

The Justification of Christ as the Efficient Cause of our Justification

– the Narrow Lutheran Middle in the Controversy on Universal Objective Justification

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Introduction

Daniel Deutschlander has coined the term “The narrow Lutheran middle”. The true biblical and Lutheran doctrine on many points is a narrow Lutheran middle between two opposite errors. These opposite errors often end up looking much like each other.

My paper is an attempt to stay on the royal road – the narrow Lutheran middle.

My position on this doctrine has already caused a bit of controversy. I hope you will follow my argument and make sure you understand my position, before you pass judgement on it.

The background of this paper is a long struggle with the issue of universal and objective justification. When I became a member of the Freechurch, the sisterchurch of the LCMS, around 2001, I was introduced to this doctrine. I read Siegbert Becker and Seth Erlandsson. I also read Tom Hardt’s essay¹, which we also read in Roland Ziegler’s class on Justification at Fort Wayne in 2003 or 2004, when I attended Fort Wayne. Recently I found my notes from a class in seminary on justification, where we went through Tom Hardt’s essay. I can see that already back then, I struggled with the formulation of this.

When the ELDONA came out with their rejection of the doctrine and their condemnation of the use of the term, I had to study the issue again. I could see that a lot of their criticism was right, especially as it applied to the structure of the doctrine as taught by Becker and Erlandsson. However, I was and I am not convinced that they are right in their condemnation of the term itself, and especially in their rejection of the Easter-absolution, which Walther taught so strongly.

My paper should therefore not be seen as a defense of ELDONA’s rejection of Universal Justification and I want to make that crystal clear. It is not. I reject their position, and in fact when it comes to the crucial point about the effect of the resurrection of Jesus, I believe that ELDONA and Becker/Erlandsson are closer to each other, than I am to any of them.

My paper is an attempt to clarify what we mean by Universal Objective Justification and getting rid of what I consider mistakes having crept into this doctrine. It is also an attempt to find out where the real issue lies. I believe that the term objective justification in some ways has become a shibboleth, which means that the term itself has become the doctrine that demands loyalty and has become the starting point of a theological system.

¹ Hardt, Dr. Tom G.A. *Justification and Easter - A Study in Subjective and Objective Justification in Lutheran Theology* in Preus, Robert D., Kurt E. Marquart, John R. Stephenson, and Bjarne W. Teigen. *A Lively legacy: essays in honor of Robert Preus*. Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1985. p. 52-78.

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I admit that I am heavily influenced by Dr. Tom G.A. Hardt in my theology also on this point as I am in the view of the Lord's Supper. As we shall see that the two issues are also connected.

Definitions

While the definition of universal objective justification is what this paper is about, I think it is important to define the word "justification" before we go into the discussion of justification. Justification according to the Formula of Concord is correctly defined this way: *Accordingly, the word justify here means to declare righteous and free from sins, and to absolve one from eternal punishment for the sake of Christ's righteousness, which is imputed by God to faith, Phil. 3:9.*²

We should observe here first that justification is a forensic act of God. The mere earning of the right to be justified is not in itself a justification. Therefore, if universal justification were only about whether Jesus had acquired the right for everyone to be absolved and justified, it would not be a universal justification, if no actual forensic act took place prior to faith.

Secondly, we should observe that someone is justified in justification. Justification of a sinner normally means that the sinner is absolved from sin and enters a state of grace from a state of condemnation.

Thirdly, we should observe that the Formula is speaking here about justification of the sinner and explains this justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. These are synonymous in the sense of referring to the same thing in individual justification. However, they are not synonymous in the sense of meaning the same thing. Someone could in principle be justified because of his own righteousness.

The same thing could be said about remission of sins and non-imputation of sins. These are different terms used to explain individual justification, and the reason why we need these different terms is that they explain different things about individual justification. These terms do not by necessity apply every time one of them applies. This is a question, that must be resolved in every instance.

Therefore, when we ask whether, there is such a thing as universal, general or objective justification, we are asking whether a forensic act took place whereby the world/mankind in some sense was declared righteous and in what sense it was justified.

With this in mind, we will first look at how the term has developed.

Historical background – Huber and moravianism

The Huberian Controversy

The first one to introduce the term Universal justification was Samuel Huber. The Lutheran dogmaticians condemned him. No one claims to be Huberians, but the question is often whether those who use the term Universal Justification, are in line with Huber or not.

What was Huber's position, then? A quote from his writings:

But I called universal justification that by which God, considering the satisfaction of Christ, became favorably disposed toward the entire human race because of that satisfaction, and thus he accepted it just as if everyone had made satisfaction for himself, with the law having been entirely

² FC SD II 17 <http://bookofconcord.org/sd-righteousness.php#para17>

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*fulfilled. In this respect it is sensibly called universal justification, not first by me, but by Paul. In it only that act of Christ's merit and satisfaction is considered at the tribunal of God. However, people still do not possess justification by their own act unless they apprehend by faith that which was approved and ratified by God on behalf of all.*³

And again:

*This is the truth and the light of the Gospel, showing to us the work of redemption accomplished for all, so that we all can apply to ourselves by faith this benefit of redemption and the abolishment and remission of our sins. And so this is the foundation and the description, as of universal remission, so also of universal justification.*⁴

Hunnius attacked the position of Huber that all men had already entered a state of grace and that justification has already been conferred on all men:

*Huber professes such a justification, for the sake of which Christ has properly, actually and practically conferred redemption on the entire human race in such a way that sins have been equally remitted to all men, including Turks, and that all men (including believers) have received remission of sins, and that the whole human race has, in actual fact, been received into the grace and bosom of God.*⁵

Tom Hardt has made a thorough treatment of the controversy and summarizes the accusation thus:

*The accusation is: "1) He affirms a universal justification, whereby all men are equally justified by God because of Christ's merit, regardless of faith. 2) He denies faith's or the believer's individual justification to be by God or a special action of God, whereby He justifies only believers. 3) He states faith's individual justification to be only men's action, whereby they apply to themselves by faith the righteousness of Christ."*⁶

³ Hussmann, Andrew (translator), *Samuel Huber on Election and Justification: Translations from His Writings* p. 17.

<http://www.wlsessays.net/handle/123456789/2282?show=full>

⁴ Hussmann, Andrew (transl), *Samuel Huber on Election and Justification: Translations from His Writings* p. 20.

<http://www.wlsessays.net/handle/123456789/2282?show=full>

⁵ Hunnius, Aegidius, and Paul A. Rydecki. *Theses opposed to Huberianism*. Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 2012. i p. 57: Thesis 1 in "Theses concerning the Huberian universal justification of believers and unbelievers". See also Hardt p. 58: "In order not to anticipate or weaken the individual's justification as a real, divine act, they regard the use of the word "confer" in this connection as misleading; Christ cannot be said to have "properly speaking conferred redemption on all mankind." This expression is rejected, because "confer" in theological terminology is related to "apply" or to "accept" from the one upon whom something is conferred. Still they think that not even "confer" as such is impossible: "neither have we unconditionally rejected the expression 'confer,' even less censured it." Hardt p. 59: About the unbelievers Huber said: "...Therefore, although it is true that they have RECEIVED the remission of sins, nevertheless they are AGAIN condemned because of their negligence and are forced to pay for all their debts." Huber must reintroduce the Law through a new act of God, being the consequence of the rejection of the Gospel.

⁶ Hardt p. 57

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The basic problem according to Hardt is the simplicity of God⁷, which rules out the tension between law and gospel from which follows that the law and the gospel are made inefficacious words.⁸

It should also be mentioned, as is pointed out by Hardt, that Huber does not seem to have connected the idea of universal justification to the resurrection. The idea about Easter absolution seems therefore not to have come from Huber.

The development of Universal and Objective justification after Huber

The Swedish expert in Lutheran Orthodoxy, professor at Lund University, Rune Söderlund⁹ has claimed that the doctrine or at least the term universal justification arose among the Moravians.¹⁰

Söderlund points to Norwegian professor Leiv Aalens doctor's dissertation as evidence, that even the young Zinzendorf, founder of Moravianism, taught universal justification. Zinzendorf and the Moravians reacted against the legalism of pietism.¹¹ While pietism looked for signs of regeneration in the inner life of the believer, the Moravians looked to the cross for assurance.¹²

The Swedish Moravian preacher, Rutström¹³, made the teaching of universal justification popular in Sweden, especially through his songs. According to Söderlund, Rutström might have read Huber directly while also being spread by the German Moravians.¹⁴

In the discussions about universal justification in Sweden at the time of Rutström, another preacher, Anders Nohrborg¹⁵ defended a middle-way, where Christ was the representative head of mankind, who is absolved from the sins of the world in the resurrection. This middle-way left room for an individual justification as a separate forensic act.¹⁶

Nohrborg taught:

Had God not raised our mediator, He would thereby have let it be known that He was not yet satisfied with us. But now that Jesus is risen, God has thereby declared that He has been satisfied, wherefore also Jesus was in His resurrection justified as Mediator in place of the sinners. And in so

⁷ Hardt p. 60: *Behind all his arguments there is a conception that dominates his theology as a leading principle. That is the idea of the simplicity of God: the perfect God knows of no tensions between Law and Gospel. ... In the midst of Huber's theology stands God in His naked, simple and perfect essence as propitiated*

⁸ Hardt p. 60-61: *The Gospel in Huber's theology points to salvation and is no more the efficacious Word that justifies believers by the power of God. It also loses the Law as its counterpart, because it merely conveys the truth about the simple and perfect God's universal justification.*

⁹ Wrote his doctor's dissertation *Ex praevisa fidei* about the doctrine of election in Lutheran orthodoxy

¹⁰ Söderlund, Rune. *Läran om den universella rätfärdiggörelsen i teologihistorisk belysning*. In *Svensk Kvartalskrift*. Årg 55 (1979) p. 114-129.

¹¹ Söderlund p. 119

¹² Söderlund p. 120

¹³ Anders Carl Rutström 1721-1772

¹⁴ Söderlund p. 124

¹⁵ Anders Nohrborg 1725-1767

¹⁶ Söderlund p. 126, see also quotes in 1872-essay p. 23-24 in Marquart, Kurt E. (transl) *Justification – objective and subjective: A Translation of the doctrinal essay read at the first convention of the Synodical Conference in 1872.*

<https://archive.org/details/Justification-objectiveAndSubjectiveATranslation>

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far as the whole human race, when it is considered in general and as one person, was justified at the same time together with Him, it too was received, as a fruit of this justification, into God's covenant of peace, and thus the peace which had been lost in Adam was restored again between God and men.¹⁷

Nohrborg himself calls this a middle-way:

"It remains in this contemplation to make an application to ourselves, whereby the question at once arises whether all men were justified with Christ, since He was justified in our place. To deny this outright a priori would be the same as to rob us men of a great consolation, and it would at the same time militate against God's word, which expressly teaches thus. But if one were on the other hand to affirm this question in such a way that the conclusion should be drawn that now man needs no further justification, after he has been justified once in a with Christ, then this likewise militates against God's word, and lays the foundation of a carnal security. Thus there is caution required here, to hold the proper middle-way, so that the truth may not suffer loss on either side."¹⁸

According to Nohrborg, mankind is justified in the same way that it is raised with Christ - in a representative way. Nohrborg still teaches change of status from status irae to status gratiae when a man is justified through faith.

