

Consensus

Volume 16
Issue 2 *Lutheran Pietism*

Article 4

11-1-1990

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert A. (1990) "True repentance and sorrow: Johann Arndt's doctrine of justification," *Consensus*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol16/iss2/4>

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True Repentance and Sorrow: Johann Arndt's Doctrine of Justification

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Introduction

Since the very beginning of the movement, Lutherans have been known as theologians who give first place to God's unconditional love. We have not always been so well known as theologians of the life of discipleship. It is quite clear in the contemporary church that the need remains to counter the ideology of individualistic free enterprise with a fully Lutheran doctrine of justification, but it is just as clear that an adequate theology and ethics of discipleship must be part of the effort. Have we no resources in our Lutheran tradition for such a theology?

In teaching the history of the doctrines of justification and sanctification to seminary students, I have often been attracted to Johann Arndt's *True Christianity*.¹ As I have read through the text with students, I and they have found much that seems to be helpful. We have not been alone in this sense. When no less an authority than Heiko Oberman refers to Johann Arndt as "a second Luther, a *Lutherus redivivus*",² one is forced to take notice. Oberman goes on to say, "[Arndt] did not deviate from Luther but gave access to a more authentic Luther..."³ Certainly in reading Arndt one notices similarities with Luther and even instances where Arndt sounds more like Luther than Melancthon and Lutheran Scholasticism do.⁴ It has also been demonstrated in recent scholarship that we can no longer accept at face value Albrecht Ritschl's judgment of Lutheran Pietism⁵ as simply late-Medieval piety under another guise.⁶

While Oberman maintains Arndt's connection to Luther before him, Peter Erb has shown that Arndt might be more

connected than has been thought to high Lutheran Scholasticism after him. Though it is usual to see the development of the *ordo salutis* in Lutheran Orthodoxy as a product of the later Scholastics,⁷ Erb has shown that the *ordo* in David Hollaz is remarkably similar to Arndt.⁸ If this is true, Arndt might well be responsible for what Carl Braaten calls the distorted relationship between faith and justification which developed in high Orthodoxy. According to Braaten, it was precisely in the development of the *ordo salutis*, which reached its most complex form in David Hollaz, where the distortion occurred.⁹ Is perhaps Arndt to blame for confusing the relation of faith and justification in later Lutheranism? This hardly sounds like the work of a *Luther redivivus*!

During his lifetime Arndt was never considered a systematist and all of his published works were either moral and spiritual guidance for lay people or sermon helps for pastors. Yet one cannot read Arndt's major work, *True Christianity*, without being impressed by the systematic organization. Arndt certainly had a systematic theology which he expressed through his writing on piety. Since his work was so influential on later generations of Lutheran laypeople, pastors, and theologians, it is important to understand his role in the development of Lutheran theology. Was Arndt one who attempted to maintain Luther's radical understanding of justification, faith, and the *theologia crucis*, or was Arndt a part of the process of blunting Luther's pointed critiques of the ideological theology of pious works?

The purpose of the present study is to examine Arndt in more detail so as to gain some sense of whether or not he could be one part of Lutheran tradition which would be helpful in developing a contemporary theology which is based fully on justification by unconditional love rather than achievements and encourages Lutherans to question their allegiance to the ideologies of North American society. To do so, we will examine one aspect of Arndt's doctrine of justification as presented in Book I of his most significant work, *True Christianity*, to see whether we can shed any light on the relation of Arndt to Luther and to late-Medieval theology or on Arndt's role in how the Lutheran doctrine of justification developed in the early seventeenth century. The aspect selected is that which Arndt refers to as "true repentance" and "true regret and sorrow

for sins.” Repentance has been selected both because of the importance which Arndt himself places on it¹⁰ and also because what Arndt says on this topic should shed important light on the questions which motivate this study.

Arndt on Repentance and Sorrow

In examining what one who gives us access to the authentic Luther has to say about repentance, we would expect to find a concern for the troubled conscience and an awareness of the problems of any notion of justification which throws the troubled penitent back into an examination of his/her own motivations and works in hopes of discovering a sufficient basis for receiving grace or forgiveness. Is this what we find in Arndt?

