

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE KOKOMO FOUR

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As these words are being penned, Easter is still very much on the mind of this writer. Just a matter of days ago, we once again had the joy of celebrating this world's greatest truth and most wonderous miracle: Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead on Easter morning. Without that one event, as the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians, "our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Cor. 15:14b). Without Easter morning's open tomb, our "faith is futile" and we would still be in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17). In the end, if our Lord's tomb is not empty, then everything else in this world really would be.

Easter morning's message is certainly a powerful and glorious message. For Christ has indeed been raised from the dead! And with Christ's resurrection, God declared this entire world of sinful human beings to be righteous in His sight. Our Lord's resurrection brings to this world the message that God has accepted the ransom price which Christ has paid for us and for our sin. "By raising Jesus Christ from the dead," Werner Franzmann writes, "God declares, certifies, guarantees, and attests that the blood of His Son cleanses us from all sin."¹

This Scriptural truth that Christ's sacrifice was the perfect sacrifice, sufficient for the sins of the entire world, is known as "objective justification." Within recent years, however, objective justification has been the catalyst for considerable debate. As early as 1880, the Synodical Conference was plagued by a confusion on the subject of objective and subjective justification. Writings by such men as Dr. Richard Lenski, whose commentaries on the New Testament have become something of a seminary bestseller, as well as much of what is published by Baker and Zondervan Publishing Houses, are weak on the distinction between objective

and subjective justification.

But when this subject of objective justification is mentioned within WELS, what perhaps comes first and foremost to the mind is the debate and struggle which took place at Faith Lutheran Church in Kokomo, Indiana. Because of the exposure this struggle at Faith congregation received in CHRISTIAN NEWS, the Kokomo debate brought and continues to bring all kinds of questions to the mind of many sincere believers. The crux of this controversy can perhaps be best summed up in this simple manner: "*Has God forgiven the sins of all men?*"²

What follows is a brief presentation of this Scriptural truth of objective justification and a historical glimpse into the controversy and effects of the so-called "Kokomo case."

A DEFINITION OF TERMS

In the eyes of many, there are four terms which are viewed as essentially synonymous:

UNIVERSAL JUSTIFICATION

GENERAL JUSTIFICATION

WORLD JUSTIFICATION

OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION.

Although all four terms are found in various documents to describe the same thing (E. Reim states that objective justification is an "equivalent expression" to the others³), a strict definition perhaps should be made. Dr. Becker states that, strictly speaking, there is this distinction between universal (general or world) and objective justification:

UNIVERSAL JUSTIFICATION: Denotes the Scriptural teaching that God has forgiven the sins of the entire world. This forgiveness of sins is universal.

OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION: Denotes the Scriptural doctrine that the sins of an individual are forgiven by God whether he believes it or not. Objective justification is not necessarily universal (i.e., there

*could theoretically be an objective justification which was not universal--e.g., of the elect), but if justification is universal it must be objective.*⁴

The word *justification* comes from the Greek word δικαιοῦν. The word δικαιοῦν is a legal term which means "to make just, to pronounce and treat as righteous, to justify."⁵ In light of Scripture, we have seen that *justification* may be based on either (1.) *the works a man has done* (cf. Romans 2:13) or (2.) *what someone else has done for him or in his place* (cf. Romans 3:24). As we have come to learn through the clear teachings of Scripture, our justification is based solely and entirely on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done for us, since we on our part could not possibly keep the requirements of the Law. Therefore, our justification is an act of God which took place outside of man.⁶ This pronouncement of justification is a judgment of God which does not change the individual but does change his status before God.

Objective justification, then, is that pronouncement or "not guilty" verdict which God has declared upon the entire world. By His grace, God has forgiven the sins of each and every sinner through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ. By the blood of Christ, all men have been justified. What this means is that Christ died not only for the believer, but also for the unbeliever. The difficulties which have arisen because of objective justification are a result of a conflict with human reason that comes out of this--that we say that *yes*, the ungodly have been justified, but *no*, the unbelievers will not enter heaven. Of course, it must be understood that we should never object to any Scriptural teaching because our limited reason cannot fathom the unsearchable depths of God's wisdom.

A HISTORY OF THE TERM

The term *objective justification* itself is not scriptural; that is, the term itself cannot be found within Scripture. Rather, this terminology is the product of an effort by some dogmatician or theologian to describe this scriptural doctrine. And since this term is neither scriptural nor was used by ancient church fathers, there are those today who suggest that the doctrine itself is also new.

However, orthodox Lutheranism is no stranger to the teaching that the entire world has been justified through Christ's blood. The terminology may have changed, but objective justification was not foreign to the teaching of Luther's day. THE FORMULA OF CONCORD, in its discussion "Of the Righteousness of Faith Before God,"⁷ is quite clear on this matter. In its discussion of Christ's perfect obedience unto death for the satisfaction of sin, THE FORMULA OF CONCORD states: "But, since it is the obedience as above mentioned (not only of one nature, but) of the entire person, it is a complete satisfaction and expiation for the human race."⁸

THE APOLOGY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION states quite clearly that through Christ all men's sins have been forgiven:

*The Law, which made all sinners, seemed to have done injury, but when the Lord Jesus came, He forgave to all sin which no one could avoid, and, by the shedding of His own blood, blotted out the handwriting which was ~~was~~ against us.*⁹

Although the doctrine of objective justification is present within the Lutheran Confessions, it is yet not taught as boldly nor as clearly as it might be if the Confessions were written today. The reason for this, some deduce, is that the church fathers assumed that the distinction between objective and subjective justification was quite clear

and that there was no need to further distinguish them.¹⁰

It is much easier to demonstrate Luther's adherence to this doctrine. Such quotes as the following (Luther's comments on Luke 24:47-- "preach the remission of sins") display Luther's belief concerning objective justification. Luther says that to "preach the remission of sins" is nothing else than to:

*preach the Gospel, which announces to all the world that in Christ the sins of the whole world are swallowed up, that He died to take our sins away from us and that He rose to devour them and wipe them out, so that all who believe this have such hope and assurance.*¹¹

The use of the term *objective justification* itself in Synodical Conference literature seems to date back to at least 1880. Professor F.W. Stellhorn said at the 1880 General Pastoral Conference:

*I remind you of an analogy, the doctrine of a twofold justification. There, in opposition to modern theologians, all of us teach that there is an objective justification, which came to pass through the resurrection of Christ. By this resurrection all mankind has been justified objectively. There God has declared: Now all men are justified, freed from their sins.*¹²

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TERM

The importance of a good understanding of objective justification is quite clear when set against, for instance, the backdrop of the *decision theology* which is rampant these days. A strong emphasis is placed in decision theology on responding to the Gospel's call and on "accepting" Jesus. The faith of the "born again" believer is so strongly emphasized that it would be easy to look at faith as a work which must be fulfilled for salvation and forgiveness of sins.

"PUT YOUR FAITH IN CHRIST."

"ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS BELIEVE."

"PUT YOUR TRUST IN THE LORD."

The tragedy of such a strong emphasis comes when there are times

of doubt. Since faith is seen as the "reason why" God forgives us, and since forgiveness is seen as not really existing until faith comes along, there is nothing upon which one might cling during periods of doubt. "*Do I feel the same about Jesus as I did before?*" one might then be left asking. "*Do I have enough faith?*"

On the otherhand, if forgiveness comes first, if the sins of the world were paid for with Christ's blood apart from faith, if God forgave our sins long ago when He raised Jesus on Easter morning, one can be assured that his sins are truly forgiven whether he feels it or not. Our Synod's "TRACT NO. 3" spoke of this important distinction when it said:

Take this matter of justification. Why quibble about words and expressions? Maybe we would be better off if we would stress the personal side more than we do. Why not tell man that his faith is more important to think about than a justifying act of God? What good will God's verdict of acquittal do us if we don't stress personal faith? Where does the proof of our salvation finally lie?

A time will come in our life, however, when the picture of the Bible will become more practical and more personal to us than ever before. That is when we are face to face with death.... [and] the faith by which we live will be the faith in which we die. Where do we wish to have our faith rest as we approach that final hour?

Will it be no more than this: "My justification has been made possible by God, and I know that He will finally pass judgment in my favor because I am sure that I have a personal and saving faith in my heart?"