Development of the term

The Waltherian-Missourian version of Universal Justification

Rune Söderlund argues that the LCMS had connections to the Moravians in Germany and that the doctrine of universal justification entered the Missouri synod that way.¹⁹ Tom Hardt in his essay from the Robert Preus Festschrift however pointed out that the Synodical Conference referred to the Swedish Nohrborg when they began using the term in the 1872-essay of the Synodical Conference.²⁰

In his essay, Tom Hardt gives several quotes from Walther's sermons to prove that his view of general justification was that it happened at the time of the resurrection and that he upheld the efficacy of the means of grace:

Already in the year 1840 we meet the sentence: "As we were co-punished in Christ's death, we are again co-absolved from our sins in His resurrection."²¹

In a sermon of 1855 we hear Walther make the following formulation, which aptly summarized his view of Good Friday and Easter Day in their relationship to each other: "What the Son had given to the Father on Calvary, the Father now in the garden of the tomb gave to the world."²²

¹⁷ According to the translation quoted in the 1872-essay p. 23

¹⁸ 1872-essay p. 23

¹⁹ Söderlund p. 116

²⁰ Hardt note 75 p. 76-77

²¹ Hardt p. 61 quoted from C. F. W. Walther: Festklänge, Saint Louis 1892, p. 219 (Easterday 1840): "wie wir in Christi Tod mit gestraft wurde, so sind wir in seiner Auferstehung von unseren Sünden auch wieder mit losgesprochen."

²² Hardt p. 62 Festklänge, p. 248: "Was der Sohn auf Golgatha dem Vater gegeben hatte, das gab nun der Vater ira Grabesgarten der Welt."

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In 1860 Walther presided at the general synod of his church body. On this occasion, a doctrinal discussion took place concerning several theses "On the Close Relationship between the Doctrines of Absolution and Justification." The published proceedings undoubtedly give a clear picture of the views that Walther wished to be maintained within the church entrusted to him. During the discussions, a reference was made to the fact that within the Missouri Synod it had always been preached that: "Through the resurrection from the dead God has absolved all the world, i.e., set it free from sin; if now the world already is absolved and set free from sin, what is then the absolution or preaching of the Gospel in the church? Is it, too, a setting free, or merely a proclamation of the setting free that has already occurred? Answer: ... precisely through the Gospel occurs the conveying of what is in God's heart... a proclamation that really brings and gives the forgiveness... The absolution in the Gospel is nothing else than a repetition of the factual absolution which has already happened through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."²³

At the 1860-convention, it was also confessed that this universal justification was a representative justification:

*As surely as Christ has died, and died for all people, so surely God sees all people as dead for the sake of their sins. Christ's death has redeemed sins as death for all people. On the other hand, Christ is also raised in the stead of all people, thus all people are declared righteous in Christ; for Christ needed to be as the Righteous One for His person not by resurrection, but this has been done for our sake, He died and rose again in their place, and thus all are justified in Christ.*²⁴

Likewise, universal atonement was in no way confused with the justification that happened in the resurrection:

*Finally, the following was spoken concerning the first thesis: What Christ has done and what has happened to Christ should not be confused. His life, death, and resurrection was no absolution, but rather His resurrection from the dead.*²⁵

The old Synodical Conference did not see atonement and universal justification as synonymous. Rather, atonement was the work of Christ as our substitute and the resurrection was God's absolution of Christ.

Christ was our representative; He was punished for us, condemned and cursed, we in Him. He was cast in our place finally in the debtors' prison of death, however on the third day God let Him out again and made Him glorious. So little was Christ punished on the cross for His own person, so little

²³ Hardt p. 63-64, "UEber den innigen Zusammenhang der Lehre von der Absolution mit der von der Rechtfertigung" in "Zehnter Synodal-Bericht der Allgemeinen Deutschen Evang.-Luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio u.a. Staaten vom Jahre 1860," St. Louis, Mo., 1861, p. 34 ff. The author of the theses is said to have been Rev. Th. J. Brohm; cfr. Grace for Grace. A Brief History of the Norwegian Synod, Mankato, Minn., 1943, p. 156. 63 Id., p. 42: "Durch die Auferweckung von den Todten hat Gott die ganze Welt absolviert, d. h., von Sunden losgemacht; wenn hiernach die Welt bereits längst absolviert und von Sunden losgemacht ist, was ist denn die Absolution oder Predigt des Evangeliums in der Kirche? Ist sie auch ein Losmachen, oder bloss eine Verkündigung der schon geschehenen Losmachung? Antwort: ... eben durch das Evangelium geschieht das Bringen dessen, was in Gottes Herzen ist... eine solche Verkündigung, die die Vergebung wirklich bringt und giebt ... die Absolution im Evangelio ist nichts anderes, als eine Wiederholung der thatsächlichen Absolution, die bereits geschehen ist durch die Auferweckung Jesu Christi von den Todten."

²⁴ See the translation here <http://steadfastlutherans.org/2012/06/how-the-missouri-synod-once-handled-difficult-doctrinal-issues/>

²⁵ Ibid.

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*He was a sinner Himself, however, we were punished in Him, in Him we are also justified. God spoke the entire world righteous through Christ's resurrection.*²⁶

Here a universal justification is clearly confessed. But it is a representative justification. We were justified in him as our representative, just as we were punished in him. This is important.

Regarding introduction of the term "objective justification" into the Synodical Conference, Tom Hardt writes:

*It seems, as far as the investigations for this article permit us to see, that the terms were made known to Walther through an article in a theological paper in Germany, printed in 1867. Walther reprinted it in his *Lehre und Wehre* in the same year, and it can be said to throw clarity on the original meaning of the words. The article speaks of "justification of man before God both in objective and subjective meaning. "Objective justification affects "humanity as a collective (*Gesamtheit*), in which the particular individuals are not separate entities but are inherent parts of a totality, as generally the independence and distinctiveness of the individuals are only a very relative one, and the individuals, at any rate, are included in the vital unity of the whole organism."²⁷*

The expression was therefore used to define objective justification as something that happened not to individuals but to mankind as a class. It was therefore not used in order to say that subjective justification was not an objective forensic act, but only the subjective acceptance of a past event. Walther seems to have rejected the notion that individuals were justified in objective justification.

Universal justification is the topic of the 1872-essay of the Synodical Conference.

In thesis 5, the essay says

"As through the substitutionary death of Christ the whole world's debt of sin was wiped out and the punishment for it was endured, so also righteousness, life and salvation have been brought again for the whole world through Christ's resurrection and have come upon all men in Christ as the Substitute of all mankind".²⁸

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hardt p. 65. See note 69. H. Messerschmidt: *"Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung vor Gott in ihrer hohen Bedeutung für das sittliche Leben"* in *Zeitschrift für die gesammte lutherische Theologie und Kirche*, begründet durch Dr. A. G. Rudelbach und Dr. H. E. F. Guericke, fortgeführt von Dr. Fr. Delitzsch und Dr. H. E. F. Guericke, Erstes Quartalheft 1867, pp. 63-76. It is reprinted as *"Die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung"* in *Lehre und Wehre*, 1867, pp. 76-86. Walther omits – apparently for space reasons – the first page of Messerschmidt's article, which is introduced with the following appreciative words: *"Wir theilen diesen Aufsatz von H. Messerschmidt aus dem ersten Quartalheft der Guerickschen 'Zeitschrift' 1867, mit, weil er gewiss von jedem wahren Lutheraner mit Freuden gelesen werden wird,"* id., p. 76. ("We communicate this essay ... as every true Lutheran will read it with joy.")

70 *Lehre und Wehre*, 1867, p. 77 (= *Zeitschrift...*, p. 65): *"eine Rechtfertigung des Menschen vor Gott sowohl im objectiven als im subjectiven Sinne"; "Das menschliche Geschlecht als eine Gesamtheit, in welcher die einzelnen Individuen nicht für sich stehende, sondern der Totalität inhärierende Theile sind, wie denn überhaupt die Selbständigkeit und Abgeschlossenheit der Individuen nur eine sehr relative ist, und die Einzelnen jedenfalls in der Lebenseinheit des ganzen Organismus mitbepfasst werden."*

²⁸ 1872-essay p. 18

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Hardt's summary of Walther's position as compared to Huber's:

First of all, we do not meet the slightest hint in Walther's theology about God as being forced by His own essence to know of no contradictory tension between Law and Gospel. Walther at no place suggests that the unbeliever is no more under the wrath of God or that a second judgment is necessary to deprive the unbeliever of his first, universal justification.²⁹

Regarding this point, Hardt also points out that Walther in his edition of Baier's Compendium Theologiae explicitly points to Joh 3:36 and rejects Huberianism.³⁰

A second point of divergence is the fact that to Huber justification of the world is connected merely with a change within the Godhead, effected by the atonement, but to Walther with an external act of God, the Father raising His Son, turning it toward the world. To Huber atonement and universal justification are one; to Walther they are two different acts.³¹

This is also an important point, since later, atonement and universal justification have been mixed together.

This leads us to the third point, where the previous ones are concretely summarized: the attitude toward the means of grace. To Huber the means of grace do not effect a real justification but rather point to the only existing justification. To Walther absolution or the gospel is the very repetition of the Easter events, having the same power as the resurrection of Christ.³²

For Walther and the Synodical Conference, the terminology of universal justification was introduced in order to defend the means of grace, especially absolution. They needed to explain why a pastor could forgive sins.

When the term was used by Huber and later by the Moravians, it was not to defend the power of absolution. Rather, absolution was turned into a mere communication of an already established fact by both Huber and the Moravians.

Edward Preuss – Justification of a sinner before God

Edward Preuss, who became professor in St. Louis in 1869, had previously written a work on Justification of a sinner before God. This work has been very influential in the Missouri Synod even though Preuss after a short time in St. Louis converted to the Papacy.³³

²⁹ Hardt p. 66

³⁰ Hardt p. 67: *Not unimportant is the fact that Walther was well aware of Huber's theology and its dangers. In his edition of Baier's Compendium Theologiae Positivae, Walther inserted a page with very pertinent material concerning the Huberian controversy, dealing with the impossibility of saying that all mankind has received the remission of sins, pointing to John 3:36: "The wrath of God abideth on him."*

³¹ Hardt p. 66

³² Hardt p. 67

³³ From the introduction to the English edition: p. i: *Dr. Ludwig Fuerbringer's 80 Eventful Years includes an interesting vignette on the life of Dr. Edward Preuss. Preuss became a member of the St. Louis Concordia faculty in 1869, bringing with him from Berlin a considerable reputation for learning and accomplishment as a conservative Lutheran theologian. The breadth and magnitude of his scholarly attainments included the editing, among other things, of Gerhard's Loci Theologici, Chemnitz's Examen, and Baier's Compendium, the last of which Walther used in his classes until he completed his own edition. Preuss' monograph on Justification appeared in 1868. Impressed with these credentials Walther expressed great joy in having Preuss added to the faculty at St. Louis, where he quickly established the reputation. Preuss, Eduard,*

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This work gives us much the same picture of Justification as in the writings of Walther and the official writings of the Synodical Conference.

