

Thank you, Doctor Wood for this very careful consideration of the basis for the salvation of non-Christians. And, thank you, Father Doran for the invitation to respond to such a thoughtful paper.

Doctor Wood, your theses work together to develop a picture that takes account of both human freedom and the priority and necessity of Grace, as well as Christian descriptions of the *telos* of humanity as union with Christ and participation in the Triune life. My chief question regarding this paper centers in Thesis 4: “*Salvation is not possible apart from faith, but the tradition has been consistent in affirming that this may be an implicit faith manifested in sincere commitment to God or to a righteous moral existence.*”

It would seem that this account of the salvation of non-Christians will lead us into the heart of one of the Reformation battles, because it assumes that implicit faith can be manifested in “sincere commitment ... to a righteous human conscience” (Wood, 5), in accord with the teaching of *Lumen Gentium*. The Catholic tradition, as you pointed out, sees this “righteous moral existence” not as itself the basis of salvation but as evidence of implicit faith because, as you quote Daniélou, “To obey the moral law is to recognize God’s infinitely loving will; it is to love God. Moral life is already worship. This is why conscience is a revelation of God and there exists no a-religious morality” (Wood, 6). Such an assertion argues that humanity by the grace of God in light of the incarnation is capable of an implicit faith.

In her paper, Dr. Wood applies this assertion to the context of interreligious dialogue, but it also has direct bearing on ecumenical dialogue as well, especially as the latter has formed contemporary theologies of redemption. In turn, how we understand our redemption in Christ will necessarily move interreligious dialogue in different directions; each will necessarily affect the other. In particular, I would like to ask whether thesis 4 is a danger to the consensus on Justification achieved in the Joint Declaration of 1999. While Roman Catholics now confess a common faith with Lutherans that *salvation is by grace through faith*, we need to ask if Doctor

Wood's proposal uncovers a fundamental equivocation on the word "faith" in the JDDJ such that it is shown to be only the "apparent agreement" that some non-signatory Lutherans have called it¹. According to thesis 4, based on Thomas and *Lumen Gentium*, the Roman Catholic definition of saving faith must leave room for an "implicit faith when [non-Christians] believe in the providence of God who saves people in ways that he sees best" or "under the influence of grace try to put into effect the will of God as known to them through the dictate of conscience" (Wood, 7; cf. *ST* II-II Q2.art 7, ad 3; LG 16). Such an implicit faith is possible because of Christ's reconfiguration of humanity as described in theses 1-3 and made possible by the salvific grace posited by thesis 5.

In contrast, Lutheran accounts of faith insist on explicit faith in Christ as a response to the preached Gospel. Hearing the Gospel is emphasized to the point that salvation of non-Christians is brought into doubt if not denied outright. Luther, for example, has a strong reading of "*extra ecclesia nulla salus*," at least in the Large Catechism where he bluntly states, "Outside the Christian community, however, where there is no gospel, there is also no forgiveness, there is also no holiness."² But whether or not contemporary Lutherans would insist on the impossibility of salvation outside the church really is not the question here³. Does the implicit faith to which the Second Vatican Council and Dr. Wood make appeal make further conversation with the Lutherans more difficult, or even undermine the significant (albeit imperfect) step forward that the Joint Declaration represents?

¹ Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod Committee on Theology and Church Relations, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective*, Online at www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=339, Accessed Nov 1, 2011.

² LC, Creed III, K/W 438.56) Also: Where he [the Holy Spirit] does not cause it [the Word] to be preached and does not awaken the understanding of it in the heart, all is lost. For where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call, and gather the Christian church, apart from which no one can come to the Lord Christ. (LC, Creed III, Kolb/Wengert: 436,45)

³ At least one contemporary Luther scholar argues that Luther's concept of the *Deus Absconditus* allows for the possibility of salvation outside the church, but it would forbid theologians from speculating on such matters: Kurt K. Hendel, "'No Salvation Outside the Church' in Light of Luther's Dialectic of the Hidden and Revealed God." *Currents In Theology And Mission* 35, no. 4 (August 1, 2008): 248-257.

There are two major areas of difficulty: **first**, is faith in God is possible without the proclamation of the Gospel? **Second**, Lutherans have historically been very skeptical of theological anthropology, particularly any that posits less than absolute sinfulness in humanity. Thus, Gritsch and Jenson describe the final section of the Apology's article on justification as Melancthon's final hope "that the church of Rome would turn from the anthropocentric speculations of erring theologians to the Christocentric affirmations of the prophets, the apostles and the fathers of the church" (Gritsch/Jenson, 52).