Definition of Repentance

In Bk. I, chap. 4, Arndt defines true repentance and mortification of the flesh as the apogee of self-denial and states that we cannot be followers of Jesus without such repentance:

It follows that a person must deny himself (Luke 9); that is, break his own self-will; give himself completely to God's will; not love himself but hold himself as the most unworthy, miserable person; deny all that he has (Luke 14); that is, reject the world and its honor and glory; consider his own wisdom and power as nothing; not depend on himself or on any fleshly lusts and desires such as pride, covetousness, lust, wrath, and envy; have no pleasure in himself, and consider all his acts as nothing; praise himself for nothing; ascribe no power to himself; attempt to attribute nothing to himself but mistrust himself; die to the world, that is, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life; be crucified to the world (Gal. 6). This is the true repentance and mortification of the flesh without which no one can be a disciple of Christ. *This is true conversion from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith (Acts 26).*¹¹

Another short definition of repentance, which includes sorrow, faith, and improvement of life, concludes this same book and chapter:

This is true repentance when the heart internally through sorrow and regret is broken down, destroyed, laid low, and by faith and forgiveness of sins is made holy, consoled, purified, changed, and made better so that an external improvement in life follows.¹²

Arndt summarizes this definition in Bk. I, chap. 8, where he says that repentance is both dying to sin and receiving the forgiveness of sins:

Repentance is nothing other than to die through true regret and sorrow for sins and to receive forgiveness of sins through faith, and to live righteously in Christ. True, divine regret must precede repentance. By it the heart is broken and the flesh is crucified. The Epistle to the Hebrews (6) calls this repentance of dead works, that is, the leaving of works that bring about death.¹³

Repentance and Mortification

Mortification of fleshly lusts¹⁴ is clearly an important part of repentance, along with deep sorrow of the heart. In Bk. I, chap. 4, in talking about how we are renewed from the consequences of Adam's fall, Arndt states that mortification of the flesh occurs through repentance. In the next paragraph, he says that repentance consists of divine sorrow, faith, and mortification:

This twisted, evil quality of humanity¹⁵ must now be changed or made better through true repentance, that is, through true, divine sorrow and through faith, grasping the forgiveness of sins, and through the mortification of self-love, pride, and the lust of the flesh. Repentance does not only occur when one ceases to give freedom to gross external sins and leave them, but when one enters oneself, changes and makes better the internal ground of one's heart, and turns oneself from self-love, from the world and all worldly lusts, to spiritual, heavenly life, and becomes a participant in the merits of Christ through faith.¹⁶

Note that repentance occurs when one enters oneself and changes the "ground" of one's own heart.

Mortification is a turning away from and dying to the world accomplished through divine sorrow:

Dying to the world is the mortification of the flesh and all those things that are associated with the lust of the flesh. By continual, internal, hidden sorrow and regret one turns inwardly to God and away from the world, dies daily in one's heart to the world, and lives in faith in Christ, in deep humility and meekness. The grace of God consoles such a person in Christ.¹⁷

So we see that, for Arndt, true repentance involves a deep, contrite sorrow for sins and a mortification of the flesh which crucifies both external sins and the internal self from which sins spring.

The connection of repentance, sorrow, and mortification is an important theme for Arndt. He refers to the self-denial of repentance (which he equates with conversion) as the Christian's true cross and connects it to mortification accomplished through deep inner humility:

This repentance and conversion is the denial of oneself, the true cross and true yoke of Jesus Christ, of which the Lord spoke in Matthew 11... You are, through deep, heartfelt, inner humility, to extinguish self-love and self-honor and, through meekness, your own wrath and desire for vengeance. *For the new person, this is indeed an easy yoke and a light burden but for the flesh it is a bitter cross, for it is the crucifixion of the flesh with all its lusts and desires* (Gal.5).¹⁸

If Arndt's reader is to walk the path of true Christianity, it is essential to understand that repentance is not a change of external behaviour, but internal sorrow and mortification which results in a change in behaviour:

Therefore, learn to understand repentance in a proper manner. Many people err concerning it who believe that true repentance is to leave external idolatry, rejection of God, murder, adultery, unchastity, theft, and other gross external sins. This is, indeed, external repentance, of which many passages in the prophets speak (Is. 55... Ezek.18, 33). But the prophets looked much deeper, namely into the heart, and taught us of a much higher, inner repentance in which one is to die to pride, covetousness, and lust, to deny oneself, to hate and reject that world and all that which a person has, to give oneself to God, to crucify the flesh, to bring a proper offering to God daily, [namely] a broken, contrite, and trembling heart, and to carry a sorrowful soul in one's body. This internal repentance of the heart is described in the seven Penitential Psalms.

