

Menno Simons on Conversion: Compared with Martin Luther and John Calvin

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In one relatively brief study to look at the understanding of conversion in three distinctive traditions will appear impossible only until we realize that the theological understanding of conversion by Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564) and Menno Simons (c. 1496-1561) is generally similar, while the differences, however significant in their own right, are limited; moreover, the differences are most expressively found on the biographical level.

Biblically oriented, the sixteenth century Protestant leaders accepted three traditional perspectives and quickly rejected the fourth. *First*, by conversion all of the three reformers understood the effects of salvation, initiated by God in Jesus Christ, and given as a gift to sinful and hence undeserving humankind. *Second*, conversion was understood as the subjective experience of transition from the sinful past to the saved present. Here the well known historic precedents of the Apostle Paul and St. Augustine played a significant exemplary role. *Third*, conversion was viewed not only as a onetime event, but also as a process; here conversion was consistently linked with penitence—the ongoing sorrow for sin and the quest for repeated forgiveness. At the same time, *fourthly*, the reformers rejected the medieval identification of conversion with the entrance into monastic life, a view which had been current since the fifth century.¹

I

Of the specific biographic details of conversion, Martin Luther's story—at least according to the interpretation of psychiatrist Erik H. Erikson—is without any doubt the most colourful one. In a relatively early reminiscence, notes Erikson, Luther had claimed that the correct understanding of justification by grace through faith had been given to him—in the toilet! Erikson admits that “no other reported statement of Luther's has made mature men squirm more uncomfortably, or made serious scholars turn their noses higher in contemptuous disbelief.”² Undeterred by precedent, Erikson hastens to explain:

First of all, the locality mentioned serves a particular physical need which hides the emotional relevance only as long as it happens to function smoothly. Yet ... Luther suffered from lifelong constipation and urine retention. Leaving the possible physical causes or consequences of this tendency aside, the functions themselves are related to the organ modes of retention and elimination—in defiant children most obviously, and in adults through all manner of ambivalent behavior. There can be little doubt that at this particular time, when Martin's power of speech was freed from its infantile and juvenile captivity, he changed from a highly restrained and retentive individual into an explosive person; he had found an unexpected release of self-expression, and with it, of the many-sided power of his personality.³

Heiko A. Oberman, politely allowing that Erikson's study is “brilliant,” nevertheless observes that Erikson “distorts” on account of the lack of a clear historical perspective. Namely, the identification of the toilet as the place where through spiritual tribulations and the anguish of one's soul the devil ordinarily assails the believer is typically medieval. However, in contrast to the medieval advice to flee from tribulation, Luther underscored that it is precisely in and through tribulations that the merciful God is to be found.⁴ Oberman explains further: “No spot is unholy for the Holy Ghost; this is the very place to express contempt for the adversary through trust in Christ crucified.”⁵ That much for theology; but there is also a valuable afterthought, connecting the past with the present, which Oberman does not hesitate to offer: “Christ in the privy helping one to resist the Devil is certainly anything but genteel. In their propriety later centuries recount only how Luther hurled his inkwell across the room at Wartburg Castle.”⁶ The latter episode, of course, is mere fiction.

At the same time it needs to be noted that Luther could describe the great turning point of his life in biblical language as well; he did not seek to be genteel for the sake of later ages, but tried to record the essential content of conversion, undistracted by its context whatever it might be. In the autobiographical preface to the Wittenberg edition of his works, published in 1545, a year before his death, Luther recalled the crucial event of 1519. At the University of Wittenberg Luther had already lectured on the Book of Psalms as well as on the epistles to Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Now Luther returned, for the second time, to the Book of Psalms. Still, he felt that despite all efforts he had not quite grasped the meaning of God's justice. Apparently the entire quest had been filled with terrifying anguish. Luther recalled: “For, however irreproachably I lived as a monk, I felt myself in the

presence of God (*coram Deo*) to be a sinner with a most unquiet conscience nor could I trust that I had pleased him with my satisfaction.”⁷

Additional autobiographical references have supplied Luther’s later biographers with ample materials for further analysis, admiration, and criticism. Hence we know that Luther, having entered the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt in 1505 with a firm resolve to do the holy will of God, at first—in line with the teachings of the modern theology (*via moderna*) of his day—attempted to earn grace by doing good works (*facere quod in se est*).⁸ The effort brought Luther to no spiritual fruition and refreshment, but instead accented his existential alienation. Without sparing himself, Luther later recalled: “I did not love, nay, rather I hated this just God who punished sinners and if not with ‘open blasphemy’ certainly with huge murmuring I was angry with God....”⁹

Again, the so-called “modern” theology of Luther’s day had played a decisive role in his anguish. (And we may ask: is it not perennially the case that liberal theology of any age overestimates human capacities and thus, eventually, may lead to despair?). Luther had been taught, and he initially believed, that anyone of good will was capable of turning to God in love. In other words, human initiative for reconciliation with God included both an ethical and a spiritual effort. On both levels the sinner in principle was able to take the decisive step toward conversion and salvation. Luther’s intensive efforts, however, did not lead to his desired goal.¹⁰ Finally Luther came to understand that the text of Romans 1:17, “the just shall live by faith,” did not describe the results of human initiative, but the ultimate effects of God’s grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. Luther later recalled: “This straightaway made me feel as though reborn, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself. From then on, the whole face of scripture appeared different....”¹¹

While Luther himself pointed to the year 1519 as the date of his conversion, Luther scholarship has debated the case at length. After all, the “evangelical” and central understanding of justification¹² emerged already during Luther’s first set of lectures on the Book of Psalms. Certainly, by 1519 the “breakthrough” had reached its culmination. Both momentary experiences and processual maturing belong to the total portrait.