The first chapter is called Erlösung (=redemption) in the German original. Here it says about the work of Christ and the imputation of our sins to him:

In like manner was Jesus Christ so covered with the filth of the sin of all men as with a garment that nothing else was visible. True, in Christ there was no sin at all, 1 John 3,5, but on Him were all the sins of the world. Therefore we teach with Luther: Christ became the greatest of all sinners, for He took the place of all sinners and thus became guilty of all the sins of the whole world although He was holy and innocent.³⁴

Again:

Christ, however, clothed himself with a curse as with a garment, so that nothing else could be seen. Not for His sake, - for compared with Him even the heavens are unclean, - but for our sake, in our stead.³⁵

Then Preuss says about the justification of Christ:

God declared Him to be guilty of the sins of the world when, on the Cross, He numbered Him with the transgressors, Is. 53,12; Luke 22,37; 23, 32. 33, so He publicly freed Him, justified Him from all sin, when He raised Him up from the dead. That is what St. Paul means when he says that Christ "was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit." 1 Tim. 3,16.³⁶

He quotes 2 Cor 2:19 and says:

This is not the justification which we receive by faith, but the one which take place before all faith.³⁷

Then after quoting Rom 5:18 he says:

That is the great absolution which took place in the resurrection of Christ. For as the Father, for our sake, condemned His dear Son as the greatest of all sinners by causing Him to suffer the punishment of the transgressors, even so did He publicly absolve Him from the sins of the world when He raised Him up from the dead. And us in Him.³⁸

He then points to Romans 4:25 as evidence.

The second part is called Zurechnung, which was correctly translated as "imputation". This chapter by Preuss deals with what we would call individual justification, but it is simply called imputation.

and Julius A. Friedrich. The justification of the sinner before God: on the basis of Holy Scripture. Saint Louis, MO:

Concordia Publishing House, 1981. <http://www.angelfire.com/ny4/djw/PreussJustification.pdf>

See also R. Ziegler's article on Preuss <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/ZieglerPreussandWalther.pdf>

³⁴ Preuss p. 2

³⁵ Ibid. p. 3

³⁶ Ibid. p. 5

³⁷ Ibid. p. 8

³⁸ Ibid. p. 8

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Concerning the imputation, he says:

However, this justification, or imputation, or forgiveness - choose whichever name you will - is an act of God, which takes place in time. And, mark you, for every man individually. The justification of Paul did not come to pass at the Same time as that of Cornelius; but as often as a heathen forsakes his idols, or a Jew his Talmud, so often, and much more often does God justify. Come he must, of Course. For he that does not come, that is, "believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," John 3,36.³⁹

The technical term for individual justification as opposed to the general justification that happened in the resurrection is imputation, and Preuss underscores that it is an act of God that happens in time. It is not only a subjective acceptance of an already established fact.

The general justification in the resurrection was what constituted the righteousness, which was then imputed to individuals in individual justification.

Robert Preus' position and the theses on justification

Robert Preus confessed objective justification. It has been claimed by Gregory Jackson and ELDONA, that he rejected it in the end, pointing to his last work on *Justification and Rome* written in 1995 and published in 1997, where he said:

*When does the imputation of Christ's righteousness take place? It did not take place when Christ, by doing and suffering, finished his work of atonement and reconciled the world to God. Then and there, when the sins of the world were imputed to Him and He took them, Christ became our righteousness and procured for us remission of sins, justification and eternal life... But the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the sinner takes place when the Holy Spirit brings him to faith through Baptism and the Word of the Gospel. Our sins were imputed to Christ at his suffering and death, imputed objectively after He, by his active and passive obedience, fulfilled and procured all righteousness for us. But the imputation of His righteousness to us takes place when we are brought to faith.*⁴⁰

This quote has been used to claim that Robert Preus in the end rejected Objective Justification. I think this is based on the false assumption that universal justification is the same as universal imputation of the Righteousness of Christ. On the contrary, I believe that there is firm evidence, that Robert Preus believed that universal justification corresponds to Christ our Righteousness, while imputation of that righteousness corresponds to individual justification in the terminology of the Synodical Conference.

Already in 1960 35 years before *Justification and Rome*, Robert Preus wrote:

(B) Positively the nature of justification consists in the imputation of Christ's obedience. The first Bible verse for consideration is Rom. 4.5. Three questions may be asked in 'reference to this passage: (1) What does it mean to impute? (2) To whom is the imputation made? (3) What is imputed? ... In answer to the second question we need merely repeat the words of the apostle, 'To

³⁹ Ibid. p. 15

⁴⁰ Preus, Robert D. *Justification and Rome*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1997. Print. p. 72

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him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly.' The person who does not work is simply the one who does not depend on his works for justification, not one who lacks good works, for works always proceed from faith. The believer, then, is the one to whom this imputation is made, the believer who does not trust in himself. But what does he trust in?⁴¹

Here Robert Preus clearly taught that the righteousness of Christ was imputed to those who believe - the exact same thing he wrote 35 years later in *Justification and Rome*. There is no development on this issue. The claim of the contrary is based on a (false) assumption that justification and imputation of righteousness are synonymous wherever they are used.

The proof is to be found in the CTCR-theses on justification from 1983, which were largely written by Robert Preus, and which are the official position of the LCMS:

In thesis 22, Universal justification as forensic act taking place in the resurrection of Christ is confessed:

22. God, by raising His Son from the dead, has justified Him, declared Him to be the Righteous One, and in Him (i e , for the sake of His finished work of obedience and satisfaction) has declared (as proclaimed in the Gospel), or reckoned, the whole world to be righteous. (Rom. 3:24; 4:25; 5:18-19; 2 Cor. 5:19-21; Ap IV, 40-41; SA II, i, 1-3). It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That forgiveness of sins and justification for all have not been declared by God when He raised His Son from the dead, but have merely been acquired or made a possibility through Christ's atonement.⁴²

In thesis 23, Universal justification is confessed very clearly:

"23. By "objective" or "universal" justification one means that God has declared the whole world to be righteous for Christ's sake and that righteousness has thus been procured for all people

Note that the thesis identifies universal justification and the righteousness that has been procured for all people. Righteousness has been procured for all people through God's forensic declaration of justification in raising his Son.

Then, in thesis 25, this is said:

25. Christ's righteousness and all the benefits of His perfect obedience of life and death are imputed and communicated to the sinner individually through faith (sometimes called "subjective justification").⁴³

⁴¹ Preus, R. (1960) 'The Justification of a Sinner Before God: As Taught in Later Lutheran Orthodoxy', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 13(3), pp. 262–277. p. 271-272

⁴² Theses on justification: a report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, May 1983. St. Louis, MO: Commission on Theology and Church Relations, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1983. p. 12

⁴³ Ibid. p. 13

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Here, the imputation of Christ's righteousness is identified with individual or subjective justification. There is a real forensic act taking place in individual justification, whereby the righteousness procured in objective justification is imputed to the sinner and the individual sinner is thereby justified.

Robert Preus and the CTCR also made a clear confession on the issue on whether the unbelievers were still in a state of wrath. In thesis 37, it is also confessed that unbelievers are still in a state of wrath:

37. Just as it is necessary and Scriptural, according to the Gospel, to speak of God as having declared the whole world to be justified for Christ's sake and by raising Him from the dead, it is also necessary and Scriptural, according to the terms of God's law, to speak of sinners as not justified and forgiven, but condemned.... It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That Christ's work of atonement is of such a nature that even those who do not believe receive justification to life and salvation; That without faith one is not under the wrath of God and eternally lost; That it is proper to speak of saints in hell or to use similar expressions in describing justification.⁴⁴

I think this should also be seen as an indirect response to Kokomo and those who agree with the Kokomo-statement. Later the theses also confess the effectiveness of the means of grace in conferring forgiveness and not just communicating an already established fact.⁴⁵

Summary of the Waltherian-Missourian position

I believe that there is a position, that we could term the Waltherian-Missourian position, which is in line with the middle-position of Nohrborg and not related to Rutström, the Moravians or Huber.

I do not believe that theologians of the LCMS have always formulated themselves in accordance with this, and I am not sure that it is the position of the majority of the LCMS today.

But it seems to me, that it was the position of the early Synodical Conference of Walther and Edward Preuss, and which was also confessed by Robert Preus and the CTCR.

According to this view, general and individual justification are two distinct forensic acts of God. Jesus was justified as the representative head of mankind in his resurrection, but no individual except Jesus was justified in this forensic act. This corresponds to what the dogmatists termed "Christ our righteousness", and Robert Preus very clearly made this connection and turned it into the official doctrine of the LCMS.

General justification was not a change of heart in God happening on Golgotha, but a public forensic declaration happening in Christ as our representative.

This view was introduced to guard the means of grace, especially absolution. The purpose was not to turn the means of grace into mere means of communication of the message that individuals are already forgiven, but to absolve individuals on the basis of the general absolution that happened on Easter morning.

Those outside Christ are according to this view still under the wrath of God as testified by both the Baier-Walther and the CTCR-theses.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 17

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 18. Thesis 41

Beginning of Moravian influence

I do think that a subtle change did happen in the Synodical Conference where the Moravian-Huberian type of universal justification influenced more and more. Francis Pieper began to speak about an objective reconciliation as a change in the heart of God and he did not distinguish sharply between universal atonement and universal justification.⁴⁶ It is plausible that when the terms of universal and objective justification had been introduced, the next generations were not able to distinguish the view of Nohrborg from that of Rutström.

However, the big change happened in the Wisconsin Synod. Professor Meyer was one of the Wauwatosa-theologians. I believe that even when the doctrinal difference with the Missouri Synod had not been formulated, the Wauwatosa began speaking about universal justification in a more Moravians fashion at some point. I think it corresponds very well to the rest of the Wauwatosa-theology, where both the church, the ministry and the Lord's Supper is turned into abstractions.

In 1963, Meyer made a statement that later was incorporated into the Kokomo-Statement that undermined the means of grace and turned individual justification into a mere subjective recognition of the objective justification that happened in Christ:

“Paul then, in v. 17, turns to the individual sinners, saying: If any one is in Christ he is a new creation. Objectively speaking, without any reference to an individual sinner's attitude toward Christ's sacrifice, purely on the basis of God's verdict, every sinner, whether he knows about it or not, whether he believes it or not, has received the status of a saint. What will be his reaction when he is informed about this turn of events? Will he accept, or will he decline?”⁴⁷

As we can see from the quote above, the teaching of universal individual justification by Meyer leads to a type of preaching where the means of grace are left out and faith's role is to apply the gospel of the historical universal justification to oneself.

Meyer held to the interpretation of causative interpretation of dia in Romans 4:25, but he seems somewhat confused about whether our justification happened before the resurrection or in the resurrection.⁴⁸

Becker and Biblicum

A further development happened with Becker, Seth Erlandsson and the other theologians around Biblicum in Sweden.

Siegbert Becker went to Sweden in 1972 where he taught in Biblicum – an independent Lutheran theological institution in Sweden. It was made in protest against the liberal theological institutions in Sweden. Biblicum was also where the Lutheran Confessional Church in Sweden began which is a church in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod.

⁴⁶ See for example Pieper, Franz. *Christian Dogmatics*. Vol. II. Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1951. p. 348

⁴⁷ Meyer, J.P. Second Corinthians 4:1–6:10

[Prepared for the Milwaukee City Pastoral Conference of the Wisconsin Synod]

<http://www.wlsessays.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/3290/Meyer2Cor46.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> p. 23

⁴⁸ <http://www.wlsessays.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/3286/MeyerJustification.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> p. 4-5

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One of the influential professors at Biblicum was Seth Erlandsson. The background of Erlandsson and Biblicum was mainly in Bibeltrogna Vänner – a revival movement in Sweden that has been influenced by Moravianism and has a history of affirming Rutströms teaching of universal objective justification.

When Becker was in Sweden in 1972, he gave lectures that were later published in a book published by Biblicum in both Swedish and Norwegian.