This is true repentance when the heart internally through sorrow and regret is broken down, destroyed, laid low, and by faith and forgiveness of sins is made holy, consoled, purified, changed, and made better so that an external improvement in life follows.¹⁹

Source of Repentance

What is the source of such a repentance which springs from deep sorrow for sin and then mortifies the flesh and leads to faith and forgiveness? Arndt says that it comes from the Triune God in whose image humanity is created.²⁰ The Holy Spirit plays the primary role in working repentance in a person:

Repentance or true conversion is a work of God the Holy Spirit, by which a person understands his sins and the wrath of God against

sins from the law. Out of this are awakened in his heart repentance and sorrow. From the Gospel, however, he understands God's grace and through faith he receives forgiveness for his sins in Christ. Through this repentance, the mortification and crucifixion of the flesh and all fleshly lusts and the evil qualities of the heart and the life-giving power of the spirit comes. By it, Adam and all his evil die in us through true sorrow and Christ lives in us through faith (Gal. 2). The two things are tied together. The new life and the renewal of the spirit follow upon the mortification of the flesh. When the old person dies the new comes to life and when the new comes to life the old dies. (2 Cor. 4... Col. 3... Rom. 6...).²¹

Several things are clear in this passage, but others are a bit murky. It is clear that the tools of the Spirit's work are Law and Gospel. The Law brings an understanding of sin and wrath and the Gospel brings an understanding of grace. What is murky is the connection of repentance to faith and forgiveness. At first it appears that the Law leads to repentance and the Gospel leads to faith, but then Arndt says that both mortification and life-giving power come through repentance and that the death of Adam through mortification and the birth of Christ through faith both come by repentance. It is also unclear whether the Spirit works repentance and faith or an understanding of Law and Gospel which leads to repentance and faith. We will take up these questions again in the following sections.

Later Arndt seems to say that deep sorrow and repentance are not possible apart from the work of the Holy Spirit through the Law:

Blessed those who find this holy calling in their heart, that is, the godly grief for sin brings about a regret of the blessed which no one regrets (2 Cor. 7). This godly sorrow the Holy Spirit brings about through the Law and through earnest meditation on²² the holy suffering of Christ. The suffering of Christ is likewise a sermon of repentance and the most frightful mirror of the wrath of God is also a sermon of grace. Consider the cause why our dear Lord suffered his bitter death, namely because of our sins. Consider also the love of God, that he gave his Son. In this we see God's righteousness and mercy.²³

An interesting aspect of this passage is the role of the passion story as Law. Luther normally understood the passion story as Gospel, but clearly, even in the hands of the early seventeenth century, the Lutheran distinction of Law and Gospel is not a wooden dividing of Bible passages into two boxes. It

is a recognition of the existential impact of Scripture and the Word of God on people. Also note that Arndt parallels Law and meditation on the suffering of Christ. Does this mean that the meditating person plays some role in causing his/her own repentance? This is a question which begins to plague the reader of *True Christianity*: what role does Arndt assign to grace and what to the penitent?

As the last quotation indicates, the sufferings of the incarnate Christ also have a role in working repentance. In this case, the atonement is the foundation upon which repentance is built:

The new birth thus arises from the incarnation of Christ. Since humanity was fallen and turned away from God, through our own honor, pride, and disobedience, this fall cannot be made better, or repented for, except through the deepest humility, obedience, and humbling of the Son of God. Since Christ walked his humble path on earth among people, so he must live in you and renew the image of God in you.²⁴

The new birth arises and springs from the wellspring of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ (1 Pet. 1). We have been born anew to the living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a result, the holy apostles always laid as the foundation for repentance and the new life, the holy suffering of Christ (Rom. 6; 1 Pet. 1...). Peter gives the reason why we should live a holy life, namely because we were purchased with so great a price (1 Pet. 2...). Our Lord Christ made a similar statement in Luke 24: *This is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations.* Thus we hear that the Lord himself indicated that both things, preaching and repentance, were living streams flowing from the well of his suffering, death, and resurrection.²⁵

Repentance and Faith

In order to discuss the place of repentance and true sorrow in Arndt's doctrine of justification we will need to examine how he connects repentance and sorrow with faith. To begin with, Arndt posits that the connection is a necessary connection. Faith cannot exist without sincere repentance and sorrow:

Your repentance must be no less, however, in righteous earnestness, for otherwise you have no righteous faith, which daily purifies, changes, and amends the heart. You must also know that the consolations of the Gospel cannot be applied, unless preceded by a true

righteous sorrow, by which the heart is broken and made contrite, for we read: *To the poor has the good news been preached* (Lk. 7). How can faith give life to the heart unless [the heart] has been previously mortified by earnest regret and sorrow and a thorough knowledge of sin? Do not, therefore, think that repentance is a slight and easy work.²⁶

At least two points are made in this passage which merit further study. First, the mention of "righteous earnestness" seems to give some precedence to the activity of the earnest penitent. It might be possible that this passage and others like it are merely saying that the Holy Spirit works sorrow first and faith second. On the other hand, the continual reference to earnestness leaves the implication that the penitent plays some role in his/her own sorrow and repentance.