Regarding the first of our two questions, whether salvific faith is possible for those who have not been confronted with the Gospel, we should note that both Luther's lectures on Hebrews and the Formula of Concord's references to Hebrews 11, call the faith of Abel, Enoch, and Noah faith in God, and describes this faith as acceptable to God because of Christ (FC/SD; 22. K/W, 591). Based on this, we can safely say that also for the Reformers, faith in God need not be explicitly belief in Christ as proclaimed by the church, but would be acceptable to God because of Christ. Also, implicit faith as we have been describing it is possible only because of humanity's reconfiguration in Christ. Any re-unity of humanity which allows implicit faith is precisely a unity in Christ (Thesis 1). Because of humanity's restoration in Christ, even this implicit faith is faith in Christ, and can in some sense be said to participate in the faith of the church's proclamation.

Answering the second challenge is somewhat trickier. Clearly, this proposal *is* anthropological speculation, although whether it is the "anthropocentric speculation of erring theologians" remains to be seen. As is often the case in Reformation questions, the Lutheran categories do not line up well with Catholic ones (and vice versa). In this case, while Dr. Wood's claims are certainly anthropological, that anthropology is incomprehensible without a prior Christology. St. Gregory of Nyssa's Christological criterion, "What is not assumed is not redeemed.," is especially pertinent here and can even be taken as one major measure of an orthodox Christology. The Catholic tendency, then, has been to turn that criterion around and ask what redemption means given Christ's assumption of humanity. Thus, from the

Catholic perspective, theological anthropology cannot be anything other than second-order Christology. However, from a Lutheran perspective, this is an inherently dangerous path because we are always tempted to lose sight of the necessary background and begin to trust in human works of one kind or another. Faith is defined for Luther and his followers not even as belief (which can itself be appropriated as a work) but as the complete trust in Christ's work that is possible only by acknowledging one's utter dependence on Christ and inability to do anything on one's own.

Now, I am a Roman Catholic, and as such my judgment on this matter may not be unimpeachable. However, I believe that we can make the case that Doctor Wood's description of implicit faith as grounded in Christ can be reconciled with Lutheran concerns. In fact, Dr. Wood's account might even strengthen the case for utter dependence on Christ. What we will have to show is that the salvation of non-Christians is itself radically dependent on Christ and cannot become a new object of human striving. On the one hand, this seems like a very odd thing to say. We are, after all, speaking about the possibility of salvation for those who have not heard the Gospel, or those who are already deeply committed to other religious traditions, in other words, people who are unlikely to hear or care about our deliberations. Our reasoning about their salvation is powerless to influence their trust in God or taint them with any sense of self-dependence. On the other hand, how we reason about the salvation of non-Christians cannot but influence the reasoning of Christians about their own being and salvation.

One way to untangle this knot might be to borrow a line of thought from the reasoning of St. Paul. In the eleventh chapter of his letter to the Romans, he hopes that the salvation of the Gentiles might awaken jealousy in Israel and thus allow for their own reliance on faith (Rom 11:11-12). As Luther would be the first to admit, we humans excel at finding new ways to trust in ourselves instead of God. It should be no surprise then that we are tempted to make even faith into a work to be accomplished (that is, "believe rightly and you will be saved"). In the face of this temptation, here we are—daring to suggest that even non-believers are acceptable to God completely by grace (*gratis*) because of their underlying union with God (theses 1-3) and through a faith which is a gift to them (thesis 4). We have stipulated that if they are acceptable to God it is entirely by Christ's work: first, by his work in history (the incarnation)

and also his work in them now (creating a faith in Christ of which they are not even aware). This might just be salvation at its most clearly *gratis* and could serve as a reminder to both Lutherans and Catholics that “salvation by grace through faith” cannot be a human work, but must mean utter dependence on God. Thus, when the Joint Declaration says “we confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation” (§19), and “when Catholics say that persons “cooperate” in preparing for and accepting justification by consenting to God's justifying action, they see such personal consent as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities” (§20), we can further emphasize the utter gratuity of grace by recognizing and accepting its presence even in those who do not share our baptismal identity or in those who have not heard the Gospel.

“Faith” then, as used in the Joint Declaration, is “itself God's gift through the Holy Spirit who works through word and sacrament in the community of believers and who, at the same time, leads believers into that renewal of life which God will bring to completion in eternal life” (§16). Our exploration of the possibility of the gift of faith outside the community of believers need not undermine the Reformation's insistence on the priority of Christ; indeed, such a conviction is grounded in Christ and in his gift. Whether this argument is convincing to Lutherans is not for me to decide, but I believe that it is an argument worth making. In addition to challenging any attempt to convert faith into a work, it also exposes any assertion that the church's preaching or ministry are necessary conditions for God's gift of salvation as a usurping of the place of Christ and becoming, in Luther's terms, a theology of glory. Thank you again, Dr. Wood, for helping us think about what it means for Christians to hope for the salvation of non-Christians. I look forward to our discussion.