Becker claimed in these lectures that God in his heart has already forgiven all men on account of the work of Christ.⁴⁹ He also claimed that there was no sharp distinction between universal atonement and justification.⁵⁰ He also gave the advice to say to unbelievers “you are saved”, “your sins are already forgiven”.⁵¹ Justification, according to Becker, is an objective fact, whether or not a person believes it.⁵² He said that the word offers us forgiveness by saying that we are already forgiven, and that we make this forgiveness our own by believing the message about God’s forgiveness, which is a fact independent of my view on the case.⁵³ He says, “When I believe this, I can say my sins are forgiven, and in this way the objective fact becomes a subjective reality”.⁵⁴

It is hard not to see Becker as being very close to Rutström and the Moravians. The distinction between objective and subjective justification is not between two forensic acts, but between an objective fact and the individual’s acceptance of this.

Afterwards, Seth Erlandsson edited a booklet in 1974 on Justification, in which the doctrine of universal justification was also defended.⁵⁵ In this booklet, Erlandsson also interpreted the dia in Romans 4:25 as causative. The resurrection happened because of the justification that had already happened on the cross.⁵⁶ Atonement and justification are identical according to Erlandsson, since justification was the immediate consequence of atonement, according to Erlandsson.⁵⁷

Erlandsson wrote in the booklet *“He who has the forgiveness of sins in an objective sense can nevertheless be without it in the subjective sense. Without the gospel, without the means of grace, he is blind in relation to the gift, he doesn’t see it.”*⁵⁸

The means of grace do not effect a justification that is received in faith, according to Erlandsson. Rather subjective justification is only the subjective acceptance of the objective justification on the cross. In other words, subjective justification is not really a forensic act and therefore not a real justification.

I am not sure whether Becker or Erlandsson influenced the other one most, but it seems to me that Beckers version of universal justification fit right in with the Moravian type of the Swedish theologians with a background in Bibeltrogna Vänner.

⁴⁹ Becker, Siegbert, *Skriften og Saligheden*. Chronos Forlag 1972. Stiftelsen Biblicum. p. 67

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 68

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 70

⁵² Ibid. p. 71

⁵³ Ibid. p. 73-74

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 74

⁵⁵ Erlandsson, Seth. *Rättfärdiggörelsen*. Uppsala: Biblicum, 1974.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 16

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 14

⁵⁸ Erlandsson p. 23-24

Hardts and Söderlunds criticism of Becker and Biblicum

Professor in Lund Rune Söderlund was one of those who attacked Becker and Biblicum.

Söderlund mistakenly equates the Waltherian-Missourian view with the one of Becker and Erlandsson on universal justification. Hardt corrects this mistake by pointing out that the 1872-essay quotes Nohrborg in support and not Rutström. While Söderlund rejects the terminology of objective and subjective justification, he nevertheless accepts Nohrborgs teaching as acceptable within Lutheran Orthodoxy.

Söderlund attacks Biblicum`s use of the Calov-quote from Biblia Illustrata on Romans 4:25, which says either that God absolved us in him or absolves us in him.

According to Söderlund as well as Rydecki and ELDONA, absolvit should be translated in the present tense.⁵⁹

Söderlund then claims, that while Biblicum claimed that Osiander`s problem was that he denied objective justification, the real issue was his denial the objectivity of the justification that happens through faith. This justification is made purely subjective by Osiander just like it is for Biblicum, when they use the terminology of objective and subjective justification.

This could all have been mere terminological, but Söderlund claims that Biblicums are denying that anything happens objectively speaking when a person comes to faith. Biblicums teaching on subjective justification according to Söderlund indicates that subjective justification is a mere recognition of the objective justification that has already happened. Nothing seems to happen on God`s part in “subjective justification”.⁶⁰

The point of controversy in the modern (Scandinavian) debate about universal justification according to Söderlund can therefore not be answered only by asking whether there is such a thing as universal justification. One must also ask whether a person`s sins are imputed to him in the state of unbelief and if he is under the wrath of God. One must ask whether the justification, which happens when a person comes to faith, includes an objective change in God`s way of looking at that person.⁶¹

Tom Hardt also attacked Becker. It happened in a footnote in his essay in “A Lively Legagcy”. Unlike Söderlund Tom Hardt defends the terms universal justification and objective justification. One should not fail to see that his essay on Justification and Easter is a long defense of the teaching of Walther and the Synodical Conference as being in line with Luther and Lutheran orthodoxy.

In spite of this, Tom Hardt actually ends up attacking the same issues in the approach of the LBK and Siegbert Becker as Rune Söderlund did, and he defends the middle position of Nohrborg, which he also think is the position of Luther, Walther and the early Synodical Conference.

Hardt has three points about S. Becker in the last footnote in his Essay:

⁵⁹ Söderlund p. 123

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 128-129

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 129

*“1) Universal justification is identified with what happens in God’s heart at the atonement on Good Friday, not with the justification of Christ in His resurrection as an external act of God, directed towards the world.”*⁶²

No matter how to understand the grammatical issue here, the problem seems to be, that atonement and justification are identified and that justification is tied directly to Christ’s work on the cross with his resurrection as only the declaration of this.

*2) Absolution and the means of grace are downgraded to means of communication and deprived of their efficacy.... S. Becker. op. cit., p. 55, interprets John 20:23: “they are remitted unto them” as a reference to what has already happened at Calvary, p. 56: “The meaning is this: ‘They have been forgiven completely in the past, and they still are forgiven now. This means that when we preach the message of the Gospel, we do not effect the remission of sins through our sermon.’” (tr. from Swedish).*⁶³

Hardt attacks Becker’s denial that absolution and the gospel effects any forgiveness. They are according to Becker only communicating knowledge of forgiveness that has already happened. Compare this to the receptionism of the WELS and the LBK/Biblicum in Sweden, which Tom Hardt also fought hard against.

This charge also seems to be correct in light of what Becker taught in Sweden. The means of grace did not actually confer forgiveness, but informed about the forgiveness that man could subjectively accept.

Later Staffan Bergman also criticized Biblicum and claimed that there was a connection to filipism, where salvation is always seen in past tense. He noted the connection to the view on the means of grace, and especially The Lord’s Supper among the LBK.⁶⁴

⁶² Hardt p.77 in note 75. Hardt continues, quoting Becker (Swedish edition): *S. Becker: Skriften och saligheten, Landskrona 1972, p. 55 (tr. from Swedish): “We do not differ sharply between the expressions ‘universal atonement’ and ‘universal justification’ ”; S. Erlandsson: “Den rättfärdighet som gäller inför Gud,” Biblicum 4/1974, p. 16: (tr. from Swedish): “Here in Rom. 4:25 it is stressed that if ‘our justification’ had not taken place, Our Lord Jesus would not have left His grave. For as certain as our sins were the cause of Jesus’ being delivered to death (v. 25a), equally certain our justification was the cause of Jesus’ being raised from the dead (v. 25b). The Greek original text uses the same preposition dia in order to indicate the cause in both cases.” Universal justification thus takes place prior to Easter and is the cause of resurrection, not its result.” I guess one could understand dia as causative and still see the resurrection of Christ as the immediate effect of of this justifying verdict without moving universal justification to good Friday.*

⁶³ Ibid. *S. Becker. op. cit., p. 55, interprets John 20:23: “they are remitted unto them” as a reference to what has already happened at Calvary, p. 56: “The meaning is this: ‘They have been forgiven completely in the past, and they still are forgiven now. This means that when we preach the message of the Gospel, we do not effect the remission of sins through our sermon.’” (tr. from Swedish).*

⁶⁴ The occasion was the Swedish peoples Bible which had translated both the dia’s in Romans 4:25 as causal, as Meyer, Becker and Erlandson had also done. Staffan Bergman summarized the criticism of Hardt, but also pointed out the connection to Filipism, which also wanted to proclaim the gospel as a past event, which had to be received now. I Lutheranen Nr 3 September 1999: *“Just denna åtskillnad, som både Luther och Missourisynodens grundare Walther var måna om att upprätthålla, utvecklar Hardt senare i den mycket intressanta och upplysande artikelserien 1986 i NV om “Påskan och rättfärdiggörelsen”. Vad han där skriver om Rom. 4:25 ligger helt i linje med vad han skrev redan 1978 i artikelserien “Filippistisk och luthersk nattvardslära?” Den senare uppsatsen var en svidande vidräkning med den wisconsinskt färgade filippismen som frodades i kretsen kring Biblicum och doc. Seth Erlandsson. Hardt visar här att filippismen inte bara är ett ont som hotar nattvardsläran. Den påverkar synen på evangelium och nådemedlen över huvud*

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Just like the words of institution are seen only as information about the promise and the as effective, so also the word of absolution and the gospel in general is seen as information about a past salvation which can be subjectively accepted.

Just as Calvinism in practice is not far away from the arminianism it denounces, the Moravian affirmation of universal justification is not that far away from the pietist denial of the same. Both bypass the means of grace.

3) Universal justification is said to be the contents of the sermon to be delivered to the heathen without any previous reference to the Law. ...⁶⁵ Through the centuries Huber's missionary sermon: "Habetis gratiam Dei" resounds in the 20th century."⁶⁶

The tension between law and gospel as realities and not just as a pedagogical device is undermined by Becker and Biblicum as it was for Huber. This is a return of the Huberian error.

Kurt Marquart – one of the three editors of the Festschrift to Robert Preus – wrote at the end of Tom Hardt's essay:

One of the editors, however, feels duty-bound to record his conviction that at least some of the difficulties with the short citations from the late Dr. Siegbert Becker are basically terminological, and should not be taken to reflect his theology as a whole.⁶⁷

We should not fail to see, that the two other editors, John R. Stephenson and Bjarne W. Teigen, did not feel duty-bound to record this. And on top of this Marquart later changed his mind about this, when the consequences of Beckers doctrine was revealed in the Kokomo-theses.

The Kokomo-incident and Kurt Marquarts reaction

After Beckers and the WELS contact and fellowship with the LBK and Tom Hardts Criticism, a development took place in the US. The Kokomo-statement was released.

It was not a statement made by the WELS, but by laypersons, who criticized the form of the doctrine of Objective Justification and were later expelled from their congregation for this criticism.⁶⁸ It was however defended by the WELS-congregation – and later by Becker. These are the four Kokomo-statements:

taget."

<http://luk.se/LuthWebbArkiv/Luth1999-3.htm#HidénHardt99>

⁶⁵ This striking similarity to Huber's pastoral advice to the Wittenberg theologians, quoted above in our article, is found in Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 56 f. (tr. from Swedish): "In America it is very common that Reformed missionaries tell a man whom they try to gain: 'Are you saved?' ... It is, however, not likely that a Lutheran missionary would ask: 'Are you saved?', as the experience of conversion is not so important from his theological point of view. As he believes in universal redemption and in universal justification it is more likely that he changes the order of the words and says: 'You are saved,' 'Your sins are forgiven unto you.' He can say so to everyone, as he knows that it is true about everyone."

⁶⁶ Hardt note 75 p. 77-78

⁶⁷ Hardt p. 78

⁶⁸ See Curia, Rick Nicholas: The Significant History Of The Doctrine Of Objective Or Universal Justification <https://archive.org/details/TheSignificantHistoryOfTheDoctrineOfObjectiveOrUniversalJustification> p. 111 f

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Objectively speaking, without any reference to an individual sinner's attitude toward Christ's sacrifice, purely on the basis of God's verdict, every sinner, whether he knows it or not, whether he believes it or not, has received the status of a saint.