No, it must be nothing less than this: "My faith is a weak and faltering thing. My personal feelings betray the weakness of my heart. But God has already declared the whole world righteous in Christ's death and resurrection. Sinner that I am, I know that I am included."¹³

What then, one might ask, is the role of faith? Many like to picture objective justification as the bank of God. In that bank is deposited the treasure which Christ purchased for all men through His blood. That treasure is an inexhaustible amount of grace and forgiveness for all mankind. The treasure is there whether we go and get it

or whether we let it sit. God's forgiveness has been won for all of mankind whether we believe it or not. And so, faith is that which draws from the bank's treasure. Faith merely takes and holds what God promises and gives. It is important to remember that faith is not a condition which must be fulfilled before we can be forgiven, nor is it the cause of forgiveness. By *objective justification*, we mean that faith is a response to what came first--forgiveness for all mankind.¹⁴

Thus Pieper states:

*Discard this doctrine and you will have to teach that men must supply the deficiency in Christ's work.*¹⁵

THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Scripture is quite clear. The following passages speak to this truth that in Christ God has objectively justified the world.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-19

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

VERSE 18

A key word here is *reconcile*, which is καταλλάσσω in the Greek. The word itself, according to its root meaning, suggests a complete change. It states that the relationship which existed between the two parties has been fundamentally and completely changed.¹⁶ When used of an individual(s), the verb commonly means to restore the individual to his/her former status.¹⁷ The question is--who is the reconciled party? The general pronoun "us" (ἡμᾶς), being in the accusative case, indicates that we are the direct object of this action by God. The next verse will describe this change in status.

VERSE 19

The verbs ἦν καταλλάσσω, translated "was reconciling," is an imperfect periphrastic. The significance of the imperfect periphrastic for the reader of 2 Corinthians 5:19 is that it refers to a continued past action. The past continued action was Christ's perfect life of obedience here on earth and then His death on the cross. And it was through that "past continued action" that God reconciled the world to Himself.

The noun *world* (κόσμον) further explains the object of this reconciliation. With this κόσμον, we see clearly the objective nature of this justification. Christ's blood covers the sins of the *world*. God hereby completely changed the status of the entire world, no longer *counting men's sins against them*. This nonimputation of sins is both universal ("the world") and an accomplished fact ("was reconciled").

ROMANS 5:18-19

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Two key thoughts run through this entire section. Both thoughts are shown to relate to *all men* (παντας). The first thought refers to Adam, while the second refers to Christ. By Adam's trespass all men were made sinful by imputation. The words "all" and "many" are used interchangeably throughout this section. The "many" of verse 19 ("the many were made sinners") is the "all" of verse 18 ("condemnation to all men").

The context of Romans 5:18-19 also proves to be strong evidence for "the many" here referring to "all men." Verses 12 to 14 assert that because of Adam's sin, all men died. And in the following verse, he says that "the many" died. Dr. Becker states that "no one can argue successfully that οἱ πολλοί does not mean all men in this case. And just as the πάντας of verse 12 is reflected in the οἱ πολλοί of verse 15, so the πάντας of verse 18 is in both cases reproduced by the οἱ πολλοί of verse 19."¹⁸

The point is clear. Just as the sin of the one has such devastating and far-reaching effect upon all men, so too does the righteousness of the One have a far-reaching effect upon all men. The parallelism of Paul's argument is clear. On account of Adam, all men are guilty. This guilt upon all men does not require that each individual sinner acknowledge his guilt and believe himself to be a sinner in order for it to be a concrete reality. Likewise, on account of Christ, all men have been justified. This justification upon all men does not require acceptance by the individual to be complete or effective.

ROMANS 4: 23-25

The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

This passage is a clear statement of what was stated at the outset of this paper--that is, the wonderful importance of Christ's resurrection and the blessed assurance it gives to us.

Through chapter four of Romans, Paul has been describing Abraham's justification by faith. God had credited to believing Abraham the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Paul then uses Abraham as an example

for us to learn how we are justified. Verse 23 makes that connection, stating that this was written "for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead."

The word *for* in verse 25 is διὰ, which means "because of" or "on account of." And so when Paul states that Christ was delivered because of our sins, he is saying that Christ was delivered because our sins had been imputed to Him. The *our* of verse 25 cannot be limited to only believers, as some suggest. For Paul throughout the epistle has been speaking in terms which are clearly universal (cf. 3:23-24).

1 JOHN 2:2

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Our sins have aroused God's anger and wrath. This verse speaks of how God's anger over sin is propitiated. The word which the NIV translates *atoning sacrifice* (ἱλασμός) literally means *to appease anger*. And since it is sin that has aroused God's anger, only by removing or forgiving that sin would God's anger then be appeased. And Christ is that sacrifice which has removed God's wrath. Again, the phrase *the whole world* shows the extent of this propitiation--the entire human race.

THE OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION DEBATE

The debate in Kokomo concerning objective justification is not the first time this subject has been debated within American Lutheranism. Although there are many reasons for this, part of the reason has been in the difficulty in distinguishing between law and gospel. For those who desire to soften God's Law and the consequential punishment for those who have broken the Law, the idea of a universal or objective justification has never been seen as a problem. However, it has

become a problem when individuals desire to maintain the Law which speaks of our God who hates and punishes sin, but then by human reason try to harmonize the Gospel message with that. Human reason stumbles when making that distinction between Law and Gospel. How can God be both a forgiving and a punishing God? These two messages appear to contradict themselves, thus causing many to reject as unscriptural the doctrine of objective justification since there is this conflict with human reason. But as we have seen from the passage of Scripture which we have already studied, God has found a way to provide for us and for all mankind forgiveness of sins and yet remain a God who hates and punishes evil. That way is in the Person of Jesus Christ. "In Christ," Dr. Becker once wrote, "God has forgiven every sin and in Christ God has punished every sin."¹⁹

Human reason becomes a stumbling block when it tries to reconcile the Scriptural truths that are an essential part of the doctrine of objective justification. Thus it is somewhat understandable that, as stated, the Kokomo controversy was not the first time that this subject has come under debate within American Lutheranism. In fact, a statement very close to one of the FOUR STATEMENTS of Kokomo was the catalyst for one of the earliest objective justification debates.

The fourth of the FOUR STATEMENTS from Kokomo, which will be studied in more detail later in this paper, states: "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." Even though the statement leaves much to be desired, it nonetheless can be defended as portraying the Scriptural truth that in Christ the sins

of the world have been forgiven, including the sins of those who died in the flood and the sins of Judas. This truth that Judas has been objectively justified in Christ was defended by C.F. Walther in 1850 when he wrote:

What? Then are the impenitent to be absolved as well, and therefore also an absolution spoken to an impenitent be valid? To this we answer: The absolution remains valid and powerful, even if it is spoken to a Judas, for the Judas is already completely redeemed by Christ and in Christ already justified and absolved by God Himself. ²⁰

This truth is one which was offensive to some who heard it in 1850, as it would prove to be to the families involved in the debate at Kokomo over 100 years later. Professor T.N. Hasselquist, president of the Augustana Synod, was one such individual for whom objective justification seemed foolishness. He saw this teaching as unscriptural and accused the Norwegian Synod of teaching that "the whole world--even Judas--has been justified and has received the forgiveness of sin."²¹ This teaching of the Norwegian Synod, however, was defended as Scriptural. A short time after Professor Hasselquist's accusation of this "false teaching" within the Norwegian Synod was leveled, a Lutheran pastor wrote to defend this truth:

Even Judas had become, objectively, in Christ, a child of God and an heir of heaven. However, since he [Judas] did not accept in true faith that which Jesus had so dearly acquired for him, but scorned it, naturally he never received any benefit from it. ²²

The position of the Norwegian Synod concerning objective justification remained firmly grounded in Scripture: To quote one of its pastors:

Although other words are used here by Hasselquist than those we have used, and words are present which might appear strange to many who are not sufficiently well acquainted in the linguistic usage of the Bible, yet I will nevertheless say that I heartily approve of that which is cited here as the teaching of the [Norwegian] Synod... ²³

THE HISTORY OF THE KOKOMO CONTROVERSY

What took place at Kokomo was not unique in the history of American Lutheranism. The center of the debate, as we shall see, was a denial of objective justification. What took place received considerable attention by some and the matter soon found its way into such publications as the CHRISTIAN NEWS. Portions of what took place at Kokomo have been reported by various parties on various sides of the issue. Unfortunately, as I imagine is the case with many such controversies as this, some of what has been told of the events and history of the controversy has been distorted.²⁴

As we proceed now through the events central to a proper understanding of the debate, something about the character and nature of the people involved should be stressed. It appeared throughout the controversy that the people on both sides of the issue possessed a deep love for our Lord and for His Word. Never did I sense a desire to knowingly change or mutilate God's Word by the appellants. Never did I sense anything but a love for our Lord, for His Word, and for maintaining His Word from either side involved in the issue. This does not in any way condone or disregard the false teaching that arose at Kokomo, yet I hope it does put what follows in the proper light. The teachings of the David Hartman and Joe Pohlman families, although not in accord with the teachings of God's Word, do appear nonetheless to proceed from hearts which love our Lord and treasure His Word.