Secondly, we see that repentance is made equally necessary for salvation along with faith. It even appears that repentance must precede faith and that faith is, in fact, dependent on repentance, since the consolations of the Gospel must be preceded by sorrow and faith cannot give life to the unmortified heart. Is this what Arndt intends to teach?

It would seem so, for he repeats that both true repentance and true faith are necessary before one can come to Christ:

The Lord Jesus says in Matthew 9: "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*"

In this the Lord tells us that he calls the sinner but to repentance. It follows, therefore, that no one can come to the Lord without true repentance and conversion from sins and without true faith.²⁷

When we look to confirm whether Arndt holds faith as dependent on prior repentance, we find that he can speak of faith and repentance as parallel parts of the renewal of the person in Christ:

The suffering of Christ is, therefore, two things—namely, a payment for all our sins and a renewal of persons through faith and true repentance. Both belong to the renewal of people. They are the fear and the power of suffering of Christ, which work in us renewal and sanctification (1 Cor. 1), and thus the new birth arises from Christ in us.²⁸

More commonly, though, Arndt speaks of faith as only one part of repentance. For example, in Bk. I, chap. 4, he states

that repentance consists of divine sorrow, faith, and mortification: "This twisted, evil quality of humanity must now be changed or made better through true repentance, that is, through true, divine sorrow and through faith, grasping the forgiveness of sins, and through the mortification of self-love, pride, and the lust of the flesh."²⁹ This same inclusion of sorrow, faith, and mortification within repentance is repeated in Bk. I, chap. 8: "Repentance is nothing other than to die through true regret and sorrow for sins and to receive forgiveness of sins through faith, and to live righteously in Christ."³⁰ It would seem that, for Arndt, repentance is the primary category and faith the secondary category.³¹

Arndt often speaks of faith as following repentance: "Christ called us to this repentance. After it follow the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of his righteousness and his holy obedience in the power of faith."³² Here the forgiveness of sins and imputation of righteousness, which Lutheran and Reformed theology after the Osiandrian Controversy saw as the centre of justification, follow after repentance. Arndt also says, again implying that faith is subsequent to repentance, "His redemption, which came through the blood of Christ, is so perfect and all the merits of Christ will be perfectly ascribed to the repentant heart through faith."³³ We have here at least the beginnings of an *ordo salutis* in which faith follows true repentance and/or is dependent on it as a sub-species.

Another place where we can see Arndt placing faith in a dependent relation to repentance is in his advice about how to counsel someone who is weak in faith:

If you find someone who does not have the joy of faith but is weak of faith and seeks comfort, do not reject him because of this but comfort him in the promised grace in Christ. This always remains firm, certain and eternal. If we fall in weakness and stumble, God's grace does not fall away if we rise again through true repentance.³⁴

Here Arndt seems to make even the receipt of grace dependent on true repentance.

Finally, in examining the connection of repentance and sorrow with faith, we return to the passage brought forward in speaking about the source of repentance and sorrow in which the questions of this section were first raised:

Repentance or true conversion is a work of God the Holy Spirit, by which the person understands his sins and the wrath of God

against sins from the law. Out of this are awakened in his heart repentance and sorrow. From the Gospel, however, he understands God's grace and through faith he receives forgiveness for his sins in Christ.³⁵

Here Arndt places the source of sorrow and repentance in the Law and the source of faith and forgiveness in the Gospel. The implication of this structure, placing repentance and sorrow at least logically prior to understanding grace and receiving forgiveness through faith, has been reinforced by reference to other passages. For Arndt faith is not the central reality of the justified Christian's life as it was for Luther. Repentance is the central category, both more basic and more comprehensive than faith. In some of Arndt's statements faith is the second of the three parts of repentance: sorrow, faith, and mortification.

Repentance and the Forgiveness of Sins

If Arndt places faith in a dependent position to repentance and subsequent to sorrow, how does this affect his thinking on the forgiveness of sins? For Luther the forgiveness of sins is the crucial result of justification *sola gratia, sola fide, et solus Christus*, and is, therefore, given as an utterly free gift of God's grace through faith. It is not dependent on *any* human work or achievement. If Arndt is truly a *Lutherus redivivus* we would expect to find forgiveness of sins to be a gift of God's unconditional love. While Arndt has placed repentance in the place occupied by faith in Luther's theology, it is still possible that Arndt could hold a doctrine of justification by grace alone in Christ alone, if he would see true repentance as a gift rather than as a human work.³⁶