John Calvin merely outlined—rather than described in depth—his own conversion and that on only two occasions. Both were retrospective and written many years after the event. His most explicit statement was in the preface to the *Commentary on the Psalms* (1557). There Calvin began, as could well be expected, by sorrowfully reflecting on his initially sinful life. What Calvin had in mind, however, were not any particular transgressions, but his ecclesial membership. This Calvin described with fierce outrage: “And at first, whilst I remained thus so obstinately addicted to the superstitions of the Papacy that it would have been hard indeed to have pulled me out of so deep a quagmire...”¹³ Of course, in a modern perspective the statement is highly tendentious, onesided and pre-ecumenical. Yet it reveals something of Calvin’s deep-seated anguish. The way out, as Calvin understood it, had been provided by God. He recorded it on two levels. On the one hand, here was God’s providence at work: “... God finally made me turn about in

another direction by his secret providence.”¹⁴ On the other hand, existentially, it was a direct intervention by God Himself: “... by sudden conversion, [God] subdued and made teachable a heart which, for my age, was far too hardened in such matters.”¹⁵

Calvin had no doubts that his conversion had been an act of God. But through what specific means this had occurred is indicated only in general terms, as Calvin pointed to the influence of those who had already accepted Protestantism. Even the suddenness of the conversion is somewhat ambiguous.¹⁶ As well, Calvin did not supply an exact date of the event: “Having thus received some foretaste and knowledge of true piety, I was straightaway inflamed with such great desire to profit by it, that although I did not attempt to give up other studies I worked only slackly at them.”¹⁷

The second account, traditionally assumed to be autobiographical,¹⁸ is a stylistically rather formal statement, prepared by Calvin at the request of the city of Geneva, in reply to Jacopo Sadoletto, who had urged the city to return to Catholicism.¹⁹ Written in beautiful Latin, the *Epistle to Sadoletto* (1539) confirms the general steps of Calvin’s conversion, without, however, any detailed references either to God or to the anguish of his own soul. Initially, Calvin acknowledges his rather unhappy membership in the Catholic Church: “The more closely I considered myself, the more my conscience was pricked with sharp goadings; so much that no other relief or comfort remained to me except to deceive myself by forgetting. But since nothing better offered itself, I went on still in the way I had begun....”²⁰ The encounter with some representatives of the newly emergent Protestantism had supplied Calvin with a new perspective and insight. Again, the situation is described with clearly pre-ecumenical rancor: “...then, however, there arose quite another form of teaching, not to turn away from the profession of Christianity but to reduce it to its own source, and to restore it, as it were, cleansed from all filthiness to its own purity.”²¹ Yet here, too, we are not supplied with any specifics as to persons, place, or date. What seems clear, however, is that the process took some, although undisclosed, amount of time:

But I, offended by this novelty, could hardly listen to it willingly; and must confess that at first I valiantly and bravely resisted. For since men are naturally obstinate and opinionated to maintain the institutions they have once received, it irked me much to confess that I had been fed upon error and ignorance all my life. One thing especially there was that prevented me from believing in those people, and that was reverence for the Church.²²

The statement ends with a defense of Calvin’s recently acquired position: Calvin asserts that in Protestantism “the majesty of the Church” continues to be faithfully affirmed.²³

While Calvin’s own account of his conversion is solemn and at points filled with emotion, in recent Calvin scholarship one may on occasion observe the tendency to downplay the event. Thus according to William J. Bouwsma, “By ‘conversion’ Calvin meant only a shift and quickening of his interests.”²⁴ Indeed,

“...Calvin attached little or no significance to ‘conversion’ as a precise event in his many discussions of the Christian life and the way of salvation.”²⁵ And Suzanne Selinger observes that Calvin was an “intellectual”: “His actual conversion occurred when he, the perpetual scholar, was quietly persuaded by the sudden apprehension of true doctrine.”²⁶

While such observations do not seem to be justified by the available evidence, they may usefully reduce the autobiographical richness of the event. Here two further observations are in order. T.H.L. Parker in his thoughtful and highly reliable biography of Calvin notes that the conversion—which he places in 1529 or early 1530²⁷—was but a beginning, however important. Parker elaborates:

The unexpected conversion is only a beginning, ‘a mere taste of true godliness.’ He did not immediately arrive at the complete theology later expressed in the *Institutio*; he did not immediately understand the whole ecclesiastical implication of his new faith; he did not forthwith cut himself off from all associations with the Church of his youth. All that happened was that his mind, wilful in its submission to other authorities, accepted now the sole authority of God.²⁸

Yet while the original conversion and its initial understanding may need to remain somewhat vague, Calvin’s maturing view of conversion he has made rather clear. In a most carefully crafted analysis Alexander Ganoczy has pointed out that when later Calvin describes the event, the decisive accent is on God’s marvellous gift rather than mere self-discovery. Ganoczy observes: “...Calvin at the age of fifty intentionally compares the miraculous change in Paul to the beginning of his own transformation in order to emphasize its divine origin.” Conversion is understood as a kind of “divine invasion into human existence,” fitly belonging to the “prophetic genre”²⁹ which Calvin then begins to exposit in his *Commentary on the Psalms*. In other words, sums up Ganoczy, “Calvin is not the dominant subject but the triumph of the divine power over every human obstacle, accomplished through the ministry of his servant in order to restore the Church.”³⁰ And while a measure of intellectual grasp of this process is clearly present, the entire episode is viewed as a supernatural event.

While *Menno Simons’* conversion account is powerful and precise, it conveys significantly less personal information than might appear at first glance. Menno Simons’ description of his onetime life of sin has occasionally been taken literally, quoting him as evidence. As I have pointed out elsewhere,³¹ here Menno had only followed a sound hermeneutical principle which he had spelled out as follows: “O dear Lord, I did not know myself until I viewed myself in Thy Word.”³² In other words, in various and vivid scriptural accounts of sinners Menno recognized a spiritual affinity with his own previously sinful life. Despite his efforts, he had not succeeded in extricating himself from such a lifestyle. As he continued to wrestle with the Scriptures, there came the following turning point, initially negative in nature: Menno discovered, as he put it, “that we were deceived.” The next turn was positive: “Through the illumination and grace of the Lord I increased in knowledge of the Scriptures daily....”³³ Yet the progress was only gradual, as Menno continued to wrestle with the meaning of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper and to strive for

personal success in his own church. Then a further turn occurred: "And so, my reader, I obtained a view of baptism and the Lord's Supper through the illumination of the Holy Ghost, through much reading and pondering of the Scriptures, and by the gracious favor and gift of God...."³⁴ Was Menno Simons now finally converted? Apparently he did not think so. Whatever new insights he had, he continued, as he put it "in my comfortable life and acknowledged abominations simply in order that I might enjoy physical comfort and escape the cross of Christ." At the same time, the continued ruthless persecution of Anabaptists was something which he could not readily overlook. Menno recalled his anguish:

Pondering these things my conscience tormented me so that I could no longer endure it. I thought to myself—I, miserable man, what am I doing? If I continue in this way, and do not live agreeably to the Word of the Lord, according to the knowledge of the truth which I have obtained... —oh, how shall their shed blood, shed in the midst of transgression, rise against me at the judgment of the Almighty and pronounce sentence against my poor, miserable soul!³⁵

As his heart "trembled" and he prayed for divine assistance, Menno Simons began to proclaim some of his newly-found religious insights. At the same time he was not yet fully an Anabaptist. Finally the decisive step was made:

After about nine months or so, the gracious Lord granted me His fatherly Spirit, help, and hand. Then I, without constraint, of a sudden, renounced all my worldly reputation, name and fame, my unchristian abominations, my masses, infant baptism, and my easy life, and I willingly submitted to distress and poverty under the heavy cross of Christ.³⁶