The two families which appealed the actions of Faith Lutheran Church of Kokomo, Indiana, are David and Janet Hartman and Joe and Wenda Pohlman. As we shall see, the Hartman and Pohlman families are the only members of Faith congregation who opposed the doctrine

of objective justification and it is against them alone that church discipline was taken.

THE EVENTS OF JULY OF 1978

The setting for the first apparent public demonstration of the doctrinal position of the Hartmans and Pohlmanns was the vacancy situation at Faith Lutheran Church in Kokomo, Indiana. Faith congregation was without a pastor and had requested that they be assigned a graduate from our seminary. During this period of vacancy at Faith, various duties normally performed by the pastor were being performed by men of the congregation. Since the congregation didn't know exactly when the new pastor would arrive, they asked David Hartman to lead the Vacation Bible School program. The program was scheduled for August of 1978 and Mr. Hartman undoubtedly seemed like the logical choice to fill that position in absence of a pastor since he was the Education chairman and the superintendant of the Sunday School program.²⁵

Charles Papenfuss was assigned from our seminary to be Faith congregation's new pastor. He arrived in July and was installed and ordained on July 16, 1978. David Hartman then asked Pastor Papenfuss to be a teacher for one of the VBS classes and thus to attend the VBS teachers' meetings.

At the first meeting of the VBS teachers, David Hartman presented to the teachers the stories which were to be taught at VBS that summer. One of the stories that was to be taught was that of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Mr. Hartman's presentation of the story included the analysis that just as the father of the story wished to forgive the son and be reconciled to him, so too God wishes to forgive sinners.²⁶ Pastor Papenfuss then indicated

that in Christ God has already forgiven the sins of mankind.²⁷ Pastor Papenfuss and Mr. Hartman discussed the issue for a short time at the teachers' meeting, but both men remained firm in their positions. It was decided at that time or shortly thereafter that Mr. Hartman and Pastor Papenfuss should meet again later to discuss the issues in greater detail. But it seemed clear already that the doctrinal lines had already been clearly drawn. As the Hartmans and Pohlman later wrote: "Thus the difference in our teaching appeared the first week after his [Pastor Papenfuss'] installation."²⁸

THE EVENTS OF AUGUST TO OCTOBER OF 1978

David Hartman and Pastor Papenfuss continued to meet to discuss objective justification. Pastor Papenfuss gave Mr. Hartman various reading materials which he felt correctly represented the Scriptural teaching of objective justification. One of the materials which Pastor Papenfuss gave to Mr. Hartman for home study was MINISTERS OF CHRIST, a commentary on Second Corinthians by former seminary professor Joh. P. Meyer.

The Hartmans and Pohlman hadn't seen Professor Meyer's commentary prior to this time and they found much of what it contained to be surprising to them.²⁹ From reading MINISTERS OF CHRIST, David Hartman formulated three statements which he felt were a representation of Prof. Meyer's thoughts on objective justification as found on pages 103-109.

1. *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 saint.*
2. *After Christ's intervention and through Christ's intervention, God regards all sinners as guilt-free saints.*
3. *When God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ, He individually pronounced forgiveness to each individual sinner whether that sinner ever comes to faith or not.*

As mentioned, these three statements are based on Prof. Meyer's commentary. Statement No. 1 is from pages 103-104 and is taken word-for-word from the commentary.

Paul then, in vs. 17, turned 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? Paul for the present disregards the possibility of rejection; he takes up the case of one who accepted the good news. He describes him as one "in Christ," and sums up the situation by calling him a "new creation."

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Statement No. 2 is from page 107 of Meyer's commentary. The Hartmans and Pohlman explain that they understand the "He" of the corresponding sentence in MINISTERS OF CHRIST to be *God* and the "him" to refer to *all sinners*. Their statement made these two changes from MINISTERS OF CHRIST "for clarity."³¹

We thus see that *καταλλαγῆ* does not denote a change in the nature of the sinner, in the attitude of his heart. That change will take place when he is led by the Spirit to accept in faith the offered *καταλλαγῆ*. The change occurred in the standing of the sinner before his Judge. Before Christ's intervention took place God regarded him as a guilt-laden, condemned culprit. After Christ's intervention and through Christ's intervention He regards him as a guilt-free saint. The *nature* of the sinner has not been changed. *God* did not undergo a change, did not experience a change of heart. The *status* of the sinner was changed.

32

Statement No. 3 of those formulated by the Hartmans and Pohlman is from page 109. The Hartmans and Pohlman worded the third statement so as to express what they understood Prof. Meyer to be saying, "staying as closely as possible to the original paragraph."³³

We take up the first part of the statement: *θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσειν ἑαυτῷ*, which the King James Bible translates: *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*. We note first of all that Paul extends God's act of *καταλλάσσειν* to cover the whole world. No sinner is excepted. The sins of everyone were laid on Jesus, were imputed to Him. Forgiveness of sins was not only secured and provided for the sinners, it was pronounced over them. Their sins were nonimputed to them; they were imputed to Christ. This applies to the whole world, to every individual sinner, whether he was living in the days of Christ, or had died centuries before His coming, or had not yet been born, perhaps has not been born to this day. It applies to the world as such, regardless of whether a particular sinner ever comes to faith or not.

34

The Hartmans and Pohlman understood the above paragraph to express three key thoughts which together make up that third statement. They understood that paragraph to say:

- *Forgiveness of sins wasn't only secured and provided for each individual sinner, it was individually pronounced over each sinner.*
- *This forgiveness applied to all people, those in hell, those living, and those yet to be born.*
- *This individual pronouncement of forgiveness applied to all people apart from faith, prior to faith, or whether they would come to faith or not.*

35

Together with the three statements from MINISTERS OF CHRIST, a fourth statement was added by the Hartmans and Pohlman. The source of this fourth statement is somewhat unclear. It was said in 1980 by the Hartmans and Pohlman that David Hartman found that fourth statement "in classroom notes given him by a friend in the Missouri Synod who had attended the seminary at Springfield."³⁶ In 1982, the Hartmans and Pohlman wrote that the fourth statement "came from a paper presenting the differences between the Augustana Synod and the Norwegian Synod concerning objective justification."³⁷ Dr. Becker wrote that "the last statement is quoted from a term paper from Concordia Seminary in Fort Wayne. It reflects the views of an LC-MS professor who saw in it the significance of objective justification. It should be said that this professor does not accept our exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:19 and Romans 5:19, which, by the way, is also the traditional standard LC-MS interpretation of those passages."³⁸

This fourth statement was added to the other three for a very definite reason. The Hartmans and Pohlman felt that statement #4 would serve to clarify the *all sinners* of the first three statements. If Pastor Papenfuss would reject the fourth statement but accept the first three, then they would be able to conclude that *all sinners* of the first three statements did not include all those in hell. The fourth statement reads:

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.

With the FOUR STATEMENTS formulated and in hand, David Hartman brought them to his next meeting with Pastor Papenfuss. The Hartmans and Pohlman wrote later that they thought that perhaps they had been misunderstanding Pastor Papenfuss' teaching concerning justification and they therefore hoped that the FOUR STATEMENTS would help to clarify the issue. In fact, they later said that they had thought that upon reading the FOUR STATEMENTS, Pastor Papenfuss 'would surely disallow 'sainthood' for unbelievers, that he would say God has not pronounced every individual forgiven whether that sinner ever comes to faith or not, that Judas and his hell-mates have not been declared innocent--not guilty--forgiven of all sin and been given the status of saints. In short, we felt that he would reject a 'faithless justification.'"³⁹

In his private meeting with David Hartman, Pastor Papenfuss received the FOUR STATEMENTS as a valid espousal of the teaching of objective justification. The FOUR STATEMENTS were then brought by the Hartmans and Pohlman to the October (1978) Church Council Meeting and asked Pastor Papenfuss to express his views of them publically. Again, as

he had done in his private meeting with Mr. Hartman, Pastor Papenfuss stated that the FOUR STATEMENTS are correct and are the teaching of the Wisconsin Synod.⁴⁰

APRIL 8, 1979

A voters' meeting was held at Faith congregation and again the issue of objective justification was one of the topics under discussion. David Hartman had written a paper in which he studied the use of the word *justification* in the Lutheran Confessions. Mr. Hartman made his first public mention of that paper at this voters' meeting and he suggested that perhaps the voters could use it as a study guide for future discussions concerning objective justification.⁴¹