As noted in the passage cited just above, Arndt agrees with Luther that conversion is a work of the Holy Spirit through Law and Gospel and that we receive forgiveness of sins through faith.³⁷ The same point is made already in the preface of *True Christianity*:

The Scriptures abound in the jealousy of God, who demands both repentance and its fruits, without which eternal salvation is lost. Thereafter the consolation of the Gospel can manifest its true natural power, but the Spirit of God, through the Word, must work both in us.³⁸

This is reaffirmed in Bk. I, chap. 8, where Arndt speaks of the sorrow brought by the Holy Spirit through the Law and

meditation on the passion.³⁹ Arndt also gives forgiveness of sins a place alongside faith in true repentance in his various definitions of repentance.⁴⁰

However, even in his definition of repentance Arndt appears to make repentance a human activity, something that the true Christian must do, when he speaks so forcefully of self-denial, breaking self-will, and self-hatred. If this is true, then it implies that true repentance and sorrow are, at least in part, a human work by which the penitent gives him/herself to God and rejects the world. The definition goes on to make repentance a requirement and prerequisite for being a disciple who is forgiven and sanctified by faith.⁴¹

Arndt understands repentance as a requirement for justification:

Mark this well. Why is it said that Christ has come to call sinners, but to call them to repentance? Because only a repentant, broken, contrite, faithful heart is capable of receiving the precious merit, blood, and death of Jesus Christ.⁴²

Arndt goes on to make two aspects of repentance, sorrow and mortification of the flesh, requirements for the forgiveness of sins:

Christ called us to this repentance. After it follow the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of his righteousness and his holy obedience in the power of faith. Without such inner faith Christ is of no use to a person, that is, the person does not participate in his grace and the fruit of his merit, which must be received with a sorrowful, broken, repentant, faithful, and humble heart.⁴³

Upon such a deep repentance the forgiveness of sins follows, for how can sins be forgiven in a person who was never sorrowful and in one who still has pleasure in sins and will not give them up?...

There are many people who throughout their life have not done true repentance and yet wish to have forgiveness of sins... Ah, you deluded, false Christian... If you wish to have forgiveness of sins you must be repentant and leave your sins, have sorrow for your sins and believe in Christ.⁴⁴

The true Christian must refrain from sinning in order to receive the forgiveness of sins:

If these [works that bring about death] are not left, Christ with all his merits is of no use to a person. Christ our Lord placed himself before us as a physician and his holy blood as the precious, sanctifying medicine for sins.

This most costly medicine cannot help and will not work if the patient will not give up what is bad for him. Christ's blood and death will help no one who does not leave his sins.⁴⁵

Faith is not enough, nor is forgiveness unconditional. In order to receive forgiveness deep sorrow and mortification of the flesh are required.

How shall one, however, be sorrowful for sins that he does not intend to leave? How shall he leave sins for which he does not have sorrow? Christ, his prophets and apostles teach that: You must die to the sins and the world, that is, your own pride, wrath, enmity, and you must turn to the Lord and seek grace. Then you will have forgiveness of sins, then the physician will come who binds up broken hearts and heals their pain (Ps. 147). Otherwise, Christ is of no use and does not help even if you say much about your faith. True faith renews a person and mortifies the sins in that person, makes that one living in Christ, that is, he lives in Christ, in his love, humility, meekness, patience.⁴⁶

While Arndt can say, "As a means to [the new birth], holy baptism is ordered by which we are baptized in the death of Christ so that we might die with Christ to our sins by the power of his death and once again rise from our sins through the power of his resurrection,"⁴⁷ he elsewhere disagrees with Luther's theology which would see Word and Sacrament as means which the Holy Spirit uses to communicate the Gospel and effect justification.⁴⁸ According to Arndt, the means of grace are useless without the forgiveness of sins which comes through a repentant and contrite heart:

Even if you heard ten sermons every day, went to confession every month, went to receive the Lord's supper, none of this would help you unless you had the forgiveness of sins. This is because there would be present no repentant, contrite, faithful heart that would be capable of receiving the healing medicine. God's Word and sacraments are indeed healing medicines, but they do not help any unrepentant person who does not have a continually sorrowful, faithful heart.⁴⁹

For Arndt Word and Sacrament are not means by which repentance and faith are created. Rather repentance, sorrow, and mortification must already be present in order for Word and Sacrament to have any effect.