The event had occurred "late in January, 1536,"³⁷ while his account of it was written in 1554, incorporated in a tract entitled *Reply to Gellius Faber*. There Menno Simons also offers his final evaluation of the nature of his conversion:

And so you see, my reader, in this way the merciful Lord through the liberal goodness of His abounding grace took notice of me, a poor sinner, stirred in my heart at the outset, produced in me a new mind, humbled me in His fear, taught me to know myself in part, turned me from the way of death and graciously called me into the narrow pathway of life and the communion of His saints. To Him be praise for evermore. Amen.³⁸

As with his above confession of sin, so also now with the experience of grace, Menno Simons is making a consistent use of Scriptural phrases and insights. Thus in his perspective the true dimensions of conversion are seen in the revealed Word of God, rather than in the details of personal experiences and feelings. As with Martin Luther and John Calvin, so also with Menno Simons almost exclusive attention is paid to God, the author of conversion. In such a perspective none of the reformers deny the subjective context of conversion—they point to the Scriptures, to their own consciences in struggle, to the witness of other believers, even the need for a decisive and courageous witness. In each instance the biographical details necessarily vary, but the basic profile of the nature of conversion remains the same.

Of course, as one may expect in a pre-ecumenical age, each regards his own conversion as authentic. Menno Simons, in reference to Martin Luther, warns that

mere “learning and knowledge of languages” may very well occur “without regeneration and change of heart.”³⁹ Of John Calvin—along with John a Lasco and Theodore Beza—Menno Simons thought that they were “men of blood” because they were persecutors.⁴⁰ In turn, Calvin had hastened to distance himself from Menno Simons “with whom,” as Calvin put it, “I have no more in common than water has with fire.”⁴¹ While such mutual recriminations need not be taken literally, they at the very least offer a warning that within large areas of concurrence one may also need to look for authentic differences.

II

All three reformers held in common that conversion was an act of God. Having rejected the late medieval belief that active preparation for an initiative of conversion was a human possibility, they also sought to account for at least a measure of human participation.

Accordingly, Martin Luther thought that conversion was a miracle through which God accomplished what He had once prefigured in the exodus event through the Red Sea.⁴² As for the role of humans, Luther initially saw it somewhat larger. At first Luther attributed to the sinners the capacity to recognize their plight and in humility to long for conversion. In the first series of his lectures on the Psalms, the *Dictata super Psalterium*, Luther confessed: “... no one is justified by faith except one who has first in humility confessed himself to be unrighteous.”⁴³ Yet at the same time Luther also viewed humility as the very result of God’s grace. As Luther put it, a man “would never see his own filthiness, unless he had been enlightened in his inmost being with a holy light.”⁴⁴ The tension between human and divine initiative in becoming humble—and thus becoming ready for conversion—was not readily solved, but continued through Luther’s *Lectures on Romans*. In some instances the tension is present in the same passage. For example, Luther stressed divine initiative by pointing out that “... the whole task of the apostle and of his Lord is to humble the proud and to bring them to a realization of this condition.” Immediately, however, Luther acknowledged human capacity for awareness and change, namely: “... to teach them that they need grace, to destroy their own righteousness so that in humility they will seek Christ and confess that they are sinners and thus receive grace and be saved.”⁴⁵

The simultaneous acknowledgment of human and divine initiatives is not an occasional inaccuracy, but an often occurring sequence. “But a man who fears and humbly confesses will be given grace, that he may be justified and his sins forgiven....”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it is clear that the dominant theme of the *Lectures on Romans* celebrates the priority of grace. In other words, initially the sinner does not seek his conversion, since “the carnal man does not desire to be liberated and set free.”⁴⁷ By the time Luther had prepared his lectures on *Hebrews* (1517-1518) and *Galatians* (1519), the *sola gratia* perspective had gained the upper hand. In other words, Luther now acknowledged that it is grace which prepared for conversion by penitence and the awakening of faith.⁴⁸

In Luther's subsequent writings he finally clarified the situation and explained that grace is always given through the Word of God. A characteristic comment would be Luther's reflection on II Cor. 4:6 — "Paul regards the conversion of the wicked—something which is also brought about by the Word—as a new work of creation."⁴⁹ Now this "new work" always occurred through faith: the Word evoked faith, since it was only through faith that the Word could be heard and accepted.⁵⁰ Luther noted: "This conversion consists in that through the Word of grace the hearts are enlightened toward God so that we cease from our righteousness, our confidence, our endeavors which turn us away from God and are the supreme idolatries." Then it can be affirmed, objectively, that "The Gospel truly converts us to God."⁵¹

John Calvin also acknowledged that man as a sinner could not initiate his own salvation. As Calvin saw it, the reason for this was that a sinner was not aware of his need for conversion: a "man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself."⁵² Although in principle God could be encountered both in nature and in the depth of one's soul, in reality this is not the case. Calvin explained: "But although the Lord represents both himself and his everlasting Kingdom in the mirror of his works with very great clarity, such is our stupidity that we grow increasingly dull toward so manifest testimonies, and they flow away without profiting us."⁵³ Therefore, claimed Calvin, authentic saving knowledge can be obtained only through the Scripture.⁵⁴ In other words, Calvin viewed conversion as a lengthy and thorough process. He wrote: "And indeed, this restoration does not take place in one moment or one day or one year; but through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruptions of the flesh, cleanses them of guilt, consecrates them to himself as temple renewing all their minds to true piety that they may practice repentance throughout their lives and know that this warfare will end only at death."⁵⁵

Menno Simons, too, accepted the limits of human self-understanding, and noted that "Every person generally judges according to his own ideas...."⁵⁶ Accordingly, salvation is not possible through personal initiative. Menno observed: "What do we, miserable sinners, have of which we may boast? What do we have that we have not received from Thee?"⁵⁷ Hence Menno also objected to the suggestion that salvation could be merited: "... we do not believe nor teach that we are to be saved by our merits and works..."⁵⁸ Similarly: "judge for yourselves whether the preachers [of the magisterial Reformation] do rightly when they lie so bluntly saying that we expect to be saved by our merits and works...."⁵⁹