After Christ's intervention and through Christ's intervention, God regards all sinners as guilt-free saints.

When God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ, He individually pronounced forgiveness on each individual sinner whether that sinner ever comes to faith or not.

At the time of the resurrection of Christ, God looked down in hell and declared Judas, the people destroyed in the flood, and all the ungodly, innocent, not guilty, and forgiven of all sin and gave unto them the status of saints.⁶⁹

The review committee of the WELS saw these statements as inadequate, but they nevertheless saw them as doctrinally correct and those who rejected them as heterodox.⁷⁰ They do, however, clearly reflect the Moravian view of universal justification, in which all individuals are justified by universal justification, and subjective justification is turned into the subjective acceptance of an objective fact. If every unbeliever is already a saint, no forensic change of legal status happens in subjective justification.

Marquart reacted to Kokomo and wrote about his earlier judgment of Tom Hardt's criticism:

In light of Mr. Darby's citation of the late Dr. Siegbert Becker in support of the "Kokomo" theses (HD, p. 240), I now regret my editorial note (A Lively Legacy, p. 78) which attempted to shield Becker against criticism by Hardt on justification. However technically defensible my cavils may have been, the larger truth signaled by the "Kokomo" affair is that Hardt was right and I was wrong.⁷¹

We should remember that Marquart was the only one of the three editors of Robert Preus' Festschrift who criticized Hardt. And now he admitted that he was wrong.

Marquart also commented on the individual theses:

Thesis 3 is perhaps the least offensive, although in its context it is thoroughly misleading.

Thesis 1 confuses "objective" and "subjective" justification by saying of the former what may only be said of the latter, namely that sinners have "received" forgiveness. Objective justification means that forgiveness has been obtained for and is being offered to all in the Gospel—not that anybody has "received" it. The receiving can happen only through faith, sola fide.

Thesis 2, that after Christ's sacrifice "God regards all sinners as guilt-free saints" is simply false, St. Jn. 3:36; 1 Jn. 5:12.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 132

⁷⁰ Ibid p. 132

⁷¹ Marquart, Kurt: Clarifications on Objective Justification (1998). <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/justandsinner/rev-dr-kurt-marquart-clarifications-on-objective-justification-1998/>

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And Thesis 4 about hell's human denizens being pronounced innocent, given "the status of saints," etc. is fantasy. An unbiblical logic has driven biblical language senseless: what can it possibly mean to have (or, worse, receive!) "the status of saints" in hell? The grace and forgiveness which Christ obtained for all, had been offered to the dead during their life-time, in the means of grace (St. Lk. 16:29; Heb. 9:27), but are in no way given to the godless in hell, where there is no Gospel, hence no forgiveness (Large Catechism, Creed, 56).⁷²

The four theses turns universal justification into universal individual justification.

Marquart too sees the connection to Hubers understanding of universal justification:

The trouble with these repulsive "Kokomo" statements is that they ignore the pivotal significance of the means of grace and thereby abandon the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. That, too, in essence is what was wrong with Samuel Huber's proposal, early in the 17th century, of a notion of "universal justification," which was duly rejected by representative Lutherans at the time.

It was Huber's bad theology, which speculated about God's inner essence, and an alleged change there; for Walther objective justification meant "an external act of God, the Father raising His Son," thus "turning it toward the world"⁷³

Kurt Marquart has much the same criticism of the Kokomo-theses as tom Hardt had of Siegbert Becker.

Becker after Kokomo and Hardts criticism

Did Becker correct his doctrine after Tom Hardt's criticism and after the Kokomo-theses? He wrote a paper on Objective Justification in 1982⁷⁴.

Becker seems to have modified or clarified his view on the change in God, though it seems to me that the clarification serves to underscore the thought that we are individually justified in the death of Christ.⁷⁵

He does not seem to have changed anything else in his doctrine.

On the role and message of the gospel, Becker does not seem to have changed or clarified anything. He describes it thus:

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Objective Justification* By Dr. Siegbert W. Becker, [An essay delivered at the Chicago Pastoral Conference, WELS, Elgin, Illinois, November 9, 1982]

<http://www.wlsessays.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/331/BeckerJustification.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 7: *When Franz Pieper says that when God reconciled the world to himself a change took place in God he uses language that can be justified by biblical usage. The Bible in many ways says that God put away his wrath and turns from the fierceness of his anger. But we recognize that this is an anthropopathism, that speaks of God in human terms. We can only think of what happened as a change in God. But the change that takes place does not consist in this that his anger changes to love. Rather, if we abide by the actual words of Scripture, the change as we conceive of it took place in this way that God, who apart from Christ sees us as guilty sinners, in and through Christ now considers us to be not guilty because of the atoning work of the Savior. We can only conceive of that as a change in God's attitude toward us. What has really changed is our standing before God. God is always angry with sinners.*

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God tells us in the Gospel that he has forgiven us. Rather, he tells us that he has forgiven the sins of the world, that the sins of the whole world are covered (ἵλασμός) by Christ, that the sins of the whole world are taken away by the Lamb of God.⁷⁶

This is the same view on the gospel, Hardt criticized, namely that the gospel is a means of communication of a past fact. Again, it has the result, that subjective justification is viewed as the work of man:

When the ministers of his Word, both those who act in their capacity as public ministers and those who act by virtue of the universal priesthood, tell men that their sins are forgiven, there are really only two possible reactions to that message. Either it can be accepted by believing what we hear or it can be rejected in unbelief.⁷⁷

The role of the means of grace in applying forgiveness is not mentioned. In stead, the gospel is a message about a forgiveness that has already taken place and can be received in faith.

God says to us, "Your sins are forgiven." This is objective justification, and God's message to us is true whether we believe it or not. Faith makes God's message its own and says, "My sins are forgiven." This is subjective justification. The whole doctrine is just as simple as that.⁷⁸

Subjective justification, as Hardt pointed out is the mere reception or confirmation of the objective "fact", but it is not seen as a separate forensic act whereby the sinner is declared righteous.

Becker in this essay also comments directly on the Kokomo-statement:

On the first statement, Becker says:

The first statement can easily be misunderstood and has caused confusion. The Bible never uses the word saint, when applied to human beings, in any other sense than a converted Christian. Those who have read those words in the context of John Meyer's Ministers of Christ know what Prof. Meyer wanted to say in that sentence. The key words are "objectively speaking" and "status." Meyer simply wanted to say that the sins of all men are forgiven. "Status of a saint" to him meant "the legal state of a forgiven sinner." While we may disagree with his use of English, we cannot as biblical theologians surrender what he wanted to say. Nevertheless, it would have been better if he had not used the word saint in that connection, especially since the word "received" is also a word that is often used in describing the function of faith in justification. We receive the status of saint for ourselves or accept forgiveness through faith.⁷⁹

While Becker does not like the statement, he basically agrees with it. The legal status of every sinner has already changed from a state of wrath to a state of grace. It is hard to see any change from a state of wrath to a state of grace, if everyone have already received the status of a saint.

On the second statement, Becker says:

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 12

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 12

⁷⁸ Ibid. P. 12-13

⁷⁹ Ibid. P. 14

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However, since our holiness, as Augustine says, consists in sin's remission rather than in life's perfection, we could say that when God forgave the sins of the whole world he regarded all sinners as guilt-free, but if they are guilt-free we might also say that they are considered sinless in the sight of God. But a sinless person is a holy person, a saint. The fact that unbelievers do not consider themselves to be forgiven does not change the truth of God's Word that tells us that God does not impute the sins of all men to them, or that through one man justification has come upon all men.⁸⁰

Again, subjective justification as real forensic act is denied and turned into at subjective acceptance of a fact that is already in place. Because of this, the means of grace are turned into means of communication.

On the third Kokomo-statement, Becker wrote

I would have preferred it if the words "individually" and "individual" had not been used. But the meaning of the statement is nevertheless clear and correct.⁸¹

Again, this is a matter of preference for Becker, but not doctrine. He does confess that all individuals have been justified, and the gospel is the message, that they should just recognize his. The means of grace are means of communication and not means designated to actually deliver forgiveness.

Becker also defends the fourth statement:

Even the fourth statement can be defended even though it leaves much to be desired. As we have said, the statement is not drawn from a WELS source. If it is true that God has forgiven the sins of the world then it is also true that he forgave the sin of Judas. When Jesus called Judas "friend" in the garden, he was in effect treating him as a forgiven sinner.⁸²

One should compare this to thesis 37 in the CTCR-theses on Justification, which explicitly reject the notion that there are saints in hell. But again, Becker's support of the content shows that his view of objective justification is that it is an actual bestowal of forgiveness on all individuals, even those in Hell.

Two different doctrines called universal objective justification

As we have seen, there are two different types of universal objective justification: A 1) Moravian type continuing in the tradition of Huber and Rutström which has dominated the WELS and the LBK in Sweden, and 2) a middle-way represented by Nohrborg and C.F.W. Walther and the LCMS.

Historically, it is not clear exactly when the Moravian type entered the Synodical Conference and the difference has not always been clear, but it got a hold in the Wauwatosia-theology of the Wisconsin Synod. Dr. Tom G.A. Hardt and the late Dr. Kurt Marquart are those in the Missourian tradition that have been most critical of the Moravian version. Robert Preus consistently taught the Waltherian position and made it part of the official teaching of the LCMS.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 14-15

<http://www.wlsessays.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/331/BeckerJustification.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 14

⁸² Ibid. p. 15

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The Waltherian version teaches two forensic acts of justification, a general and an individual, while the Moravian version teaches one forensic act – objective justification – while subjective justification is not a new forensic act, but a subjective acceptance and confirmation of the objective justification.

The Waltherian-Missourian doctrine has traditionally taught a general justification of the world in Christ as our representative followed by an individual justification through faith in the gospel, while the Moravian version has taught a universal justification of all individuals, which is revealed in the gospel and recognized through faith.

The Waltherian-Missourian doctrine teaches that the means of grace confer forgiveness and that absolution effects forgiveness of sins, while the Moravian version teaches that absolution does not effect forgiveness but only communicates an already established fact.

The Waltherian-Missourian teaches that faith is an empty hand that receives the forgiveness offered in the means of grace, while the Moravian version preaches that subjective justification is the individuals applying of the objective fact of justification to oneself.

The Waltherian-Missourian doctrine teaches that the unregenerate is under the wrath of God, while the Moravian version teaches that the unbeliever is already justified and only condemned because of unbelief.

My theory is this: The Moravians reacted to the pietists and the pietists reacted to the Moravians. Between them stood Nohrborg in Sweden with his middle-way that employed the terminology of the Moravians but without the baggage. In order to defend the doctrine of absolution the Synodical Conference adopted Nohrborgs middle-position and thereby the terminology of universal justification. They – like Nohrborg - combined it with the orthodox Lutheran teaching about the absolution of Christ as our bondsman as the efficient cause of our absolution (see later in this paper). However, because of the terminology and maybe the interaction with Scandinavians influenced by Moravianism, the baggage from the Moravians slowly came back into the Synodical Conference where it especially fit well with some of the tendencies in the Wauwatosa Theology of the Wisconsin Synod.

ELDONA-criticism of “Objective Justification”

The teaching of universal objective justification of the Synodical Conference has been criticized. I will focus on the recent criticism by ELDONA and pastor Rydecki.⁸³

A lot of the criticism of ELDONA is valid, if one does not see the difference between the two types of Objective Justification mentioned above. They are right in attacking the idea of a change in the heart of God (thesis 19) as being against the immutability of God. They are also right that at least the Moravian version of universal objective justification undermines the means of grace as I have already shown.