JUNE 20, 1979

An emergency voters' meeting was called by Pastor Papenfuss because of what he saw as an ever-escalating problem and volatile situation at Faith congregation. Mr. Hartman on June 10th had distributed his research paper to the voters of the congregation. The paper voiced the position previously taken by the Hartmans and Pohlman which denied objective justification. In the PREFACE to his research paper, David Hartman states that he was writing that paper in defense of the following thesis:

*...On the basis of His work, the merit He earned, Christ stands ready to act as Propitiator for men, to provide for them access to the Father. The Father on His part wishes to forgive the sins of men....The gift of faith thus becomes a key. When an individual comes to faith, he trusts that the Father wishes to forgive his sins and approaches the Father through Christ, his Mediator and Propitiator....The Father now sees the believer through Christ the Propitiator. He justifies the sinner, that is, imputes the perfect righteousness of Christ to him, declares him just for Christ's sake.*⁴²

After reading Mr. Hartman's paper, Pastor Papenfuss concluded

that the paper made several definite assertions that the WELS teaching of objective justification is an incorrect teaching in light of the Lutheran Confessions and Scripture. Because Mr. Hartman's paper and his views had now been made public, Pastor Papenfuss decided that it would be in the best interest of the congregation and the work of the Lord if Mr. Hartman would no longer continue his duties as an elder at Faith congregation. Pastor Papenfuss later wrote:

*I felt that I had no choice but to act at that time in relieving David Hartman of his elder duties, since a church cannot have two leaders publically saying two different things.*⁴³

A second factor which necessitated the June 20th emergency voters' meeting was a Sunday school class taught by Mrs. Hartman. The lesson taught that Sunday was of Sodom and Gomorrah. The lesson, as taught by Mrs. Hartman that morning, dealt with God's wrath and punishment upon the ungodly. What exactly Mrs. Hartman taught that Sunday and what it was about that teaching that became a factor in calling the emergency voters' meeting is still unclear. It does appear, however, that some of the parents of the children in that Sunday's class were upset at the content of Mrs. Hartman's teaching.⁴⁴

The third catalyst for that June 20th meeting came shortly after Mr. Hartman was relieved of his elder duties. That following week Faith congregation held its annual VBS program. The attendance was unusually low for the program, almost half of what had been expected. The reason for the low attendance at the Faith Lutheran Church VBS program was because a second, rival VBS program was being held at the home of David Hartman.

These three factors created what Pastor Papenfuss considered to be a "chaotic situation" which "demanded immediate attention."⁴⁵

Because of the nature of the meeting, the June 20th emergency voters' meeting was attended by Circuit Pastor Allen Siggelkow. The voters were informed of the situation that had arisen at Faith with the Hartmans and Pohlman. After a lengthy discussion, the voters decided that each of them individually should express their support or rejection of the WELS teaching on objective justification. The FOUR STATEMENTS were read to the voters. Pastor Papenfuss and Pastor Siggelkow said that the statements were a proper expression of the WELS teaching. By motion of the voters, the FOUR STATEMENTS were "allowed to become the basis for testing adherence to or rejection of the doctrine of objective justification."⁴⁶ By its vote on these FOUR STATEMENTS, the congregation would either adhere to or repudiate the doctrine of objective justification.

In the subsequent voting, the majority of the voters supported the WELS teaching on objective justification. Mr. Hartman and Mr. Pohlman, however, expressed their opposition to the teaching.⁴⁷ The Hartmans and Pohlman were then given a "grace period" during which they could reconsider their position. They were given until July 8th, the date of the congregation's next regularly scheduled voters' meeting, to make their position known [see colored insert, page 22].

On June 22nd, David Hartman sent a letter to the voters of Faith in which he once again stated their opposition to the WELS teaching of objective justification.

We refuse to confess to the following: Objectively speaking, without any reference to an individual sinner's attitude toward Christ's sacrifice, purely on the verdict of God, 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 to each individual sinner whether that sinner ever comes to faith or not. At the time of the resurrection God leeked down in hell and declared Judas, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all the ungodly innocent, not guilty, and give unto you the status of saints.

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH

Special Voters' Meeting - June 20, 1979

The meeting was opened by Pastor Papenfuss with a devotion and prayer. Roll call was taken with 14 members present as well as Pastor Siggelkow.

Pastor Papenfuss told why the meeting was called:

1. Doctrinal Problems
2. Sunday School and V.B.S. Problems.

After a lengthy discussion, D. Hartman stated that he would send a letter about what had happened in Sunday School.

After another lengthy discussion a motion was made by D. Kerkhoff and seconded by W. Henke to poll the membership on whether each individual member supported the biblical doctrines of the W.E.L.S. The motion passed, and on the resulting roll call the vote was 10 "yes", 3 "no", and 1 "undecided". One of the "no" votes then said he would change to "yes" and study to clear up the questions he had.

A motion was then made by J. Kerkhoff and seconded by W. Henke to exclude from fellowship those members who stated they could not support the doctrines of the W.E.L.S. It was decided that a grace period would be available until July 8 for those who voted "no" or "undecided" to reconsider their position. The motion carried.

W. Harvey requested Pastor Siggelkow to talk about the meeting which he did.

A motion was made by M. Liebner that Pastor Papenfuss be given a vote of confidence as the spiritual leader of F.L.C. D. Kerkhoff seconded the motion which was withdrawn after a lengthy discussion since several of those who voted "no" stated a vote on this matter should not be taken until the period for reconsideration had elapsed.

D. Hartman stated he would send a letter regarding his intentions.

The meeting closed with the Lord's Prayer.

John Metcalf

JUNE 26, 1979

After a lengthy discussion with Pastor Papenfuss, Joe Pohlmann resigned from his position as chairman and confirmation class teacher at Faith. This decision was one which was voluntarily made on Mr. Pohlman's part when he saw that he simply could not come to an agreement with WELS on the teaching of objective justification.

JULY 8, 1979

With Joe Pohlman's resignation as chairman of Faith congregation, Pastor Papenfuss became the acting chairman of Faith in Mr. Pohlman's absence. Eight voting members were present at this meeting which began by electing a new chairman. David Hartman's letter of June 22nd was then read and discussed.

Because the Hartmans and Pohlmans remained firm in their opposition to the WELS teaching of objective justification, the following *Resolution on Fellowship* was read to the voters.

Whereas: Faith Lutheran Church is part of the W.E.L.S.; and whereas in the Special Voters' Assembly meeting of June 20, 1979 in a roll call vote these gentlemen (D. Hartman and J. Pohlman) stated that they would not support the teachings of the Wisconsin Synod, nor have they indicated yet at this present time to give support to this Church's doctrinal positions;

Be it resolved: This Voters' Assembly will institute strict disciplinary action (withholding rights and privileges) in regard to these gentlemen and to any part of their family that supports their position until such time as they or any part of their family indicates to the Voters' Assembly of this Church their willingness by their confession to be in fellowship with us;

And be it further resolved: This assembly encourages these gentlemen and/or any part of their family to seek further counseling through the proper W.E.L.S. channels.

The voters of Faith discussed the resolution and then voted to sever fellowship with David Hartman and Joe Pohlman. The two men, however, were not suspended from membership at Faith. The congregation

explained that this somewhat unusual distinction was made because Faith congregation was "still hoping and praying that you will come back to us. In other words, our action was not final and conclusive, because we still feel God's Word can bring you back into agreement with us."⁴⁹

It should be noted that the July 8th voters' meeting may have been acting somewhat outside the boundaries of Faith's constitution. There is some question as to whether the eight voting members present at that meeting represented a quorum.⁵⁰ Secondly, the voters acted outside of the constitution when it elected as an officer an individual who had not been a voting member for at least one year, as Faith's constitution specifies.⁵¹ And finally, the congregation provided a complicating and somewhat irregular feature when it declared Mr. Hartman and Mr. Pohlman to be out of fellowship but not out of membership. There is some question as to if such a distinction can be properly made [see colored insert, pages 25 & 26].⁵²

AUGUST 7, 1979

The Hartman-Pohlman dispute was now taken before Circuit Pastor Alan Siggelkow. David and Janet Hartman and Joe and Wenda Pohlman met with Pastor Siggelkow to appeal the July 20th decision of Faith congregation.

Pastor Siggelkow asked the Hartmans and Pohlmans what it is that they feared with the WELS teaching concerning objective justification. He wondered if their fears with WELS and the FOUR STATEMENTS developed from a fear that WELS, with its teaching of objective justification, is teaching universalism--"that the synod is saying that every human being is going to heaven whether they believe in Jesus Christ or not."⁵³

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH

Voters' Meeting - July 8, 1979

The meeting was called to order by Pastor Papenfuss, who, acting as Chairman in the absence of J. Pohlman, led those present in an opening devotion (Romans 1:1-8).