Rather, the totally unmerited salvation is to be recognized as a gift from God, given through faith, which itself is a gift: "There is none that can glory in himself touching this faith, for it is the gift of God."⁶⁰ And just as Luther and Calvin, Menno Simons pointed to the Word of God as the one and only route to conversion and subsequent salvation. In fact, this emphasis was even more outspoken in the writings of Menno, since his major criticism of both the magisterial reformers and Roman Catholicism was that they did not obey the Bible thoroughly and understand it accurately. For example, in regard to infant baptism which Menno had

rejected he observed: "For Christ and His apostles teach that regeneration, as well as faith, comes from God and His Word, which Word is not to be taught to those who are unable to hear and understand, but to those who have the ability both to hear and to understand."⁶¹ And in a step-by-step outline Menno put it this way: "First, there must be the preaching of the Gospel of Christ (Matt. 28:19); then, the hearing of the divine Word (Rom. 10:17); thirdly, faith by hearing the Word (Rom. 10:17); fourthly, there must be the new birth by faith; fifthly, baptism out of the new birth (Titus 3:5), in obedience to God's Word; and then follows lastly the promise."⁶²

Moreover, along with the magisterial reformers Menno also celebrated the mysterious and divine power of the Word joined with the Spirit. Although in 1537 Luther had charged the "fanatics" (or Schwärmer), as he referred to the Anabaptists, that they had separated the Spirit from the Word,⁶³ discarding the latter, the charge most certainly did not apply to Menno Simons. Consistently, Menno joined the Word with the Spirit. He writes: "Ah, dear children, you who are born of the Word of the Lord through the Spirit, ponder how incomprehensibly great the heavenly goodness and grace have been...."⁶⁴ And again: "Recall that He has opened to us with the key of His Word and Spirit the saving Truth, and has closed it to all emperors, kings, lords, princes, the wise and the learned ones of the whole world."⁶⁵

At times the Spirit is not mentioned explicitly, but Menno Simons' highly dynamic view of the Word clearly implies it: the Word does not merely inform but also transforms the listener. In an eloquent and precise passage Menno put it this way: "And God's Word knows of no other faith than that which has power and fruit, that which regenerates the heart, converts and renews, as the Scripture says: The just shall live by faith. It is all in vain to boast of faith where the godly new fruits and works of faith are not in evidence."⁶⁶

Although in describing this transformation Menno could occasionally speak of being converted ("bekeert"),⁶⁷ his customary term was being "born again." This "new birth" marked a radical departure from the sinful past. And, as we shall note subsequently, Menno was well aware that conversion, in his own and many other cases, was ordinarily gradual. Nevertheless, like Luther who could speak of "the conversion caused by the Gospel"⁶⁸ and suggest immediacy, or Calvin who could call his own conversion "sudden,"⁶⁹ so also Menno could telescope the lengthy process into an immediate and powerful challenge: "We must be born from above, must be changed and renewed in our hearts, and must be transplanted from the unrighteous and evil nature of Adam into the true and good nature of Christ...."⁷⁰

But Menno Simons' main emphasis was never on the timing, but on the thoroughness of the conversion:

The new birth (Die nieuwe geboorte) ... is the heavenly, living, and quickening power of God in our hearts which flows forth from God, and which by the preaching of the divine Word, if we accept it by faith, quickens, renews, pierces, and converts our hearts, so that we are changed and converted from unbelief to faith, from unrighteousness to righteousness, from evil to good, from carnality to spirituality, from the earthly to the heavenly, from the wicked nature of Adam to the good nature of Jesus Christ.⁷¹

With such an evaluation Menno was clearly in agreement with both Luther and

Calvin. In regard to the objective side of conversion, all three reformers steadfastly pointed to the Word of God as the source and faith as the means through which conversion took place. While in the pre-ecumenical sixteenth century setting it could not be very well expected that each would regard the views of others as equally valid, in retrospect their substantive agreement on this level seems obvious and undeniable.

III

The situation may appear somewhat less precise in regard to the subjective side of the conversion experience, but even here any difference that might be present could very well be attributed mainly to the individual writing style of the three Reformers rather than to the theological position in question.

As already noted, the starting point for all three was the redemptive act of God, communicated to sinful men and women through the Word. Luther's general observation may be seen as representative: "... in the beginning and before every creature there is the Word, and it is such a powerful Word that it makes all things out of nothing."⁷² In this process, Luther noted, the sinner experiences that God "first humbles and afflicts him" and then "brings him to remorse."⁷³ This humiliation is a profoundly shattering experience:

Therefore, if you want to be converted, it is necessary that you be terrified or killed, that is, that you have a timid and trembling conscience. When this has happened, then you ought to accept the consolation not of some work of yours but of the work of God, who sent His Son Jesus Christ into this world to preach the consolation of free mercy to terrified sinners. This is the way of conversion: other ways are the ways of error.⁷⁴

The rationale for such a traumatic experience of fear Luther found in what he regarded as the biblical distinction between Law and Gospel, the two dynamic sides of the Word of God.⁷⁵ The Law, viewed as the divine standard of righteousness, discloses to the sinner his obligations to God. Since sinners are not capable on their own initiative and strength to convert themselves, the encounter with the righteous and demanding God is an encounter with divine wrath.⁷⁶ Valuing this confrontation with reality, Luther could even speak of a "twofold conversion" in which both the Law, the standard of eternal righteousness, and the Gospel, the offer of redemption in Jesus Christ, have their own respective and complementary roles:

There is, you see, a twofold conversion—that of the Gospel and that of the Law. The Law merely gives the command, but nothing is accomplished, something is accomplished, however, through the Gospel, when the Spirit is added. He renews hearts, and then God turns toward us. This is the conversion of peace, that is, that we are not merely righteous but also filled with joy and find delight in God's goodness.⁷⁷

John Calvin's understanding of the human situation is essentially the same. In regard to the Law Calvin noted that "it is pointless to require in us the capacity to fulfill the law" since "for the fulfillment of all God's commands the grace of the Lawgiver is both necessary and is promised to us."⁷⁸ In such a situation there necessarily arises the "dread of judgment," which, however, serves to draw

"inevitably though unwillingly to the Mediator" Jesus Christ.⁷⁹ In other words, the anguish is creative: "... empty of all opinion of our own virtue, and shorn of all assurance of our own righteousness—in fact, broken and crushed by the awareness of our own utter poverty—we may learn genuine humility and self-abasement. Both of these the Lord accomplishes in his law."⁸⁰ Only in such a setting repentance can be genuine. Hence Calvin's dictum: "... repentance proceeds from an earnest fear of God."⁸¹ Moreover, Calvin explained further: "By the word 'fear' Paul means that trembling which is produced in our minds as often as we consider both what we deserve and how dreadful is the severity of God's wrath toward sinners."⁸²

Dependent on the theological vocabulary of the Apostle Paul who designated the sinful self as "flesh," and the redeemed person as "spirit," Calvin explained further the interplay of diagnosis and healing in repentance: "repentance consists of two parts: namely, mortification of the flesh and vivification of the spirit."⁸³ With special attention to vivification, the entire concern with repentance could have an up-beat quality. This is precisely how Calvin saw the situation: "... I interpret repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God that has been disfigured and all but obliterated through Adam's transgression."⁸⁴