The basic assumption of the ELDONA is, that the Lutheran teaching of the Throne of Grace provides the same thing that we seek in the teaching of Objective justification and that this court-analogy is the Lutheran way of presenting justification. Thesis 8 says

⁸³ See paper by Rydecki, Rev. Paul A. *The Forensic Appeal to the Throne of Grace*. April 30 2013. And also *Theses on the article of justification*. 2013. Now to be found in *Theses on the Article of Justification: and The Forensic Appeal to the Throne of Grace in the Theology of the Lutheran Age of Orthodoxy*. Paperback – February 15, 2014. Repristination Press.

Yet, "Objective Justification" is a gross overstatement of this concept. The creation of such an alternate place of judgment in Christ has the same effect for the sinner (in terms of providing an already-established reality to which one can look and which can be given through the Means of Grace) as would the postulating of a forensic declaration of mankind's righteousness, but without the unfortunate baggage of the latter and in accord with the clear 'mercy seat' language of both Testaments (Cf. Exodus 25:22; Hebrews 9:5 and Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2, etc.).⁸⁴

The forensic declaration of mankind's righteousness in Christ is exactly what the middle-position advanced by Nohrborg, Walther, Edward Preuss and Robert Preus postulated. Christ was justified as the representative head of mankind. They did not postulate that this righteousness was imputed to the world, but that this representative righteousness was established by a forensic act in the resurrection.

When the ELDONA-theses say "...as would the postulating of a forensic declaration of mankind's righteousness...", I am nevertheless not convinced that they actually would accept the teaching of such a forensic declaration of mankind's righteousness through the resurrection of Jesus. Their treatment of the absolution of Christ in thesis 11 and 12 seems to deny it.

The crucial point here is, whether this Throne of Grace has been established as a reality only in the sense of being merited or whether it has also been declared by a forensic act. Was the justification of Christ only a vindication of Christ or was it also a justification of him as our bondsman and representative who had taken our responsibility and debt.

While the idea of the Mercy Seat is important in Lutheran Orthodoxy, the idea of an already existing alien righteousness that is imputed through faith is just as important and it is mixed with the court-room-analogy. The weak point of ELDONA's criticism of universal justification is the exclusive focus on the Mercy Seat.

The biblical and Lutheran doctrine

We need to look at the issue through the lens of the Biblical texts and the position of the Confessions and our Lutheran fathers also.

The criminal-law-court-analogy and the bookkeeper-analogy are mixed together in the Formula's definition of justification through faith:

Accordingly, the word justify here means to declare righteous and free from sins, and to absolve one from eternal punishment for the sake of Christ's righteousness, which is imputed by God to faith, Phil. 3:9.⁸⁵

What is then righteousness that is imputed? The formula answers

Therefore, the righteousness, which is imputed to faith or to the believer out of pure grace is the obedience, suffering, and resurrection of Christ, since He has made satisfaction for us to the Law, and paid for [expiated] our sins.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Thesis 8

⁸⁵ FC SD III 17 <http://bookofconcord.org/sd-righteousness.php#para17>

⁸⁶ FC SD III 14 <http://bookofconcord.org/sd-righteousness.php#para14>

Therefore, not only the death of Christ, but also his resurrection is part of the righteousness that is imputed to faith. How can that be?

Representative union and resurrection in Romans 4:25

Romans 4:25 has not been used to proof universal justification, but rather objective justification- the idea that justification happened already in the work of Christ.

²³ Οὐκ ἐγράφη δὲ δι' αὐτὸν μόνον, ὅτι ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ·

²⁴ ἀλλὰ καὶ δι' ἡμᾶς, οἷς μέλλει λογίζεσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν ἐγείραντα Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἐκ νεκρῶν,

²⁵ ὃς παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν, καὶ ἠγέρθη διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν.

(Rom 4:23-25 BYZ)

²³ But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone,

²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,

²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Rom 4:23-25 ESV)

The traditional interpretation of διὰ is the one given in the translation here, namely that it designates purpose. This is how our confessions understand it (SA I I). This is also how Stöckhardt understood it. He saw our justification as the immediate effect of the justification, just as the expiation of our sins was the immediate effect of his being delivered up to die.⁸⁷

J.P.H Meyer, Becker and Erlandsson have interpreted it as a causative or retrospective διὰ as have Stanley E. Porter in his grammar.⁸⁸ The reason for the causative translation has been the parallel between the διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν and the διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν. Since our trespasses were not the goal of Jesus being delivered up, our justification cannot be the goal of his being raised, goes the argument. This has been used by Becker and Erlandsson to defend the idea, that our justification happened already on Good Friday in the heart of God and that the resurrection of Jesus was only the effect of that justification.

I am not convinced by the argument. The death of Jesus was not the effect of our trespasses. Our death was. And even if διὰ is to be understood as retrospective, a purpose or goal does exist before it is actually reached. Many of the examples given by Porter for the grammatical causal meaning would be classified as final cause rather than efficient cause in Aristotelian logic.

While I believe that the interpretation of Stöckhardt is plausible, I do not consider the text so clear that we can prove from this alone that our justification happened already at the time of Jesus' resurrection. But whether ἠγέρθη διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν refers to what we call universal or person justification, is not as important as the fact that our justification is a result of his justification as our representative. Moreover, I think that is the crucial

⁸⁷ See Stöckhardt, D.G, *Commentar über den Brief Pauli an die Römer*, St. Louis 1907. p. 213

⁸⁸ Porter, Stanley E. *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*. Sheffield: JSOT, 2005. p. 150.

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issue here. We do learn in 1 Tim 3:16 that Jesus was justified. The question is what this justification means for us.

PhD Lee Tankersley has written an article in Southern Baptist Journal of Theology, which treats this issue starting from Romans 4:25:

One must see Jesus as a “representative substitute” for believers and his atoning work as that of “inclusive substitution.” The combination of these two elements is crucial because unless the representative element of Christ’s work is acknowledged alongside that of substitution, the resurrection will seem to have little connection to a forensic atonement. The reason for this is that what Christ accomplishes in both his death and resurrection is appropriated to believers via their union with him.⁸⁹

What Tankesley calls the representative element is often lost when dealing with the work of Christ. This might be one of the problems with both the Moravian version of universal justification and ELDONAs rejection of every use of the term. In both views, Jesus is merely seen as someone making an actual payment and not as the one who has taken over the debt itself as our representative and therefore is also the one who receives justification on our behalf.

Jesus died as our highpriest and the lamb of God. He rose again as the highpriest who had accomplished the work of redemption.

It is interesting, how Paul continues a few verses later in Romans 5:10: *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.* (Rom 5:10 ESV)

Again in 8:34, Paul writes: ³⁴ *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.* (Rom 8:34 ESV). In both verses the resurrection is seen as the source of salvation and justification.

This idea of the resurrection as the source of our justification is also treated by the Lutheran Domatians. When Martin Chemnitz explains Romans 4:25 in his Examination of the council of Trent, he says:

For that Christ might be our justification, it was necessary that He should not only bear the punishment of our sins, but that he should also fulfill the Law with so perfect an obedience that it might suffice for the righteousness of the whole world. And this whole action of the Mediator turns on this, whether the Father would accept that satisfaction and obedience of the Son for the whole world. But this the Father showed especially in this, that he did not leave in death, the Son, whom He had smitten for the sins of the people, but raised Him from the dead and set Him at the right hand of His majesty. And this is what Paul says, 1 Cor 15:17: “If Christ has not been raised...you are still in your sins,” that is, if death had overcome Christ and the Father had not accepted His

⁸⁹ <http://equip.sbts.edu/publications/journals/journal-of-theology/raised-for-our-justification-the-resurrection-and-penal-substitution/>

*satisfaction for us but had left Him in death, then we would not have remission of sins for Christ's sake.*⁹⁰

For Chemnitz it all turns on whether or not God would accept the satisfaction of the son. Without this acceptance in the resurrection, we would still be in our sins. Chemnitz points to 1 Cor 15:17 as evidence. So in the resurrection God showed to the world, that he had accepted the payment of Jesus on behalf of the world. Again, Jesus is seen as a representative who pays and is released from debt on behalf of mankind. And this is part of our righteousness as Chemnitz continues:

*When, therefore, Paul wanted to explain, Rom 4:24-25, what that righteousness is which is imputed to the believers without their own works, or what faith must apprehend that it may be imputed for righteousness, he says: To those who believe in Him who raised Jesus from the dead, who was delivered to death for our transgressions and was raised again for our justification. For that is our righteousness: (1) that the Son of God became Mediator for us, being obedient to the Father to death; (2) that the Father accepted that satisfaction and obedience of the Son for our reconciliation and propitiation, which he showed by his resurrection.*⁹¹

In other words, the righteousness that is imputed through faith is not only the satisfaction made by Christ, but also God's forensic reaction to this satisfaction in raising his son from the death, whereby he accepted the satisfaction and obedience of the Son.

As is pointed out by Hardt in the first part of *Justification and Easter*, the idea of the great Easter absolution of Christ, which constitutes our righteousness comes from Luther's description of the resurrection.⁹² If this idea is to be rejected, Tom Hardt's quotes and analysis of Luther need a serious answer.

⁹⁰ Chemnitz, Martin, and Fred Kramer. *Examination of the Council of Trent.*: Part I. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1971. p. 530

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Hardt p. 54: *For before three days have passed, our dear Lord Christ brings another, beautiful, healthy, friendly, joyous picture with Him, in order that we might learn the consolation that not only are our sins destroyed and strangled through the passion of Christ, but that we should be made righteous and eternally blessed through His resurrection, as St. Paul says...* (Rom. 4:25 follows). A little later Luther continues: *"For as we see in the first picture on Good Friday, how our sin, our curse and death are put upon Christ, so we see on Easter Day another picture, where there is no sin, no curse, no displeasure, no death but only life, grace, bliss and righteousness on Him. With such a picture we should establish our hearts. Then it is shown and given to us that we should receive Him in no other way than as if God has raised us today with Christ. For as little as you see sin, death and curse on Christ, you should so strongly believe that God wants to see as little (of sin) on you for the sake of Christ, if you accept this resurrection of Christ for your consolation."* *The Christian righteousness is again identified with Christ's personal righteousness, acquired through His resurrection, and presented to faith. Faith alone makes this righteousness present in the individual, but it exists prior to faith, and individual in the resurrected Christ, whose righteousness is a substitutionary one, as His passion was too.* The quote from the Housepostil is from St.L. 13a, 516; WA 52, 250, 36 ff.

And again:

Thus this central article of faith is nothing else than the article of justification, contained in the Easter message about Christ's vicarious resurrection, in the proclamation of our righteousness in the Risen One. Luther does not speak about the future, physical resurrection of the Christians in this connection, a teaching that is given a lower rank: "For as true as Christ has risen from dead, we have already gained the best and most excellent part of the resurrection, so that the corporeal resurrection of the flesh from the grave, which still remains in the future, is to be considered insignificant compared to

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This is also the idea behind Luther's treatment of the resurrection in his Galatians Commentary on the first verse:

Thus Paul, even at the first entrance, bursteth out into the whole matter whereof he entreateth in this Epistle. For (as I said) he treateth of the resurrection of Christ, who rose again to make us righteous, and in so doing he hath overcome the law, sin, death, hell, and all evils (Romans 4:25). Christ's victory, then, is the overcoming of the law, of sin, our flesh, the world, the devil, death, hell and all evils: and this his victory he hath given unto us. Although, then, these tyrants and these enemies of ours do accuse us and make us afraid, yet can they not drive us to despair, nor condemn us; for Christ, whom God the Father hath raised up from the dead, is our righteousness and victory (1 Corinthians 15:57).⁹³

This commentary is almost given a confessional status in FC SD III 67 on the issue of justification.