Arndt has made too many clear statements for us to conclude otherwise than that the forgiveness of sins is not the result of God's unconditional promise communicated as the

Gospel through Word and Sacrament, but is conditioned upon deep true repentance which includes sorrow, faith, and mortification of the flesh:

If a person turns with the prodigal son (Lk. 15), weeps and is sorrowful for his sins, hates and shuns them, asks God for grace, and looks in faith to the crucified Christ and his bloody wounds (as the Israelites looked to the snake in Numbers 21), and says: *God be gracious to me a poor sinner* (Lk. 18), everything will be forgiven and forgotten, even if that person has committed the greatest sin in the world.⁵⁰

Forgiveness is, according to Arndt, by grace, but grace is given only to the contrite penitent:

The holy blood of Christ and his holy death pays for this much. *Tanta est perfectio in redemptione, parva sanguine Christi et tanta est perfectio applicationis gratiae et imputationis totius meriti Christi per fidem.* His redemption, which came through the blood of Christ, is so perfect and all the merits of Christ will be perfectly ascribed to the repentant heart through faith. God accepts repentance for sins (Wisd. 12), that is, God completely forgives the repentant person out of pure grace for Christ's sake. Indeed, it is God's pleasure and joy to be merciful and to forgive the sins out of grace... (Jer.31).⁵¹

Contritio and Penance in Thomism

Certainly, much of what Arndt has to say about repentance and sorrow does have a familiar ring to it, though one is reminded not of Luther, but of the Medieval doctrine of *contritio* as an aspect of the sacrament of penance. To illustrate the point it will be helpful to examine one particular Medieval writing as an exemplar, recognizing that contrition was an important topic to the Medievals and that there were a variety of positions. Because it is typical of one mainline school of Medieval thinking on contrition, we will use the Supplement to Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*⁵² in this role. The first five questions of the Supplement address the question of contrition.

The Definition of Contrition

The Supplement begins by affirming the traditional definition of *contritio*: "an assumed sorrow for sins, together with the purpose of confessing them and of making satisfaction for them."⁵³ The substance of contrition is sorrow, the object is

sins, and the way of acting is confession and satisfaction. The Supplement also says that contrition is that leaving of sin which is necessary for justification: "And since, for the remission of sin, it is necessary that man should put aside entirely his attachment to sin... the act through which sin is cast aside is called contrition metaphorically."⁵⁴

The Supplement also approves of several other definitions:

Contrition is voluntary sorrow for sin whereby man punishes in himself that which he grieves to have done.... Another definition is given by Isidore (*De Sum. Bono*, ii. 12) as follows: *Contrition is a tearful sorrow and humility of mind, arising from remembrance of sin and fear of the Judgment....* Another definition is taken from the words of Augustine, and indicates the effect of contrition. It runs thus: *Contrition is the sorrow which takes away sin.* Yet another is gathered from the words of Gregory (*Moral.* xxxiii, 11) as follows: *Contrition is humility of the soul, crushing sin between hope and fear.*⁵⁵

In each case we see the importance of deep sorrow over sins and the role of contrition in the removal of sins.

The Object of Contrition

The focus of contrition is to be on sorrow for the sin committed, not on fear of the punishment to be levied. While one can feel regret for lost virtue as part of penance, this is not the whole of contrition. The contrite penitent feels this tearful sorrow and humility because of the evil of the sin, not because s/he fears the punishment of God.

Since contrition is sorrow for sins we have committed by our own will and includes the intent to confess and make satisfaction, "it can regard those sins only which result in us through the hardness of our will."⁵⁶ Since original sin is not caused by our own will, we can feel sorrow over original sin, but contrition itself can only be felt over actual sins we have ourselves committed.

The sixth article of question two makes the point that general contrition for all one's mortal sins in general is not sufficient, but that one must feel contrition for each mortal sin. Here an important statement is made:

By origin of contrition I mean the process of thought, when a man thinks of his sin and is sorry for it, albeit not with the sorrow of contrition, yet with that of attrition. The term of contrition is when

that sorrow is already quickened by grace...Baptism acts in virtue of Christ's merit, Who had infinite power for the blotting out of all sins; and so for all sins one Baptism suffices. But in contrition, in addition to the merit of Christ, an act of ours is requisite, which must, therefore, correspond to each sin, since it has not infinite power for contrition.⁵⁷

Contrition is thus a synergistic act, requiring both grace (to lift it from attrition) and an act of the human will.