While *Menno Simons'* position clearly paralleled that of Luther and Calvin, he did not fail to observe that the magisterial reformers persecuted Anabaptists. Clearly, this was not a matter of a minor difference! And yet, when this difference is taken into account, the theological agreement is notable. To begin with, Menno, too, can point to the redemptive power of the Word: "...as soon as this malefactor heard the sweet word of God out of the mouth of the Lord ... it wrought in him so powerfully that his heart within him was touched and changed."⁸⁵ And where such an adherence to the Word is missing, redemptive results are naturally absent. Hence the following warning is in order: "...we dare not willfully and knowingly deviate one hair's breadth from His Word, ordinance, and command, as is testified to the whole world and shown by our tribulation, misery, property, and blood...."⁸⁶ In other words, the vicious persecution of the Anabaptists at the hands of the magisterial Protestants and Roman Catholics was, in Menno Simons' judgment, a clear proof that his opponents were only partially obedient to the Word of God. After all, Menno underscored, "All who are moved by the Spirit of Christ know of no sword but the Word of the Lord."⁸⁷ Consequently, Menno in his inimitably colourful style judged: "...your preachers ... are not of God and His Word, but of the bottomless pit and the beast."⁸⁸

Nevertheless, in following the scriptural account, Menno paralleled Luther and Calvin. Note his emphasis on the need of awe before God: "...our God is a consuming fire."⁸⁹ Therefore Menno warned, "...fear God, who has eyes like flaming fire which penetrate heaven and earth and cannot be blinded with fine words."⁹⁰ Indeed, "fear God's wrath."⁹¹ On one level, such a challenge to fear God was directed toward sinners: "Ah, dear sirs, awake and fear God, for the hour draws near that your moment of laughter will be changed into an endless lament...."⁹² On another level the challenge applies to believers as well. At first this is the case in regard to conversion: "...it is impossible to become righteous without the fear of

God.”⁹³ Subsequently, the challenge applies to the entire life of believers: “If you have the genuine and unfeigned love and fear of God, then let them appear in your works.”⁹⁴

Moreover, just like Luther and Calvin, Menno could also point out the accusing and judging function of God’s law, the standard of divine righteousness. As he wrote:

Search the Law diligently. For it points out to you, first, the obedience to God and righteousness required of you; and also the weakness of your sinful flesh, your evil and evil-disposed nature; and that you are already condemned to death, according to the rigor of the above-mentioned righteousness, since you, through your inherent weak nature and evil-disposed flesh, do not walk in the required righteousness as God has commanded and required of you in His Law.⁹⁵

At the same time although the Pauline definition of Law occurs on several occasions⁹⁶ Menno Simons’ ordinary appeal is directed more generally to the entire Word of God, accompanied by the warning to fear God⁹⁷ and to consider the fierce judgment of God in hell.⁹⁸ The obvious purpose of such references is to challenge to repentance: “If you do not repent there is nothing in heaven or on earth that can help you, for without true repentance we are comforted in vain.”⁹⁹ Where repentance is authentic and therefore successful, it is synonymous with conversion: “...repentance is a converted, changed, pious, and new heart, a broken and contrite, sad and sorrowful spirit, from which come the sorrowful tear and lamenting mouth, a genuine forsaking of evil in which we were held, an earnest and hearty hatred to sin, and an unblamable pious Christian life; a repentance that will stand before God.”¹⁰⁰

It is of course the general duty of all Christians to lead sinners to repentance. Already Luther had noted: “These are the two tasks of the Christians, to glorify God and to convert others.”¹⁰¹ Such was also the conviction of Menno: “It is the proper disposition of a true and pious Christian to seek to lead poor, wandering sinners to repentance....”¹⁰² However, it was Menno’s deepest conviction that authentic repentance and conversion did not take place outside his theological community: “In a word, it is manifest that they preach and promulgate the Gospel in such a way that no repentance follows, but every one, alas, remains as he is; yes, what is worse, the people are not only not improved, but are daily growing worse.”¹⁰³ Thus in addition to the faithful interpretation of the Scriptures, Menno also demanded a lifestyle faithful to the Scriptures. It was his belief that his persecutors had failed in this regard: “If you are not converted to a better and a Christian mind, if you do not die to your error and also to your vain, carnal life, if you do not repent and become like innocent, simple children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁰⁴ Of course, the magisterial reformers also knew and taught that faith should be active in good works.¹⁰⁵ On the level of theological proclamation there was ample agreement.

IV

Likewise, all three reformers asserted that in conversion a real change had taken place. Thus according to Luther the “conversion of the wicked” which had occurred “by the Word” was in fact “a new work of creation,”¹⁰⁶ indeed “a new life” as well.¹⁰⁷ And this “new life” was visible in action. Here Luther’s prime example was the Apostle Paul:

After his conversion his flesh, tongue, and voice were the same as they had been before; nothing at all was changed. But now the voice and tongue did not speak blasphemies; now it spoke spiritual words of thanksgiving and praise for God, which came from faith and from the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁸

And the Apostle Paul was not an exception, as authentic faith would necessarily always be expressed through good works: “as there are no fruits until there is a tree, so there can be no good works until the person is first righteous and good.”¹⁰⁹ Calvin also insisted that in conversion real transformation occurs. Man’s will is now “created anew,” which of course does not mean “that the will now begins to exist, but that it is changed from evil to good will.”¹¹⁰ And this “new creation ... sweeps away everything of our common nature.”¹¹¹ Then Calvin adds a note, characteristically his own: God “completes his work, moreover, by confirming us to perseverance.”¹¹²

In the writings of Menno Simons parallel statements abound. And while it is of no surprise that statements in the superlative would appear in the discussion of sanctification—where the ultimate results can be safely projected into the future of the entire process—it is instructive that all three reformers recognize the radical transformation which already occurs in conversion. Thus Menno could speak of “spiritual resurrection from sin and death to a new life and a change of heart.”¹¹³ He also noted that believers are “by virtue of their new birth so joined to Christ,” that they “become so like unto Him, so really implanted into Him, so converted into His heavenly nature, that they do not teach nor believe any doctrine but that which agrees with the doctrine of Christ....”¹¹⁴ In another passage Menno put it this way: “But in whomsoever the new birth is, there is godly wisdom, goodness, light, righteousness, peace, truth, Spirit, Christ, God, and life eternal.”¹¹⁵

As always, the foundation for such an insight was biblical, notably II Corinthians 5:17, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.”¹¹⁶ All such references to the newness of the converted person were further accented by Menno’s insistence that they “have become partakers of the divine nature.”¹¹⁷ Although it might be tempting to point to the affirmation of the participation in the “divine nature” as an exclusive insight of Menno Simons, recent Finnish Lutheran scholarship has brought to light that the Early Christian teaching of deification, current in Orthodox circles, was also shared by Luther. Hence the radical results of conversion can be viewed as a common insight of the three reformers.