The righteousness of Christ which exists before faith according to Luther, is not only the death of Christ, but especially his resurrection.

Gerhard says in the much-debated place in his commentary on Romans 4:25:

"(3) With respect to the actual absolution from sin...He also condemned it, in that He punished our sins in Christ, which were imposed on him and imputed to Him as our bondsman. So also, by the very act of raising Him from the dead, He absolved Him from our sins that were imputed to Him, and consequently also absolves us in Him, so that, in this way, the resurrection of Christ may be both the cause and pledge and the complement of our justification. The following passages pertain to this: 1 Cor 15:17, 2 Cor 5:21, Eph 2:5, Col. 2:12-13, Phil 3:8-10, 1 Pet. 1:3"⁹⁴

ELDONA and also Söderlund have attacked the rendering of absolvit as absolved in older English translations. I am not convinced that they are wrong, but unlike Söderlund, ELDONA denies what they admit that Gerhard and Calov are saying. When ELDONA deny that Christ needed to be absolved from our sins and turns his resurrection into a mere vindication of him, they are wrong.⁹⁵

Christ was made sin for us. Gerhard uses the analogy of a bondsman, which is related to the bookkeeping-analogy of imputing righteousness.

This idea is also supported by other works by Gerhard:

this." Hardt p. 55 St.L. 10, 1133; WA 37, 68, 21 ff.: "Denn so das war ist, das Christus auferstanden ist vom tode, so haben wir schon das beste stück und fürnemeste teil hinweg von der auferstehung, das die leibliche auferstehung des fleisches aus dem grabe (die noch zu künfftig ist) da gegen geringe zurechen ist."

⁹³ Translation by Philip S. Watson. Handsworth Methodist College, Birmingham. Available at:

<http://www.lutherdansk.dk/1%20Galatian%201535%20-%20old/index.htm>

⁹⁴ Gerhard, Johann, Paul A. Rydecki, and Rachel Melvin. *Annotations on the first six chapters of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: in which the text is stated, troublesome questions are answered, observations are made, and passages that appear to be in conflict are reconciled as concisely as possible: with preface and general prolegomena on the Pauline Epistles by the same author.* Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 2014..

⁹⁵ Thesis 11, 12 and 29 in their *Theses on the Article of Justification: and The Forensic Appeal to the Throne of Grace in the Theology of the Lutheran Age of Orthodoxy.* Paperback – February 15, 2014. Repristination Press.

Because Christ arose, we are therefore no longer in sins, since most assuredly full and perfect satisfaction has been made for them, and because in the resurrection of Christ we are absolved of our sins, so that they no longer can condemn us before the judgment bar of God. ... This power of the resurrection of Christ includes not only the application of the righteousness that avails before God, but also the actual absolution from sins, and even the blessed resurrection to life, since by virtue of the resurrection of Christ we are freed from the corporal and spiritual death of sins. Some bring in here the apostolic teaching in 1 Timothy 3:16, God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit (namely through the resurrection by God the Father), that is, he was absolved of the sins of the whole world, which he as Sponsor took upon himself, so that he might make perfect satisfaction for them to God the Father. Moreover in rising from the dead he showed by this very fact that satisfaction has been made by him for these sins, and all of the same have been expiated by the sacrifice of his death.⁹⁶

A bondsman (lat. sponsor) is someone who takes responsibility for another's obligation – usually economic obligation. Jesus did not just pay a debt he was not responsible for. He paid a debt that he had taken responsibility for. When he had made the payment, God accepted the payment and therefore absolved him, released him from debt.

If this could not be called absolution, neither can our absolution, since our sins are also paid for and Jesus was made guilty for our sins through imputation (Is 53:4-112; John 1:29; 2 Cor 5:21).

Christ was our bondman and our sins were imputed to him. He paid the price and was then absolved from the sins imputed to him. His death was the meritorious cause of his absolution and our absolution, that is right. But the resurrection of Christ is the efficient cause of our absolution, because he was absolved from our sins.

He died as our both substitute and representative, but he was raised as our representative, who received absolution on our behalf.

Stefanski wrote on the ELDONA-blog against the idea of Jesus being raised in our place:

But Calov (mimicking Gerhard) makes a vital point here that demolishes the argument that all men have been justified in Christ. "For it says that Christ suffered and died both for our sake and in our place. However, He rose again, not in our place, but only for our sake." Since Calov and Gerhard expressly denied the fundamental tenet of "Objective Justification" that Christ was raised and justified in our place, it is either truly ignorant or truly disingenuous for its modern-day proponents to continue claiming validity for their novel doctrine in these Lutheran fathers.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Johann Gerhard, Disputationes Theologicae [Jena, 1655], XX, p. 1450 [translated by Kurt E. Marquart]
<http://www.angelfire.com/ny4/djw/OJQuotations.pdf>

⁹⁷ <http://eldona.org/theses-on-the-article-of-justification-a-refutation-of-the-aclds-critique-part-five/>

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I am not sure that the Synodical conference use “in our place” the same way that Calov and Gerhard uses it here. Both Gerhard and Calov are here referring specifically to the meritorious cause, as Stefanski points out in the same blog-post.⁹⁸ No one has claimed that the resurrection is part of the meritorious cause of justification.

Everyone will admit that Jesus did not arise in our place so that no one else will rise from the dead. The distinction between substitute and representative may not have been made so clear by the old Synodical Conference, but I think the meaning is clear. God did not raise and justify Christ instead of raising and justifying us. Christ was justified on our behalf as our bondsman and this is the efficient cause of our justification and our resurrection.

Again, the analogy of the bondsman (sponsor) is used. Jesus not only paid our debt. He was first charged for our debt and made to pay, because he had taken over the responsibility of our debt. Therefore, God’s acceptance of the payment in the resurrection is correctly called an absolution from our sins, which is the cause of our absolution from our sins.

Quenstedt seems to have much the same idea:

*In Romans 4:25 the apostle joins the payment of punishment rendered for us through the death of Christ, as cause, with the justification i.e. the remission of sins acquired in Christ's resurrection, as effect. Paul is not dealing with renewal here—something he discusses at length in chapter 6 — but he is discussing the imputation of righteousness, as the whole sequence of the chapter shows.*⁹⁹

Justification and remission of sins was procured in the resurrection of Christ, because he was absolved and thereby the righteousness of mankind was declared by a forensic act.

Again, Jesus took over the full responsibility of our sins and paid the price on our behalf. The resurrection of Christ was God’s absolution of Christ, our bondsman and representative, and in that representative sense, a general or universal justification happened.

Even though ELDONA are right that Gerhard and Calov did not teach in so many words, that all men were absolved on Easter Morning, Gerhard and Calov did teach that Jesus was absolved from our sins as our bondsman and representative and the reformers and the age of Orthodoxy did see this as a representative justification, which in turn is the efficient cause of our individual justification.

Romans 5:18-19

The second classical proof text of universal or objective justification is Romans 5:18-19:

⁹⁸ Gerhard, *Annotations* p. 214: *Based on this foundation, one can easily respond to the question, Does the resurrection of Christ pertain to the merit that has been provided for us? We reply: The word “merit” is understood either generally as all that pertains to our justification; or specifically as that which Christ has provided for us and which we ourselves were obligated to provide. In the first sense, the resurrection of Christ pertains to merit, because the resurrection of Christ was required for our justification in the ways explained thus far. But with regard to the second sense, it does not pertain to merit, because, although Christ arose for our sake, He did not arise in our place, whereas he suffered and died, not only for our sake, but also in our place.*

⁹⁹ (Quenstedt, *Systema*, Par, III, C) Preus, Robert. *Justification as Taught by Post-Reformation Lutheran Theologians*. <https://archive.org/details/JustificationInLutheranOrthodoxTheologiansRp> p. 8

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Ἄρα οὖν ὡς δι' ἑνὸς παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα, οὕτως καὶ δι' ἑνὸς δικαίωματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς. (Rom 5:18 BYZ)

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. (Rom 5:18 ESV)

There are no verbs in this sentence, so the “led to” and “leads” are put into the text. The recurring εἰς can be understood as designating either result or purpose.¹⁰⁰

The noun δικαίωμα(τος) can either be understood as righteous deed or the sentence of justification or simply as righteousness.¹⁰¹ The use of the same noun in verse 16 suggest that it is used with the meaning of sentence of justification, but the parallel in v 19 suggests that it is to be understood as righteous deed. It is hard to ascertain the meaning of the in this context.

The parallel between Jesus and Adam in v 18 does not demand a universal justification of all individuals at the time of Christ's death or resurrection, since a universal verdict on individuals not yet born was not passed on Adam either. Rather the fall and condemnation of Adam led to a condemnation of all those that are in him, those whom he represents.

Lee Tankersley comments

It is not surprising, then, that Paul speaks of Christ's work as determinative for those whom he legally represents. Paralleling the theme regarding Adam's representative action, he notes that Christ's "one act of righteousness leads to justification resulting in life for all men" and that by his "obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:18-19). Where Adam is called the "first" man/Adam, Christ is called the "second" and "last" man/Adam (1 Cor 15:45-47). This implies that Adam and Jesus are unique; none other affects the world as these two.¹⁰²

Both Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15 describe Jesus not only as our substitute who takes our places, but also as our representative. Moreover, there is a difference. A substitute does something in the place of another, while a representative does or receives something on behalf of another. Jesus is both our substitute and representative.

Jesus is both our high priest, that is representative, and the sacrifice, that is substitute as the Hebrew describe him. He enters the tabernacle as our representative with himself as our substitute, and he leaves the tabernacle, not as our substitute, but as our representative, who has earned forgiveness with his substitutional sacrifice.

This corresponds very well with Gerhard's description of Jesus as our bondsman or sponsor in his comment to Romans 4:25. A sponsor is not just someone who pays a price for another, but someone who takes the obligation of another.

This is the tension of law and gospel, which is not only psychological or pedagogical, means to convert people, but a reality in God. In Adam, the first representative of mankind, the whole world stand condemned. In Christ,

¹⁰⁰ Porter p. 152

¹⁰¹ See Lenski, Romans p. 380 and Kittel, G. and G. Friedrich. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976. P. 222

¹⁰² See Lee Tankersley above

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the second representative of mankind, the whole world stand justified. If a man is in Adam, he is condemned. If a man is in Christ, there is no condemnation, but justification instead.

Both Jesus and Adam represent all men. Believers before the death of Jesus were justified and not condemned, and unbelievers after the death of Christ are condemned. Therefore, while Adam and Jesus are the first and the second representative of mankind, this does not mean that they represent to chronological parts of humanity. Adam brought condemnation for all mankind and Jesus brought justification for all mankind.

This again shows the tension of law and gospel that Huber, the Moravians and also Becker and Biblicum deny. Bot condemnation and justification exist for the whole world in the two representatives. If one is in Adam one is condemned. If one is in Christ, one is justified.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

We should also treat the third classical prooftext, 2 Cor 5:17-21 in it's context:

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

(2Co 5:17-21 ESV)

Here we should not the connection between verse 18-19 and 21. In verse 18 and 19 Paul says, what God did *in Christ*. In verse 21 he speaks about the imputation of our sins to Christ and his righteousness to us *in him*. God did reconcile the world in Jesus by imputing our sins to him, punishing our trespasses in him and forgive our trespasses in him.