Roll call was taken with 8 members present.

Chairman Appointment

J. Pohlman's verbal resignation necessitated the appointment of a new chairman. A motion was made and seconded (D. Kerkhoff, M. Liebner) to nominate J. Metcalf to serve as Chairman until January 1980. The motion was approved unanimously.

Minutes

The minutes of Voters' Meeting on April 8, 1979 and June 20, 1979 were read and approved as read.

Reports

Treasurer

The treasurer's report was read and accepted (copy attached). To be noted are first and second quarter deficits of \$283.31 and \$221.85, respectively. These have resulted in part from the expense of the parsonage remodeling and pre-payment of mission funding.

Pastor

Pastor Papenfuss reported that attendance in church was stable. V.B.S. attendance averaged 15-30 students. 12 Evangelism presentations had been made. Vacation plans had been formulated. Sunday School teachers would be as follows:

Regular

Bill Harvey
Becky Pohlman
Marilyn Lasch

Substitute

Kim Papenfuss
Rosie Kerkhoff
Angela Lasch

Old Business

June 20th Meeting

D. Hartman's letter of 6-22-79 responding to questions raised at the Special Voters' Meeting was read and discussed:

R. Pohlman and A. Schroeter agreed to support the doctrines of the W.E.L.S.

Kerkhoff Resolution

A motion in the form of a resolution stating that D. Hartman and J. Pohlman were not in fellowship with F.L.C. was made and seconded (D. Kerkhoff, J. Metcalf) (copy attached). Following a solemn discussion on the necessity for this procedure, the motion was passed and the secretary directed to notify those involved of their new status. To be noted is the fact that the Voters' action held that those who had failed to support the doctrine of the W.E.L.S. were not in fellowship with F.L.C. but were not suspended from membership pending completion of the appeals process.

The parsonage remodeling has been completed and an open house will be held in the future.

New Business

Election of Officers

A motion was made, seconded (R. Pohlman, D. Kerkhoff), and unanimously passed that the following members would serve as recorded until January 1980:

| | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| Chairman | J. Metcalf |
| Secretary | M. Liebner |
| Treasurer | D. Kerkhoff |
| Education Elder | W. Harvey |
| Financial Elder | L. Kuntz |

The duties of the elders and trustees were explained.

Work to be done on the exterior of the Church building was discussed.

Adjournment

Lord's Prayer

Respectfully submitted,

M. Liebner, Acting Secretary

David Hartman said that the group feared that the FOUR STATEMENTS are false doctrine, going beyond the teaching of Scripture, and that they "are making a justification which the Scriptures nor our Lutheran fathers knew about. Therefore, the Synod, if these teachings are their teachings, is guilty of false doctrine."⁵⁴

"We are just saying," Wenda Pohlman later added, "that God did not declare everyone forgiven."⁵⁵

The following are excerpts from the Hartmans' and Pohlmans' discussion with Pastor Siggelkow which most clearly display the doctrinal position of the appellants.

The crux of David Hartman's understanding of objective justification came in a discussion of 2 Cor. 5:20 when he said: *"The context clearly shows that all people were not reconciled at one time 2000 years ago because Paul is calling for these people...in Corinth to be reconciled."*

56

David Hartman: *"The people in hell have the status of being holy?"*
Pastor Siggelkow: *"Right. And that's exactly what Second Corinthians says....Christ has died for the sins of all men. Why do you say He died for the sins of all men and then you say but not...(for) the ungodly in hell?....He didn't die for their sins?"*
Hartmans & Pohlmans: (together) *"No!"*
David Hartman: *"No! We haven't said that!"*
Pastor Siggelkow: *"Then what are you rejecting?"*
David Hartman: *"We are saying that Christ has died for the sins of all people, including those in hell. But, the people in hell, because of the sin which God counts against them, they are not forgiven, they are not righteous, they are not justified, they are not holy....Christ has paid for the sins of all people...I'm saying that the payment is an accomplished fact.... NOT forgiveness."*

57

David Hartman: *"I haven't heard the word objective justification, though."*

Pastor Siggelkow: *"Christ has died for all actual sins of men."*

David Hartman: *"To me, that doesn't say that every individual has received the status of a saint. That says what we say, that Christ has died for the sins of all people."*

Mrs. Pohlman: *"To me, you have to end it there. You can't put the forgiveness, that God declared everybody forgiven."*

Pastor Siggelkow: *"Well, what did Christ die for?"*

Mrs. Pohlman: *"To pay for all sins."*

Pastor Siggelkow: *"For what purpose?"*

Mrs. Pohlman: *"He did it for everybody's forgiveness."*

David Hartman: *"He died for the purpose, so that mankind might receive forgiveness. Sure, to have eternal life."*

Pastor Siggelkow: *"So you want to use that....the next step is that your faith becomes a good work."*

David Hartman: *"As long as God works faith, it can't be a good work."*

58

Pastor Siggelkow's analysis of the meeting mentions that, as he sees it, the teachings of the Hartmans and Pohlman's view Christ's work of justification as incomplete. As he saw it, their theology made faith "a condition or cause of justification."⁵⁹

As he explained it, the Hartman-Pohlman position raised faith from merely a receiving organ of justification to "a condition to be met before justification is granted or a cause of justification in the sense that God rewards faith with justification or that faith bridges the gap from redemption to justification. Thus, no matter how you may deny it, faith becomes a good work, or a prerequisite on our part so that we may receive God's grace in justification (in your theology of justification)."⁶⁰

OCTOBER 6, 1979

With their appeal before Pastor Siggelkow being unsuccessful,

the Hartmans and Pohlman brought an appeal before Southern Wisconsin^{east} District President George Boldt. "If you agree with the decision of Faith Lutheran Church of Kokomo and Pastor Siggelkow," they wrote, "then please confirm it with a letter to us as soon as possible. We understand that appealing to you is the final appeal that we can make to the WELS Synod. If you do not agree with Faith Lutheran Church of Kokomo and Pastor Siggelkow, please act quickly to correct this matter as we have not been allowed fellowship with the WELS Synod since July 8, 1979. To us, that has been a long time ago."⁶¹

District President Boldt appointed a Panel of Review to study, as he put it, "the difficulty existing in the Kokomo, Indiana area between Faith Ev. Lutheran Church and Mr. and Mrs. David Hartman and Mr. and Mrs. Joe Pohlman."⁶² The committee chosen to review the Kokomo situation consisted of men from the Milwaukee area. The chairman of the committee was Prof. Armin Panning. The other men who served on that review panel were Pastors Wayne Mueller and Ralph Scharf and WELS teachers Ralph Muenkel and Theodore Zuberbier.

It soon became obvious to the men on the Panel of Review that a face-to-face meeting with the appellants would be highly desirable. Several dates were suggested and discussed, but because of a child to be born into the Hartman family and the work demands of both Mr. Hartman and Mr. Pohlman, the earliest date the two groups could arrange was for June 9th.

JUNE 9, 1980

The Southeastern Wisconsin District Panel of Review met at Ervin Grade School in Kokomo from 2:00 to 6:00 P.M. A classroom in the school was the setting for the four hour meeting. The general agenda which the Panel of Review wanted to follow was to divide the discussion into three general areas. The major discussion time was to concern the Scriptural passages dealing with the concept of justification. Secondly, the group wanted to discuss with the Hartmans and Pohlman appropriate material from the Lutheran Confessions. The final segment was to discuss the procedural irregularities which the appellants had noted in the various voters' meetings held at Faith congregation.

The Panel of Review's desire was that their discussion that day with the Hartmans and Pohlman would be kept as informal and as low-key as possible. They wanted both parties to feel comfortable and at-ease in discussing the matter and in exchanging ideas. Thus when the Hartmans and Pohlman suggested the meeting be tape recorded, the Panel felt that such a request would make for a more guarded atmosphere than that which they were hoping to achieve. "We wanted to maintain an atmosphere in which, if there were some unclarity in a term or concept," Prof. Panning later wrote, "it could be reworded or rephrased without the former expression having to be removed from the record."⁶³ The Hartmans and Pohlman, however, describe a much different reason for the decision not to tape record that June 9th meeting. They claim that they were told the meeting shouldn't be taped in fear that "their part of the discussion [that is, the WELS Panel of Review] might come back to haunt them at a later date and might prove

harmful to the WELS."⁶⁴ Prof. Panning and Pastor Mueller, however, both claim that such was not the fear of the panel and that no such statement was ever made.⁶⁵

Throughout the four hour afternoon discussion, the views expressed by the Hartmans and Pohlman remained consistent with their previous professions of faith concerning objective justification. The Hartmans and Pohlman denied that such a teaching is found in Scripture and in the Lutheran Confessions.