V

Finally some small theological distinctions in the understanding of conversion can be observed as the various reformers wrestle with the meaning of sin and its place in Christian life. While all of them are clearly opposed to sin, believe in principle that in conversion sin is overcome, and even acknowledge that after conversion still some measure of sin is a reality in the new life, they account for this in somewhat divergent ways.

In *Martin Luther's* theological reflection, followed basically by *John Calvin*, justification by grace through faith plays a central role.¹¹⁸ It is not merely one doctrine among many, but the central, all decisive perspectival insight. At the same time, in spelling out the ongoing role of justification, Calvin correlates it with predestination, and pays very close attention to sanctification. *Menno Simons*, nearer to Calvin, acknowledges but does not stress the role of predestination, and relates sanctification to Christian living, without succumbing to "perfectionism."

With regard to sin, Luther's view of justification means that the divine acceptance of the sinner is complete. Luther did not hesitate to call the justified person "justus"—just. At the same time in his formula Luther added "simul peccator," simultaneously sinner. This was a way of indicating that while the *act* of acceptance was authentic, the *process* of sanctification was only gradual. Hence, looking at the human situation in such a perspective, conversion was understood as the decisive beginning point of Christian life, which subsequently would continue to develop, although the struggle with temptation and sin would continue as well.¹¹⁹ The presence of sin in the justified person in the process of sanctification was by no means easy to describe. Calvin put it as well as possible: "But sin ceases only to reign; it does not also cease to dwell in them ... some vestiges remain; not to rule over them, but to humble them by the consciousness of their own weakness."¹²⁰ If, however, for Luther the entire Christian life was understood in terms of an ongoing and serious battle with sin, in which the only certainty was in regard to the power of the mercy of God, Calvin accented the latter by shifting his emphasis to predestination and perseverance.¹²¹ In a way this was a move away from existential insecurity to a transcendental security, albeit at the present known through faith only.

Menno Simons carefully correlated the power of grace with obedient discipleship. While the disciple was not free from faltering and even falling, the initial commitment in conversion continued to offer hope. In other words, Menno was prepared to stress conversion as a clear boundary line between the sinful past and the grace-sustained present. Even though later incidents of temptation and sinning were real, the basically new situation of the converted individual had to be acknowledged openly and clearly: "Peter erred mortally once, and not again. Matthew, after his call, did not return to his former conversation. Zacchaeus and the sinful woman did not go back to their impure works of darkness."¹²²

In describing this basic shift in orientation, in his earlier writings Menno emphasized the absolute newness of this direction. At times he was even prepared to write that believers "do not sin" in the sense that they "have quit the service of sin,

no longer live in sin or ... serve it." Instead, the converted believers "have now become enemies of sin and the devil."¹²³ He admitted that they still "sense it," but they are no longer "subject to their impure lusts."¹²⁴ One wonders whether Menno was not making use of the traditional distinction between mortal and venial sin; he certainly relied on the text which had been the foundation for this distinction:

It is also the nature of those who are in God not to sin, as John says: Whosoever abideth in God sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness, is righteous even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning.¹²⁵

Now venial sin, traditionally understood to be a light transgression which does not deprive the soul of sanctifying grace, appears to be what Menno had in mind when he admitted that believers can "receive a wound, surprised by their enemies." Yet "their souls remain uninjured and the wound is not unto death, for they have the anointing of God."¹²⁶

In his later writings Menno certainly did not deny the reality of sin in the lives of converted believers:

Do not understand, most beloved, that we deem ourselves so clean and unblamable as to be without sin. No, not at all, dear brethren, for I know full well that the holy John teaches, saying, If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. I John 1:8. For as James says, In many things we all offend. Jas. 3:2. Yes, dear brethren, with Paul I find the appetite to commit sin so strong in my flesh at all times that I often think recklessly, speak rashly, and do the evil which I would not."

Having said this, Menno immediately clarified: there is still a basic difference between the unconverted and the converted. Himself a converted person, Menno asserted: "But the abominable, shameful sins and offenses, such as adultery, fornication, hatred, envy, drunkenness pomp, splendor, cursing, swearing, gambling, desire for filthy lucre, abuse of the ordinances of Christ, and lying and fraud, I verily detest from the bottom of my heart."¹²⁷

Clearly here Menno has moved beyond the traditional enumeration and identification of mortal sins; nevertheless, there remains a readiness to distinguish between two different grades of sin. Such a perspective sustains the insight that conversion has been an all-decisive turning point. The converted person, while no longer a servant to sin, will nevertheless at times experience sin, presumably of the lighter variety and in a manner which will not bring about the pre-conversion's status.

Yet the line, while drawn in principle, is not readily spelled out in practice. This is particularly the case when Menno speaks autobiographically. Then invariably the voice is that of a penitent, calling himself "a poor miserable sinner," — and yet "a mere humble servant of Jesus Christ." Here Menno could recall with shuddering his pre-conversion life and admit in regard to the present: "who still to this day am found sinful, defective, and faulty before my God, not worthy to be the least and humblest servant in the house of my Lord." But then, he adds, quoting the Apostle Paul: "Yet by God's grace I am what I am."¹²⁸ There is then no merit or accomplishment which would automatically assure spiritual safety; however, such

safety is available on account of grace. As Menno writes: "For although I am a poor sinner who at times am overcome by my flesh, I yet thank God for His grace that He has to this day saved His poor, weak servant without any grave offence both in doctrine and in life."¹²⁹

Luther would have drawn more attention to his doctrine than life; yet both could have made equally powerful use of humility. At the same time many statements like the following could have been authored by either Menno or Luther: "In and by yourself you are a poor sinner, and by the eternal righteousness banished, accursed, and condemned to eternal death. But in and through Christ you are justified and pleasing unto God, and adopted by Him in eternal grace"¹³⁰ In other words, it is totally fitting that converts should be and sound humble. And theologians who have followed the scripturally outlined route through conversion are bound to agree more than disagree. Still, it is significant and impressive that on the subject of conversion Luther, Calvin, and Menno speak with such concordant voices.