The Degree of Contrition

The first article of the third question sets out to demonstrate that contrition is the greatest possible sorrow. The Supplement argues that there is a two-fold sorrow in contrition. The first of these is the essence of contrition. It is a sorrow in the will and is displeasure at past sin. This is the greatest sorrow, for it is sorrow at having turned away from the highest good. The second sorrow in contrition is sorrow in the emotions which is caused by the sorrow in the will. It is not the greatest sorrow. Since the emotions do not always follow the higher powers perfectly, some bodily injury might well cause the emotions greater pain and sorrow than contrition. Nonetheless, because the will is the higher power, and contrition is essentially sorrow in the will, contrition is the greatest sorrow.⁵⁸

This same two-fold distinction indicates why the sorrow of contrition might well be abused. It is impossible for the sorrow in the will and reason to be too great, because it is recognized as resulting from an offense against the highest good. In the emotions, however, the sorrow of contrition can become excessive. Here the rule of moderation and reasonableness should be applied in order to safeguard the person and contribute to the fulfillment of duty.⁵⁹

The Time for Contrition

The Supplement believes and teaches that the Christian's whole life is to be a life of contrition:

I answer that, as stated above, there is a twofold sorrow in contrition: one is in the reason, and is detestation of the sin committed; the other is in the sensitive part, and results from the former: and as regards both, the time for contrition is the whole of the present state of life. For as long as one is a wayfarer, one detests the obstacles which retard or hinder one from reaching the end of the

way....For this reason Hugh of S. Victor says that *when God absolves a man from eternal guilt and punishment, He binds him with a chain of eternal detestation of sin.*⁶⁰

In this article the Supplement distinguishes between sorrow on the one hand and shame and servile fear on the other hand. Shame only looks to the disgrace of sin, which is taken away by the sacrament of penance. Thus shame is not to mark the whole life of the pilgrim. Servile fear is cast out by charity—the sorrow of contrition results from charity—so servile fear ought not mark the whole life of the Christian. Contrition is sorrow for and aversion to sin and this is always part of the Christian life on earth.

The Effect of Contrition

The primary effect of contrition is the forgiveness of sins:

I answer that, Contrition can be considered in two ways, either as part of a sacrament, or as an act of virtue, and in either case it is the cause of the forgiveness of sin, but not in the same way. Because, as part of a sacrament, it operates primarily as an instrument for the forgiveness of sin, as is evident with the other sacraments; while, as an act of virtue, it is the quasi-material cause of sin's forgiveness. For a disposition is, as it were, a necessary condition for justification, and a disposition is reduced to a material cause, if it be taken to denote that which disposes matter to receive something.⁶¹

The Supplement goes on to say that God alone is the "principal efficient cause" of justification, but that we can supply the "dispositive cause" and the "sacramental cause" for forgiveness. The penitent supplies the dispositive cause and the minister the sacramental cause. This leads to the situation in which "The forgiveness of sins precedes virtue and the infusion of grace, in one way, and, in another, follows...."⁶² Contrition is both a product of grace and a necessary condition for the grace of forgiveness.

The final question regarding contrition is whether slight contrition will blot out serious sins:

I answer that, As we have often said, contrition includes a twofold sorrow. One is in the reason, and is displeasure in the sin committed. This can be so slight as not to suffice for real contrition, e.g. if a sin were less displeasing to a man, than separation from his last end ought to be; just as love can be so slack as not to suffice for real charity. The other sorrow is in the senses, and

the slightness of this is no hindrance to real contrition, because it does not, of itself, belong essentially to contrition, but is connected with it accidentally: nor is it under our control. Accordingly, we must say that sorrow, however slight it be, provided it suffice for real contrition, blots out all sin.⁶³

Summary

Justification in Medieval theology is addressed as a sub-question of the sacrament of penance. It is here, too, that the discussion of *contritio* occurs. In the Supplement to Aquinas' *Summa* contrition is defined as a deep and voluntary sorrow over mortal sin which leads to confessing one's sins to a priest and completing the works of satisfaction assigned. Contrition combines the grace of God and the merit of Christ with the human act of sorrow in the will and reason at having turned away from the highest good. This essential contrition and appropriate sorrow in the emotions which spring from it are to mark the whole life of the Christian pilgrim.

Arndtian Repentance and Medieval Penance

One cannot evaluate Arndt's role as a Lutheran theologian simply on the basis of verbal parallels with Thomas' "Sentence" commentary. Yet in comparing Arndt's statements on sorrow and repentance and the Supplement's statements on contrition and penance, one is immediately struck by the similarities. It is possible that these similarities are more than verbal and reveal similar structure in the two doctrines of justification.

To begin with, both have a tripartite arrangement. In Arndt the three parts of repentance are sorrow, faith, and mortification. These correspond to the three parts of the sacrament of penance: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. The middle element appears at first to be different, since faith in Christ is different than intention to partake of a sacrament. For Arndt, it is faith that grasps the forgiveness of sins; for the Supplement at least the intention⁶⁴ to confess to a priest is necessary because the forgiveness of sins requires a sacramental infusion of grace. In both cases, whether faith or confession, the middle element is the bridge from sorrow to amendment of life.