But we were not in him except by imputation and representation. Scripture does not say that unbelievers are “in Christ”. In verse 21 it says ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ. (2Co 5:21 BYZ) with a ἵνα and a subjunctive. This might designate either purpose, result or both. Based on the normal use of the idea of being “in Christ”, I believe it must be understood as designating purpose here.

So compared to the two other chief texts, I believe this again confirms that a justification has happened in Christ. He has not only earned and acquired justification, but having represented us and taken our obligation and sins on him, he has made satisfaction and received forgiveness on our behalf.

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But it also affirms that this forgiveness and righteousness that God has declared in Jesus, was not conferred or imputed to anyone except Jesus at the time of the resurrection. God has already forgiven our sins in Christ, and when we are in him, we therefore become the righteousness of God.

This leads us to the discussion of individual justification or imputation.

Individual justification caused by the Resurrection of our Lord

Because Jesus was absolved from our sins as our representative in his resurrection, individual justification is to be raised with him. It is to partake in his resurrection, not in the sanctifying sense mentioned in Romans 6, but in a legal or forensic sense in which the absolution from our sins declared on our representative is also imputed to us.

In Colossians 2:11-14, Paul speaks about individual justification. Here Paul claims twice that the believer is raised or made alive with Jesus (v 12 and 13). In v 12 it is connected to faith baptism and in v 13 it is connected to forgiveness of sins, which is then founded on the canceling of our debt in verse 14. This legal demand was said aside by the death of Jesus on the cross, but our debt was cancelled by our being raised with Jesus, so the resurrection of Jesus is again made the cause of our justification.

Ephesians 2:1-7 has the same thought. Here the thought is connected to us being death in sin and children of wrath before we were justified. God raised us up and made us alive with Jesus. So from being children of wrath we were raised with Jesus. Again justification is to be raised with Jesus.

Paul connects this power of the resurrection to the righteousness we have by being found in Christ (Phi 3:8-11). In Galatians he explains what is meant by being in Christ: *26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* (Gal 3:26-27 ESV)
Being in Christ is to have put on the righteousness of Christ, which happens in baptism.

Therefore, there is no condemnation for those that are in Christ (Romans 8:1, which is the same as saying that those who are in Christ are justified). Outside Christ however, there is condemnation, and those that are outside Christ are not justified. They are not clothed in the righteousness of Christ. They are in Adam and therefore condemned through the universal objective condemnation brought forth by Adam, their representative.

This being in Christ, which corresponds to the imputation of righteousness, was called the formal union of faith by the late Lutheran dogmatician Hollaz, who invented the term to distinguish it from the mystical union:

Though mystical union, where God inhabits man as in a temple, according to our mode of understanding comes after justification according to the order of nature; however, I must confess that the formal union of faith, by which Christ is apprehended, put on, and united with us, where Christ is the mediator and conveyer of grace, and the remission of sins, is prior to justification. For as faith is prior to justification, insofar as the merit of Christ is received and is united with us to become ours. "If we take the spiritual regeneration, the rebirth wrought by God, as consisting mainly in our union with Christ, this differs from justification as an effect to a cause. For we are justified because we are from God, or because we are in Christ,"[1] see Rom. 8:1: "For there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The righteousness of Christ is the chief spiritual

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*benefit reckoned to those who believe being closely united to him, his members, who are found in him, Phil. 3:9.*¹⁰³

This thought of a formal – or legal – union with Christ as the basis for imputation, fits the idea of the blessed exchange that Luther compares to the marriage union. Just as the legal union of man and wife is the basis of their fleshly union, the formal union of faith is the basis of our mystical union. So far from basing our justification on Christ in us, this idea underscores, that our justification happens by us being in Christ, clothed in him who is our righteousness, while our sanctification happens by him being in us.

The imputation of the righteousness of Christ is real even though it is a forensic act. This is expressed by Quenstedt:

*This imputation is most real, whether respect is had to the righteousness which is imputed, or to the act of imputation. The righteousness of Christ, or His obedience, active and passive, which is imputed to us, is most true and real; for it corresponds entirely to the mind and will of God expressed in the Law. The act of imputation, also, or the imputation itself, is real; because its measure is the infallible intellect of God. Whence God cannot repute or consider him just to whom true righteousness has not been appropriated; nor can there proceed from the divine will, the rule of all excellence, approbation of an imaginary or fictitious estimation or righteousness. They, therefore, to whom the righteousness of Christ is imputed, are truly righteous, though not inherently, or by inherence, but imputatively, and by an extrinsic designation at least they are such; for even from that which is external a true designation may be derived. It is, therefore, an idle question, whether, because of that imputation, we are righteous, or are merely considered righteous. For the judgment of God is according to truth. Wherefore, he is truly just who, in the judgment of God, is regarded as just.*¹⁰⁴

The thought of a real but nevertheless forensic transfer of righteousness from one to another is what was confessed by the dogmatists. Whether Lutheranism is based on Nominalism or philosophical realism should be determined by the actual Lutheran doctrine and not the other way around.¹⁰⁵

The power of the means of grace caused by the Resurrection of Our Lord

The means of grace are the means of justification. Therefore, Scripture also connects their effect to the resurrection of our Lord and our formal union with him.

¹⁰³ As translated by Jordan Cooper: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/justandsinner/a-translation-of-david-hollaz-on-mystical-union/>

¹⁰⁴ See Schmid, Doctrinal theology of the Lutheran Church § 42 [7] *QUEN. (III, 525)*, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schmid/theology.vi.iii.iv.html>

¹⁰⁵ Hardt believed that Luther was philosophically a Nominalist. See Hardt, Tom G.A. <http://www.blts.edu/wp-content/uploads/lsg/19-2.pdf> p. 8. Bengt Hägglund disagreed, especially in the doctrine of justification: <https://media.ctsfw.edu/Text/ViewDetails/6888>. See also Wilbert H. Rosin <https://media.ctsfw.edu/Home/SearchTitle?search=Nominalism&authorFacet=&headingFacet=&journalFacet=&contentFacet=&formatFacet=&dateFacet=#>

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Baptism as the means of forgiveness and regeneration is also made dependent on the resurrection of Jesus by Peter in 1 Peter 1:3 and 3:21. Therefore, the risen Christ commands his apostles to baptize the nations and gives them the promise of salvation.

We should not fail to see the connection between Easter and the institution of the keys in John 20:23. Here the resurrected Christ says: *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.* c(Joh 20:23 ESV)

The absolution of Christ in the Resurrection is what gives power to the absolution of men through the ministry. This is the power of the resurrection. If the resurrection was an absolution of all individuals in the world, the keys would not be needed and they would not have an effect. But they have an effect. Jesu says so. Jesus did not say “tell all people that they are already forgiven”, but “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them”.

And Jesus also said: “if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” So the tension of law and gospel is upheld. The gospel is that God now forgives you your sins through the gospel as he forgave Christ your sins because of his meritorious work.

This view of the keys is supported also by our confessions. Thus in the ritual given for private absolution in the Small Catechism, Luther wrote:

Furthermore:

Dost thou believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?

Answer.

*Yes, dear sir.*¹⁰⁶

The pastor’s absolution is God’s own absolution. So when a person is absolved on earth, the person is also absolved in heaven. This is not just information about something that is already a fact, but words with a divine promise and power, just like the words of consecration in the Lord’s Supper.

Therefore, people should learn to trust this forgiveness, as explained in the Augsburg Confession:

*And 2] the people are most carefully taught concerning faith in the absolution, about which formerly there 3] was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, 4] and pronounced by God's command. The power of the Keys is set forth in its beauty and they are reminded what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences, also, that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Small Catechism V <http://bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php#confession>

¹⁰⁷ AC art. XXV 2 <http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php#article25.2>

Therefore, while Jesus as our representative has been justified and God has declared his representative righteousness by a forensic act, individuals are justified through the individual absolution in the means of grace, which is received through faith.

This can only happen because the righteousness of Christ and forgiveness already exists in Christ and is objectively conferred in absolution as in the gospel.

Conclusion

There is, I believe, firm evidence that while the terminology of Universal Objective Justification has problems, the doctrine of the old Synodical Conference was in line with both the Bible and the Confessions. The idea, that every individual has already been justified and just need to be made aware of this, is not supported by the Bible or the confessions. Rather it is a denial of the power of the resurrection that works in the means of grace.

This power of the resurrection as the efficient cause of our justification working through the means of grace as the instrumental cause is the Lutheran doctrine that should be defended against all who deny it, whether or not they accept the terms universal and objective justification.

Just as the ELDONA are wrong in rejecting every use of the term, we are wrong if we accept every use of the terms. The definition and explanation of the term is much more important, and we might even want to use another term to distinguish our doctrine clearly from the Moravian doctrine. I think Universal representative justification of Christ would be a better term.

Appendix

In summary, this is what I believe is the Scriptural, confessional, orthodox Lutheran and Waltherian position:

1. Adam sinned and by his fall into sin, the whole human race stand condemned before God in him.
2. The sin of Adam and the sins of mankind were imputed to Christ as our representative and bondsman who took responsibility for our sins.
3. Jesus fulfilled the law by his active obedience and suffered our punishment by his passive obedience. All this he did as our substitute and representative, as high priest and sacrificial lamb.
4. On the third day, God accepted the substitutional work of Christ and absolved or justified him from our sins as our representative in the resurrection.
5. This was not only a justification of Christ in the sense of declaring the righteousness he had before his substitutional work, but a justification of the bondsman to whom the sins of the world had been imputed.
6. Therefore, by the resurrection of Christ, God has declared in him a righteousness that avails for the world. Christ our righteousness is both the substitutional atonement and the representative justification of Christ.

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7. God's justification of Christ in the resurrection is the efficient cause of our justification whereby we are justified and raised with an in him, when we are justified individually.
8. To be in Christ therefore is to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ, which has been earned by his obedience and declared in his resurrection.
9. Outside Christ man is still in Adam and therefore under wrath and condemnation.
10. This righteousness is delivered to and conferred on man in and through the means of grace, which effectively justifies men by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. When an individual is absolved through the means of grace on earth, the same absolution happens in heaven.
11. This righteousness is received and imputed to individuals through faith alone and thereby they are justified by a forensic act of God in heaven.

I believe we must reject these opposite views on both sides

1. That a forensic act of justification of the world took place in the heart of God on Good Friday, which is synonymous with universal atonement.
2. That Christ made payment for our forgiveness but no forensic declaration of the representative righteousness of Christ took place in the resurrection.
3. That the resurrection of Christ is not part of the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to believers.
4. That the resurrection is only the confirmation of a former universal justification that happened on the cross.
5. That the resurrection of Christ is not the efficient cause of our individual justification, but only a vindication of Christ.
6. That the means of grace do not actually confer the forgiveness of sins.
7. That absolution does not effect forgiveness but only inform about an already established fact.
8. That the means of grace only communicate a forgiveness of all individual sinners that has already taken place and only need to be accepted by individuals.
9. That the means of grace only communicate a conditional promise of a forgiveness of sins that will take place if believed.
10. That the righteousness of Christ was imputed to unbelievers in objective justification.
11. That those who are not in Christ are not under condemnation.
12. That subjective or individual justification is not a forensic act in heaven whereby God imputes the righteousness of Christ to believers and receives them as his children but only a subjective acceptance or confirmation of an already established fact.