While noting the basic theological agreement on conversion among the three Reformers, the tragic dissonances should not be overlooked. We must be aware that we have compared the persecuted with the persecutors. Clearly they were separated by theological differences which were accented by widely divergent understandings of the role of authority and violence. The theological differences on such issues as baptism, the Lord's Supper, the church, and the church and the world, need to be discussed and the gradual but real convergence celebrated. As this helpful and healing process continues, however, a sloppy sentimentality must not forget the pain, violence and destruction which initially characterised Lutheran, Calvinist and Mennonite encounters. The existential and personal understanding of conversion will be real in any age only insofar as it has been preceded by repentance and forgiveness.

Notes

¹Marilyn J. Harran, *Luther on Conversion: The Early Years* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 31; Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 127.

²Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1958), p. 204.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

⁴Heiko A. Oberman, *Die Reformation: Von Wittenberg nach Genf* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), p. 99.

⁵Oberman, cf. fn. 1, p. 155.

⁶*Ibid.*, 156.

⁷Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), p. 121, trans. from *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1883 ff.) [subsequently abbreviated as WA], 54:185:21-23.

⁸Heiko A. Oberman, "Facientibus Quod in se est Deus non Denegat Gratiam: Robert Holcot O.P. and the Beginnings of Luther's Theology," pp. 84-103, in *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986).

⁹Gordon Rupp, cf. fn. 7, p. 122, WA 54:185:23-25.

¹⁰Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), pp. 54-60.

¹¹Gordon Rupp, cf. fn. 7, WA 54:186:8-10.

¹²Harry Loewen, *Luther and the Radicals: Another Look at Some Aspects of the Struggle between Luther and the Radical Reformers* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1974), p. 14. Luther's conversion has been dated either early, when 1514 was popular with older scholarship, or between 1518 and 1519 which is the more recently defended date; a middle ground views Luther's conversion as a process with several notable advance, cf. Bernhard Lohse, ed., *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968).

¹³*Calvini Opera* (Brunsvigae: apud C.A. Schwetscke et filium, 1863 ff.) [subsequently referred to as CO], 10:3; trans. by François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963) p. 37.

¹⁴Wilston Walker, *John Calvin: The Organiser of Reformed Protestantism (1509-1564)*, bibliographical introduction by John T. McNeil (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 72.

¹⁵François Wendel, cf. fn. 13, p. 37.

¹⁶Paul Sprenger, *Das Rätsel um die Bekehrung Calvins* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960), pp. 34-52.

¹⁷François Wendel, cf. fn. 13, p. 37. Alister McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 73 conjectures that the conversion might have occurred shortly before May 4, 1534.

¹⁸François Wendel, cf. fn. 13, p. 37.

¹⁹John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto, *A Reformation Debate*, ed. with introduction by John C. Olin (New York: Harper & Row, Torchbooks, 1966), p. 7.

²⁰François Wendel, Cf. fn. 13, p. 38.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 38.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁴John Calvin: *A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 10.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁶Calvin Against Himself: *An Inquiry in Intellectual History* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1984), p. 16.

²⁷John Calvin: *A Biography* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1975), p. 22.

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

²⁹*The Young Calvin*, trans. by David Foxgrover and Wade Provo (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), p. 263.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 264. The review of older Calvin scholarship on conversion is by Fritz Büsser, *Calvins Urteil über sich selbst* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1960), pp. 23-24. In agreement with Karl Müller, he locates the conversion in 1533, p. 24.

³¹"Menno Simons' Account of His Conversion and Call in the Light of the Bible," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 3(1985):73-82.

³²Menno Simons, *Opera Omnia Theologica* (Amsterdam: Joannes van Veen, 1681, rpr. Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1989) [subsequently referred to as *Opera*], 167 B; John Christian Wenger, ed., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. by Leonard Verduin with a biography of Harold S. Bender (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956) [subsequently referred to as *CW*], p. 70.

³³*Opera* 256 A; *CW* 668.

³⁴*Opera* 256 B; *CW* 669.

³⁵*Opera* 257 A-B; *CW* 670.

³⁶*Opera* 257 B; *CW* 671.

³⁷*CW* 671.

³⁸*Opera* 257 B - 258 A; *CW* 671.

³⁹*Opera* 245 A; *CW* 653; cf. *Opera* 499 A; *CW* 550.

⁴⁰*Opera* 615 B; *CW* 939; cf. *Opera* 604 A; *CW* 922; William Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, trans. by William Heynen (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), p. 207.

⁴¹Balke, p. 206; *CO* 9:53.

⁴²WA 3:549:17-21; *LW* 11:37.

⁴³WA 3:345:29-30; *LW* 10:290.

⁴⁴WA 3:290:31-35; *LW* 10:39; cf. Harran, cf. fn. 1, p. 58.

⁴⁵WA 56:207:7-11; *LW* 25:191-192.

⁴⁶WA 56:252:27-29; *LW* 25:239.

⁴⁷WA 56:346:22-23; *LW* 25:335.

⁴⁸Harran, cf. fn. 1, pp. 117-124.

⁴⁹WA 42:14:20-22; *LW* 1:17.

⁵⁰WA 31,2:367:26-28; *LW* 17:135.

⁵¹WA 31,2:397:27-30; *LW* 17:174.

⁵²Joannis Calvini *Opera Selecta*, ed. by Petrus Barth and Guilelmus Niesel, *Institutio Christianae religionis*, 1519, (Münich: Chr. Kaiser, vol. 3, 1967; vol. 4, 1959; vol. 5, 1962) [subsequently referred to as *OS*] *Inst.* 1:1:2; *OS* 3:32:10-12; *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) [subsequently abbreviated as *LCC*], p. 37.

⁵³*Inst.* 1:5:11; *OS* 3:55:3-6; *LCC* 63.

⁵⁴*Inst.* 1:6:1; *OS* 4:60:11-61:34; *LCC* 601.

⁵⁵*Inst.* 3:3:9; *OC* 4:63:25-65:2 601.

⁵⁶*Opera* 616 B; *CW* 940.

⁵⁷*Opera* 171 A; *CW* 76.

⁵⁸*Opera* 463 A; *CW* 506.

⁵⁹*Opera* 464 A; *CW* 507.

⁶⁰*Opera* 9 B; *CW* 116.

⁶¹*Opera* 14 A-B; *CW* 124.

⁶²*Opera* 419 B; *CW* 265.

⁶³*WA* 46:577:11-23; *LW* 22:48.

⁶⁴*Opera* 74 A; *CW* 325.

⁶⁵*Opera* 74 A; *CW* 326.

⁶⁶*Opera* 75 B; *CW* 328.

⁶⁷Quoting *Matt.* 18:3, *Opera* 239 B; *CW* 642.

⁶⁸*WA* 13:551:22; *LW* 20:9.

⁶⁹cf. above fn. 15.

