatever spiritual goal we hope to achieve in this life or the next. Is it accurate, then, to say that faith comes first, and is then followed by justification and doing good works? Or must faith already be present to do what Luther or Bonhoeffer would consider a "good work"? Is the faith that would be present before the performance of good works considered somehow un-genuine until it is accompanied by good works? Are works proof of faith, even if they are not a means to faith? Can the unfaithful perform good works, and if so, will this ultimately lead them to faith? A chronological distinction regarding the "order" of works and faith cannot be made.

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[86] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 369-70.

Another question returns to the difference of terminology in the works of Luther and Bonhoeffer. If Luther indeed meant for us to be responsible to our neighbor, as this thesis argues he did, and as Bonhoeffer said we should, then why did he not use the word, "responsibility"? Why must it be left to our analysis 500 years later? There are a couple of points to take into account here. One has to do with context again. In both cases, we are dealing with translations of German into the English "responsibility." Bonhoeffer's German, however, is modern, while Luther's is from the 16th century. Perhaps there was not a parallel word to "responsibility" in 16th century German. The second point is that Luther does discuss responsibility in other sources, just not with that terminology. In *The Small Catechism*, for example, he discusses our responsibility to our neighbor. We are not to bear false witness to our neighbor, but rather, "we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light." We are not to steal from our neighbor, but rather we are to "help them to improve and protect their property and income."[87] Here Luther discusses explicitly what we ought to do for our neighbor, that is, he discusses our responsibility to our neighbor.

Regardless of the remaining questions, this thesis has aimed to clarify how we ought to live our lives as Christians in the world today, and how to avoid getting trapped in the lives of easy Christians. Our vocation, our responsibility, is this: to love our neighbor, even before we love ourselves, and in this way to put our neighbor before ourselves. We give up our lives to Christ, and thus receive lives *in* Christ. We give thanks for this in our service. We are to make our faith active in the world by loving and helping how we can. We use our God-given gifts to serve, and in doing so, we serve God. All that we do is not for our personal benefit, but rather for the sake of the call, and to the glory of God.

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[87] *The Book of Concord*, 353.

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