The review panel thought that it was unfortunate that the FOUR STATEMENTS had ever become the standard by which objective justification was judged and the basis for testing adherence to this doctrine. It was felt that such an evaluation should be made solely in the light "of the pertinent Scripture passages."⁶⁷ It was the position of the Panel of Review that the FOUR STATEMENTS, without reference to their context and with further explanation, are inadequate and fall short of completely presenting the Scriptural doctrine of objective justification.⁶⁸ "Since the FOUR STATEMENTS do not have confessional status in the WELS," Professor Panning later wrote, "they should not serve as the standard by which to judge the proper teaching of justification."⁶⁹

Where then, in the opinion of the Panel of Review, did that leave the Hartmans and Pohlman? The panel recognized that while "the form of the FOUR STATEMENTS is inadequate, the doctrine of objective justification that it grapples with is Scriptural."⁷⁰ And it is of that Scriptural truth, the panel concluded from their discussion with the Hartmans and Pohlman, which the appellants remained steadfast in their denial. This doctrinal difference between WELS and the appellants is one which the appellants them-

selves "recognized and admitted in the closing portion of the meeting."⁷¹

A somewhat surprising element of the day's discussion for the Panel of Review came in the statement the Hartmans and Pohlman made several times. They mentioned that prior to Pastor Papenfuss' arrival and their subsequent discussion with him and Pastor Siggelkow, they had never been taught objective justification in that way.

The following conclusions/recommendations were submitted by the Panel of Review on June 30, 1980:

1. *The panel feels that Faith Congregation operated outside of its constitution in having as an officer of the congregation a man who was not a voting member for at least one year, as prescribed in Faith's constitution. Furthermore, there is a question whether at the June 20 meeting of the congregation there was a quorum present.*

The panel regrets that these irregularities occurred and urges Faith Congregation to show greater procedural care in the future. The suspension process could, of course, be done over and the procedures corrected, but the outcome would still be the same so long as the doctrinal difference dividing the two groups exists. 72

2. *An open, honest assessment of the situation would seem to leave no alternative but to recognize that the break in fellowship which Faith Congregation has declared applies also to the appellants' fellowship with the WELS. The real difference in understanding is on key passages of Scripture, e.g., Romans 5:17-19 and 2 Cor. 5:18-20, not just on the Four Statements taken by themselves. 73*

3. *To the panel it seems a logical step that Faith Congregation should at this time take formal action to recognize that breaking fellowship also includes termination of membership in the congregation. 74*

4. *The panel is unanimous in its hope that a change of heart on the part of the appellants may still be possible....We do not underestimate the power of the Word. We are unwilling to say that the Holy Spirit, working through the Word, cannot bring about full recognition and acceptance of the Scriptural truth that God has justified all men and declared the sins of all men to be forgiven. At present the appellants do not agree with that teaching, and this fact will have to be recognized. However, if after studying the Scripture passages they should become convinced of the truth of that teaching, we would urge that they at that time apply for readmission to membership in Faith Congregation. 75*

On the basis of the recommendation of the Panel of Review, Faith congregation with deep regret sent the following letter on November 19, 1980 notifying the Hartmans and Pohlman that their membership at Faith had been terminated.

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH
3215 WEST JUDSON ROAD
KOKOMO, INDIANA 46901

November 19, 1980

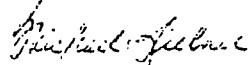
Mr. & Mrs. David Hartman
R.R.# 1, Box 90
Kokomo, Indiana 46901

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Hartman,

In accord with the recommendations of the Southeastern Wisconsin District Panel of Review the voters of the Faith Lutheran Church have approved a resolution terminating your membership in the congregation unless and until such time as you accept the doctrine of justification as practiced by the WELS.

We encourage you to reassess your position on this matter and pray for a favorable decision so that once again we can work together for His kingdom.

Yours in Christ,



Michael Liebner, Secretary

The same letter was also sent to: Mr. & Mrs. Joe Pohlman
6898 W. Co. Rd. 500 N.
Kokomo, Indiana 46901

Having run the full course of appeals with WELS, the Hartmans and Pohlman decided to appeal their case publically. By means of *An Open Letter to the Church*, a letter sent to a great majority of the pastors in WELS, they appealed the recipients of their letter "to study this matter carefully and with much prayer"⁷⁶ [cf. colored insert, pages 35 & 36].

Pastor Boldt said shortly thereafter in his *President's Report* to the Southeastern Wisconsin District that he received many phone calls from concerned people throughout the Synod concerning the Kokomo situation after the Hartman-Pohlman *Open Letter* was sent out. "It was interesting," Pastor Boldt noted, that "these calls were not complaining calls, but calls for information from callers who recognized that these four statements were not the problem but that the people who were at variance with Faith congregation simply do not believe the doctrine of justification as it is clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures."⁷⁷

As might perhaps be expected, the *Open Letter* eventually made its way to an even more public forum. Some months later the Hartman-Pohlman *Open Letter* and those letters sent to the Hartmans and Pohlman by Faith congregation were forwarded to Herman Otten by Chet Swanson and appeared in CHRISTIAN NEWS on March 15, 1982. Thus, as Rick Curia writes, "our present situation and controversy was born"⁷⁸ [cf. colored insert, pg. 37].

In June of 1982, because of the heavy exposure the Kokomo controversy has received and because of the somewhat distorted accounts that already had begun to circulate, President Mischke in his *President's Newsletter* discussed the confessional stand of the Hartmans and Pohlman and the reason why disciplinary procedures were necessary. As President Mischke stressed, the doctrine of objective justification "is a clear Scriptural teaching which we cannot relinquish"⁷⁹ [cf. colored insert, page 38].

February 12, 1982

Matthew 18:17, "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church."

An open letter to all whom God has declared righteous through faith in the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On June 20, 1979 a special Voters' Meeting of Faith Lutheran Church, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Kokomo, Indiana was called to determine if all of its members supported the doctrine of Justification as practiced by the WELS. The FOUR STATEMENTS (see letter A) were presented to those present as the teachings of the WELS concerning the doctrine of Justification.

We could not with a clear conscience support those statements since they teach universalism and are contrary to the clear teachings of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. We therefore voted against the FOUR STATEMENTS and on July 8, 1979 received a letter from Faith Lutheran Church saying that we were suspended from fellowship.

We appealed to the Circuit Pastor, Rev. Alan Siggelkow, and met with him on August 7, 1979. He ruled against us and supported the FOUR STATEMENTS. A transcript of this meeting is available upon request.

We then appealed to the District President, Rev. George Boldt, who informed us on January 23, 1980 that he had appointed a commission of review to study the matter. This commission of review, chaired by Professor Armin J. Panning of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, met with us on June 9, 1980. As you can see by the letter from Faith Lutheran Church dated November 19, 1980 (see letter B), the commission of review recommended that our membership in the WELS be terminated because we refused to "accept the doctrine of Justification as practiced by the WELS." Faith Lutheran Church followed that recommendation. The District President, Rev. George Boldt, gave his blessing upon this decision by announcing at the District Convention in June of 1981 that our case was closed. He informed us of this announcement in a letter to us dated January 25, 1982. This letter is also available upon request.

At each stage of our appeal, we were told that acceptance of the FOUR STATEMENTS was necessary in order to be members of the WELS. In every instance our statement of confession was rejected. That confession has been and remains to be as follows: "Concerning our confession as Christians we believe and confess that Christ, with His perfect life and sacrificial death, has paid for the sins of all people. This payment has been accepted by the Father which is shown in the resurrection of His Son. We believe that God wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth. God works repentance in the hearts of His children, washes their sins away in Holy Baptism, and justifies us through faith in Christ. Thus we have forgiveness of sins, eternal life, etc. This is the Justification known to our Lutheran fathers in the Confessions and to Christians all over the world. We cannot and will not stop teaching this in His Name. Acts 4&5."

We now appeal to you, as brothers and sisters in Christ, to study this matter carefully and with much prayer. Can you, in all good conscience, accept the FOUR STATEMENTS as taught and practiced by the WELS? Do these statements represent your understanding and the Scriptural understanding of the doctrine of Justification? St. Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote in II Timothy 1:13,14, "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us." We felt that we could not accept the FOUR STATEMENTS and at the same time "hold fast the form of sound words... that good thing which was committed unto thee."

We earnestly wait to hear from you as to your decision.