⁷⁰*Opera* 125 A; *CW* 92; cf. also Menno Simons' early tract from ca. 1537, *Van er Nieuwe Geborte*, *Opera* 123-132; *CW* 92.

⁷¹*Opera* 429 A; *CW* 265, cf. *Opera* 632; *CW* 409-410.

⁷²*WA* 42:14:6-6; *LW* 11:37.

⁷³*WA* 3:549:20-21; *LW* 11:37.

⁷⁴*WA* 40,2:440:27-34; *LW* 12:390.

⁷⁵Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. by Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), p. 251.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁷⁷*WA* 13:551:22-27; *LW* 20:9.

⁷⁸*Inst.* 2:5:9; *OS* 3:307:12; *LCC* 326.

⁷⁹*Inst.* 2:8:1; *OS* 3:343:29-31; *LCC* 367.

⁸⁰*Inst.* 2:8:1; *OS* 3:344:1-4; *LCC* 367.

⁸¹*Inst.* 3:3:7; *OS* 4:61:10-11; *LCC* 599.

⁸²*Inst.* 3:3:15; *OS* 4:71:29-32; *LCC* 608; cf. *Inst.* 3:3:21; *OS* 4:79:8-9; *LCC* 616.

⁸³*Inst.* 3:3:8; *OS* 4:62:10-11; *LCC* 100.

⁸⁴*Inst.* 3:3:9; *OS* 4:63:11-14; *LCC* 601.

⁸⁵*Opera* 100 B; *CW* 371.

⁸⁶*Opera* 319 B; *CW* 773.

⁸⁷*Opera* 42 B; *CW* 175.

⁸⁸*Opera* 44 B; *CW* 179.

⁸⁹*Opera* 400 A; *CW* 235.

⁹⁰*Opera* 49 A; *CW* 187.

⁹¹*Opera* 52 B; *CW* 193.

- ⁹²*Opera* 36 A; CW 163.
- ⁹³*Opera* 80 B; CW 337.
- ⁹⁴*Opera* 38 B; CW 167.
- ⁹⁵*Opera* 374 A; CW 818.
- ⁹⁶*Opera* 285 A; CW 718.
- ⁹⁷*Opera* 61 A; CW 209.
- ⁹⁸*Opera* 42 A; CW 174; cf. *Opera* 59 A; CW 205 and *Opera* A; CW 107.
- ⁹⁹*Opera* 125 A; CW 92.
- ¹⁰⁰*Opera* 200 A; CW 977.
- ¹⁰¹WA 31.2:521:7-8; LW 17:336.
- ¹⁰²*Opera* 150 A; CW 605.
- ¹⁰³*Opera* 244 B; CW 652.
- ¹⁰⁴*Opera* 60B; CW 208.
- ¹⁰⁵Egil Grislis, "The Meaning of Good Works: Luther and the Anabaptists," *Word & World*, 6,2 (1986): 170-180.
- ¹⁰⁶WA 42:14:6-7; LW 1:17.
- ¹⁰⁷WA 40,2:440:35; LW 12:390.
- ¹⁰⁸WA 40,1:290:3-5; LW 26:171.
- ¹⁰⁹WA 40,2:440:36-441:16; LW 12:290
- ¹¹⁰*Inst.* 2:3:6; *OS* 3:280:5-6; *LCC* 297.
- ¹¹¹*Inst.* 2:3:6; *OS* 3:280:18-19; *LCC* 298.
- ¹¹²*Inst.* 2:3:6; *OS* 3:279:15-16; *LCC* 297.
- ¹¹³*Opera* 179 A; CW 232; cf. *Opera* 397; CW 232.
- ¹¹⁴*Opera* 632 A; LW 409-410.
- ¹¹⁵*Opera* 636 A; LW 416.
- ¹¹⁶*Opera* 298 A; CW 738.
- ¹¹⁷*Opera* 22 B; CW 139; cf. *Opera* 298 A-B; CS 738.
- ¹¹⁸Stephan Pförtner, "The Paradigms of Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther: Did Luther's Message of Justification Mean a Paradigm Change?" pp. 135-141, in Hans Küng and David Tracy, eds., *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, trans. Margaret Köhl (New York: Crossroad, 1991).
- ¹¹⁹Gustaf Aulen, *The Faith of the Christian Church*, trans. by Eric H. Wahlstrom and G. Everett Arden (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1948), pp. 321-322.
- ¹²⁰*Inst.* 3:3:11; *OS* 4:66:24-25, 29-30; *LCC* 603; cf. *Inst.* 2:3:6; *OS* 3:279:3-39; *LCC* 296-298.
- ¹²¹Jürgen Moltmann, *Prädestination und Preservanz: Geschichte und Deutung der reformierten Lehre "de preservantia sanctorum"* (Neukirchen Kreis Mohr: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961).
- ¹²²*Opera* 7 A; CW 111-112.
- ¹²³*Opera* 181 A; CW 56; cf. *Opera* 422 A-B; CW 270 and *Opera* 424 B; CW 273.
- ¹²⁴*Opera* 13 A; CW 122.
- ¹²⁵*Opera* 636 A; CW 415-16, quoting I John 3:6-8a.
- ¹²⁶*Opera* 181 B; CW 57.
- ¹²⁷*Opera* 538 A-B; CW 447; cf. *Opera* 463 A; CW 506 and *Opera* 374 A; CW 818. Already the

local council of Carthage (418 A.D.) had defined: "And whoever shall so understand the words of John the Apostle: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1 John 1:8) as to mean that we must say out of humility that we have sins and not because it is true—*anathema sit*," p. 371, Joseph Neuner, S.J. and Heinrich Roos, S.J., ed. by Karl Rahner, S.J., *The Teaching of the Catholic Church as Contained in Her Documents* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1967). At the same time subsequent documents make clear that the reality of falling into venial sin does not necessitate progressing to mortal sin. The Council of Trent, Sixth Session, 1547, ch. 11, formulated: "For though during this mortal life men, however holy and just, fall at times into at least light and daily sins, which are also called venial, they do not on that account cease to be just, for that petition of the just, 'forgive us our trespasses', is both humble and true; for which reason the just ought to feel themselves more obligated to walk in the way of justice, for 'being now freed from sin and made servants of God' (Rom. 6:22), they are able, 'living soberly, justly and godly' (Tit. 2:12) to proceed onward through Jesus Christ by whom they have access to this grace (Rom. 5:2). For God does not forsake those who have once been justified by his grace unless he be first forsaken by them." *ibid.*, pp. 391-392.

¹²⁸*Opera* 448 B; CW 309-310, cf. *Opera* 449 B; CW 311 and *Opera* 259 A; CW 673.

¹²⁹*Opera*, 487 B; CW 1011.

¹³⁰*Opera* 434; CW 1053.