Sincerely,

Mr. & Mrs. David Hartman

Mr. & Mrs. David Hartman
7645 W. Co. Rd. 00 N.S.
Kokomo, Indiana 46901

Mr. & Mrs. Joe Pohlman

Mr. & Mrs. Joe Pohlman
6898 W. Co. Rd. 500 N.
Kokomo, Indiana 46901

Swanson Says "Strange" Terminology on
Justification Creeping Into LCMS

A strange terminology on the doctrine of justification is creeping into The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod says Chester Swanson of Cincinnati, Ohio. Swanson is a co-chairman of the Doctrinal Concerns Program within The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Considerable discussion on the doctrine of justification has been taking place within the LCMS in recent months.

Swanson claims that there are some Lutherans now teaching that even Judas is justified and that his sins are forgiven. The LCMS lay theologian contends that such a notion leaves the door wide open for universalism, the view that eventually everyone will be saved regardless of whether they believed in Christ as their Savior or not. Luther taught that "where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation."

Swanson asks: "How would you 'feel' if you were dropped from a congregation for not confessing and teaching that all individuals are forgiven independent of faith and those in Hell have received the status of saints?" According to the DCP co-chairman, "We have some in our church who insist that Judas was forgiven and is forgiven even as he resides in Hell. Such persons are, of course, anti-Walter A. Maier (and anti-Chester Swanson) because we prefer to say that forgiveness is OFFERED to all but received by faith."

Swanson sent Christian News the following letter with this attached note: "Your readers will surely be interested in the 'Kokomo Case.' This 'strange' terminology on Justification by Faith is also creeping into LCMS."

Matthew 18:17, "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church."

An open letter to all whom God has declared righteous through faith in the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
On June 20, 1979 a special Voters' Meeting of Faith Lutheran Church, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Kokomo, Indiana was called to determine if all of its members supported the doctrine of Justification as practiced by the WELS. The FOUR STATEMENTS (see letter A) were presented to those present as the teachings of the WELS concerning the doctrine of Justification.

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We appealed to the Circuit Pastor, Rev. Alan Sigglelkow, and met with him on August 7, 1979. He ruled against us and supported the FOUR STATEMENTS. A transcript of this meeting is available upon request.

We then appealed to the District President, Rev. George Boldt, who informed us on January 23, 1980 that he had appointed a commission of review to study the matter. This commission of review, chaired by Professor Armin J. Panning of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Seminary met with us on June 9, 1980. As you can see by the letter from Faith Lutheran Church dated November 19, 1980 (see letter B), the commission of review recommended that our membership in the WELS be terminated because we refused to "accept the doctrine of justification as practiced by the WELS." Faith Lutheran Church followed that recommendation. The District President, Rev. George Boldt, gave his blessing upon this decision by announcing at the District Convention in June of 1981 that our case was closed. He informed us of this announcement in a letter to us dated January 25, 1982. This letter is also available upon request.

At each stage of our appeal, we were told that acceptance of the FOUR STATEMENTS was necessary in order to be members of the WELS. In every instance our statement of confession was rejected. That confession has been and remains to be as follows: "Concerning our confession as Christians we believe and confess that Christ, with His perfect life and sacrificial death, has paid for the sins of all people. This payment has been accepted by the Father which is shown in the resurrection of His Son. We believe that God wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth. God works repentance in the hearts of His children, washes their sins away in Holy Baptism, and justifies us through faith in Christ. Thus we have forgiveness of sins, eternal life, etc. This is the Justification known to our Lutheran fathers in the Confessions and to Christians all over the world. We cannot and will not stop teaching this in His Name. Acts 4&5."

We now appeal to you, as brothers and sisters in Christ, to study this matter carefully and with much prayer. Can you, in all good conscience, accept the FOUR STATEMENTS as taught and practiced by the WELS? Do these statements represent your understanding and the Scriptural understanding of the doctrine of Justification? St. Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote in II Timothy 1:13,14 "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us." We felt that we could not accept the FOUR STATEMENTS and at the same time "hold fast the form of sound words . . . that good thing which was committed unto thee."

We earnestly wait to hear from you as to your decision.

Sincerely,
Mr. & Mrs. David Hartman
7645 W. Co. Rd. OO N.S.
Kokomo, Indiana 46901
Mr. & Mrs. Joe Pohlman
6898 W. Co. Rd. 500 N.
Kokomo, Indiana 46901

Faith Lutheran Church
3215 West Judson Road
Kokomo, Indiana 46901

August 30, 1979

Mr. & Mrs. David Hartman
R.R. No. 1 Box 90
Kokomo, Indiana 46901

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Hartman,

In response to your letter of August 18, 1979, it is our understanding that your "no" vote on June 20th against supporting the biblical doctrines of the WELS was based at least in part, on your failure to accept the following statements — included in your letter — all of which are in agreement with the teachings of the WELS, namely that:

1. "Objectively speaking, without any reference to an individual sinners' 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."

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

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

4. "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."

I trust this is the information you desire.

Sincerely yours in Christian love,
Michael Liebner, Acting Secretary
Faith Lutheran Church Voters' Assembly

The same letter was sent to: Mr. & Mrs. Joe Pohlman R.R. No. 2, Box 171, Kokomo, Ind. 46901

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH
3215 WEST JUDSON ROAD
KOKOMO, INDIANA 46901

November 19, 1980

Mr. & Mrs. David Hartman
R.R. No. 1 Box 90
Kokomo, Indiana 46901

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Hartman,

In accord with the recommendations of the Southeastern Wisconsin District Panel of Review the voters of the Faith Lutheran Church have approved a resolution terminating your membership in the congregation unless and until such time as you accept the doctrine of justification as practiced by the WELS.

We encourage you to reassess your position on this matter and pray for a favorable decision so that once again we can work together for His kingdom.

Yours in Christ



The President's Newsletter

June 1982

Dear Colleagues in the Public Ministry,

Normally this newsletter does not comment on the affairs of individual congregations. A doctrinal controversy that came to the fore in Faith Congregation, Kokomo, Indiana, has, however, received a great deal of publicity. Distorted accounts of this matter have caused, at least, some confusion in our circles and may have given the impression to some that the Wisconsin Synod is teaching and defending a doctrine that is not supported by Scripture. Since we have no way of knowing how widespread this misunderstanding may be, it was deemed advisable to offer a brief explanation in this column.

Those who were privileged to have the late Professor J. P. Meyer as a teacher at our Seminary will remember his continuing emphasis on the truth that faith is not a work but merely a "receiving organ." Faith does not create or produce something that wasn't there before; it simply lays hold of Christ's finished work.

Misunderstanding that emphasis, some have concluded that Professor Meyer plays down faith, and his commentary, Ministers of Christ, has been scored in some quarters as allowing universalism. The four Kokomo Statements that have been circulated rather freely would fall into that category: 1. "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." 2. "After Christ's intervention and through Christ's intervention, God regards all sinners as guilt-free saints." 3. "When God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ, He individually pronounced forgiveness to each individual sinner whether that sinner ever comes to faith or not." 4. "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."

Three of these statements have been quoted or adapted from Ministers of Christ. The fourth one is an "import" which has no WELS origin.

These four statements were assembled as a caricature of objective justification and were advanced as an example of the universalism that is supposedly held in WELS and taught in Faith Congregation, Kokomo. It is, therefore, evident that they are not official WELS statements. Nor have they ever been "adopted" by the WELS, as some have alleged, in the course of disciplinary procedures against the two Kokomo couples who advanced them. The four statements have rather served to show that the parties involved do not accept objective justification.

While no insistence is to be made on the use of the term "objective" (This We Believe, a statement of belief of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod, presents the doctrine of justification without using the term), yet the doctrine which is thereby expressed, namely, that in the "non-imputation of trespasses" of which 2 Corinthians 5:19 speaks there is indeed a "justification" for the whole world - this is a clear Scriptural teaching which we cannot relinquish.

THE ROLE OF PROF. MEYER'S COMMENTARY

As has been demonstrated, the first three of the FOUR STATEMENTS are taken either word-for-word or in thought from Prof. Meyer's words in MINISTERS OF CHRIST. After reading MINISTERS OF CHRIST and those first three of the FOUR STATEMENTS, some people have been quick to accuse Prof. Meyer of "opening the door to universalism."

It is important to note, however, that if one reads with care what Prof. Meyer says in the pages under question, one can easily understand what Prof. Meyer is saying. Furthermore, as Dr. Becker and several others have pointed out on many occasions, opening the door to universalism (even if such an accusation were true) would yet not be the same as actually espousing it. But it should be stressed that if one reads what Prof. Meyer says in the context in which he says it, he cannot be understood in any way other than espousing objective justification and not universalism.

The words that have come under criticism are *saints* and *status of saints*. Normally understood, and thus the catalyst for the critical statements against MINISTERS OF CHRIST, a *saint* is a believer, a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. That is the way the word *saint* is found within Scripture.

Although this is true of Scripture's use of the word, it does nonetheless seem logical that we should ask ourselves what Prof. Meyer intended to say with his use of the word *saint*? What concept did he intend to convey through his saint terminology?

A careful reading of the pages of MINISTERS OF CHRIST which have come under question indicate that Prof. Meyer's use of the word *saint* is a wider use than that which Scripture uses it. It seems obvious from the context that Prof. Meyer's use of the

word *saint* that he is referring to those who have been objectively justified in Christ and now are regarded as forgiven. And although Prof. Meyer might have been somewhat clearer and more precise if he had limited himself to the Scriptural use of the word, his words in their context and in the context of his and the WELS' teachings concerning universalism are therefore sufficiently clear. Therefore, as some have suggested, the problem with what Prof. Meyer said in MINISTERS OF CHRIST is not in the words themselves or even in his usage of certain words, but in the manner in which some people have chosen to remove them from their appropriate contexts.

STATEMENT
NUMBER ONE: *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.*

As stated, Prof. Meyer's usage of the saint terminology is somewhat wider than what is commonly understood. Thus this statement has caused confusion for those who have not understood that fact. But this statement, as with the others, can nevertheless be easily understood in a correct sense.

The words which should be noted or stressed in this first statement are *objectively speaking* and *status*. Dr. Becker states that to him it is clear that "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."⁸⁰

STATEMENT
NUMBER TWO: *After Christ's intervention and through Christ's intervention, God regards all sinners as guilt-free saints.*

The words which should be stressed in the mind of the reader

here are *regards* and *saints*. With Prof. Meyer's use of the word *saint* clear in mind, we see that Prof. Meyer is simply espousing that in Christ God regards the entire world of sinners as justified and guilt-free. "If they are guilt-free," Dr. Becker adds, "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."⁸¹

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

Dr. Becker states that this statement is basically a good summary of the WELS position and that its meaning is clear and correct. "Because the terms 'general justification' and 'individual justification' have sometimes been used as synonyms for objective and subjective justification," Dr. Becker writes, "I would have preferred it if the words 'individually' and 'individual' had not been used."⁸²

STATEMENT *At the time of the resurrection of Christ God
NUMBER FOUR 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.*

Although, as mentioned, the fourth statement was not found in Meyer's commentary, this might nonetheless be a good time to add Dr. Becker's analysis of it. Dr. Becker stated that of the four statements, this is the one which "one might swallow a little hard to accede."⁸³

"If it is true that God has forgiven the sins of the world," Dr. Becker writes of this statement, "then it is also true that He forgave the sins of Judas....[and] If Jesus took away the sins of the world He also took away the sins of the people who died in the flood."⁸⁴

This matter of Judas has been something of a touchstone in debates on objective justification. And yet in this statement of the Kokomo FOUR STATEMENTS and in this truth we can find tremendous comfort. From this statement we see that our justification is an accomplished fact which does not depend on ourselves or our individual "merit," but simply is the product of our Lord's love for a sinful world. In Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins has been achieved for all the world. As Edward Koehler states, "This nonimputation therefore is universal in its scope; it includes Jews and Gentiles, Christians and infidels, Peter and Judas, you and me."⁸⁵

THE CONFESSIONAL POSITION OF THE HARTMANS AND POHLMANS

The opposition of the Hartmans and Pohlman to the FOUR STATEMENTS is widely known. Sometime after their *Open Letter to the Church* of February 12, 1982, the Hartmans and Pohlman sent out a eight page *Follow-Up Letter* in which they again listed the FOUR STATEMENTS and their reasons for objecting to them. But as has been described earlier in this paper, the Panel of Review's recommendations to Faith congregation concerning the Kokomo case were made not only in light of the Hartman-Pohlman rejection of the FOUR STATEMENTS, but especially also in light of their difference in understanding on certain key passages of Scripture. With this in mind, what follows is a synopsis of various statements the appellants have made concerning what might be

called the objective justification "sedes doctrinae," those key passages of Scripture in which this truth is taught [for reference, cf. pages 7 to 10 of this paper].

2 CORINTHIANS 5: 18-20

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

The Hartman-Pohlman exegesis of this passage usually begins very nicely. "God laid upon Christ the sins of all people," they say, "that He carried them in His body to the cross."⁸⁶ But the problem with their exegesis comes in the way they see this sacrifice of Christ applied to mankind. They will say that Christ "earned (merited) the payment, the ransom price to set mankind free, that is all people free from eternal damnation,"⁸⁷ but that ransom price is not applied to the world until "one by one...God works faith in the heart of the individual sinner and imputes to him the righteousness of Christ."⁸⁸

Rather than viewing justification as an accomplished fact in Christ, the Hartmans and Pohlman state that "Christ died that He might bring us to God, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."⁸⁹ It is their claim that the context of this passages proves this. "The context clearly shows," they state, "that all people were not reconciled at one time 2000 years ago because Paul is calling for these people...in Corinth to be reconciled."⁹⁰

ROMANS 4: 23-25

The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

The Hartmans and Pohlman's again claim that the work of Christ did not justify mankind and reconcile him to God, but rather that this is something which "God does daily. As He did with Abraham, Romans 4:22, even so He does today, Romans 4:23-24."⁹¹

The entire context of this portion of Scripture, the Hartmans and Pohlman's claim, teaches "that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight."⁹²

ROMANS 5: 18-19

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

"To show that all people were not declared innocent and not-guilty at the resurrection," the Hartmans and Pohlman's teach, the Apostle Paul here "teaches original sin...that by reason of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, we are all in God's displeasure, and by nature children of wrath, that this hereditary evil is so great and horrible that only for sake of this Lord Christ it can be covered and forgiven before God in the baptizing and believing."⁹³

⋮
Romans 5: 18-19, according to the Hartmans and Pohlman, "speaks of forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, etc. They teach that these treasures are offered by the Holy Ghost in the promise of the Holy Gospel, and faith alone is the only means by which we lay hold upon, accept, and apply, and appropriate them to ourselves....Faith justifies, not for any cause or reason that it is so good a work or so fair a virtue, but because it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the Holy Gospel; for this must be applied and appropriated to us by faith, if we are to be justified thereby....Therefore, through faith believers have reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins, the Grace of God, sonship, and heirship of eternal life."⁹⁴

⋮ "It's simply saying," the Hartmans and Pohlman said of these verses, "that as each person is conceived he is condemned, even so, as each person is brought to faith by God that righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, he is justified and has eternal life."⁹⁵

CONCLUSION

The debate that began so seemingly innocently in a Sunday school classroom in Kokomo, Indiana, eventually became much more intense and much wider in scope than anyone in that small classroom could have ever imagined. But throughout the controversy, the question under debate has actually remained a very simple one. *Has God forgiven the sins of all men?*

To human reasoning, there will always be great difficulty in reconciling the two great truths that we have a God who is both a forgiving God and a punishing God. And yet they are true. And no matter how human reason might stumble over these truths, no matter how much we might like to change and fashion these truths to fit our feeble human understanding, they will remain eternally true.

The position of the Hartmans and the Pohlman has remained steadfast. They confess that Jesus Christ with His perfect life and sacrificial death has indeed paid for the sins of the entire world and that through faith in Him forgiveness of sins comes to sinful mankind. But throughout the debate, they have also remained relentless in their espousal and their proclamation that God did not declare all people righteous and justified at the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter morning. "We differ in our understanding of the central doctrine of Scripture," the Hartmans and Pohlman freely admit, "justification by faith and the application thereof."⁹⁶

Yes, the issue at Kokomo has always been very simple one--and yet a very important, essential, and comforting one. For with the open tomb on Easter morning, God declared and proclaimed that Christ has won forgiveness of sins for all men. With the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have God's rockbound pledge that Christ has indeed accomplished this world's most pressing need--forgiveness.

ENDNOTES

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28. Hartman-Pohlman summary of 6/9/80 appeal, p. 2
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30. Meyer, Joh. P. Ministers of Christ (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1963), p.103-4.
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54. Ibid., p.2
55. Ibid., p. 5
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58. Ibid., p. 27
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62. Boldt letter to Panel of Review members of 12/19/79.
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65. Conversation with Prof. Panning of April 29, 1987 and with Pastor Mueller of May 6, 1987.
66. Panel of Review summary of June 9, 1980 appeal, p.5.
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