The second similarity of structure is that, just as for Arndt forgiveness follows after repentance, so for the Supplement forgiveness is a result of contrite penance. In both actual forgiveness of sins then depends on the penitent's amendment of

life: for Arndt through mortification of the flesh which leaves sins; for the Supplement through works of satisfaction. For both the grace of God—for Arndt expressed in the work of the Holy Spirit in Law and Gospel, for the Supplement expressed as *gratia infusa*—is crucial, yet in the end justification depends on the actions of the sinner.

This leads to another similarity, which is the difficulty both have in combining the gracious work of God and the human work of repentance. Arndt says both that true repentance is a work of the Holy Spirit and that we must break our own self-centeredness, mortify the flesh, and leave the world. The Supplement points to the grace of God and merit of Christ without denying the Medieval maxim that God will not deny grace to the person who does his/her very best. At this point the Supplement is obviously aware of the tension and seeks, through logical distinction of causes, a way around it; Arndt seems unaware of the tensions in his system, blithely declaring his opposition to papists, Synergists, and Majorists.⁶⁵

The most important similarity of the two is that both leave the penitent sinner without much assurance of salvation. As Luther discovered, the Medieval sacrament of penance creates as many problems for the thoughtful sinner as it solves. While the sacrament is supposed to work *ex opere operatum*, it is also necessary that one have the proper disposition: contrition. One must sorrow over one's sins, not out of fear of punishment, but simply because one loves God for God's own sake. Yet, as Luther realized, once one knows that sorrow for sin rooted in loving God for God's own sake is the prerequisite for forgiveness, one can never love God for God's own sake, but always has in mind the benefits to be accrued to oneself from forgiveness. In addition satisfaction is necessary before the absolution takes hold and results in forgiveness. If the works of satisfaction are not completed in this life, then one is bound for purgatory in order to complete them.

Arndt leaves the troubled conscience without much more help. Since forgiveness follows after repentance, and repentance includes both deep sorrow and mortification of the flesh—defined as leaving sin—how can one ever be sure that one's sorrow is deep enough and mortification complete enough? Rather than move forward from Luther's solution of the problems of late-Medieval theology, Arndt has returned to

them. In Arndt, just as in Luther's opponents, the Gospel is no longer a message of unconditional love and acceptance, but a statement of what God will do *IF* the sinner will sorrow, repent, and mortify. In other words, the Gospel is no longer the Gospel, but has become a new Law.

There is a significant difference between Arndt and the Supplement. What is the sacrament of penance in the Supplement has been de-sacramentalized and existentialized by Arndt. He has changed the requirement of contrition, confession, and satisfaction in the sacrament into the existential and moral requirement of deep sorrow, faith, and mortification of the flesh in true repentance. While this no doubt makes for a more rigorous and sincere practice of Christianity, in the end the effect seems to be more damaging on the penitent sinner. In both cases the penitent is put in a position in which both the grace of God and his/her own motivation and works are essential, but neither is sufficient in itself for forgiveness. The sinner is thrown into a vicious circle of self-doubt or doubt over God's predestination from which there is no escape. We have what Oberman himself, in referring to a similar problem in the theology of Gabriel Biel, called at one and the same time justification by grace alone and by works alone.⁶⁶ The penitent is left with little comfort of the Gospel.

Conclusion

We are forced to the conclusion that Oberman's statement that Arndt is a second Luther, a *Lutherus redivivus* is not only an exaggeration, but flatly wrong. Arndt is no such thing, for he undoes the very heart of Luther's doctrine of justification through his use⁶⁷ of an *ordo salutis* which makes true repentance—defined as consisting of heartfelt sorrow, faith, and mortification of the flesh—a prerequisite for justification. While one cannot deny that there are disclaimers, the appearance of the text is that true repentance is something which the penitent must do, and do continuously, not a gift of unconditional love. If this is the case, we would have to conclude that Arndt did not renew and revive the legacy of Luther; he repudiated it and, through the widespread influence of his ideas, returned Lutheranism to face one of the crucial problems of Medieval piety. The difference is that the serious late-Medieval

penitent could not know whether s/he had done his/her very best in contrition (loving God for God's own sake), while the Arndtian penitent could never know whether his/her repentance was enough, that s/he had truly mortified the flesh and left sin behind. In either case the spiritual problem is the same.

I began the research for this study with the hope that I would be able through it to show how helpful Arndt might be for developing a contemporary Lutheran understanding and practice of discipleship. This has turned out not to be the case. Like so many modern Lutherans who fail to understand the centre of their tradition and so wander off into moralism and legalism, Arndt's major help to contemporary disciples is as a negative, rather than as a positive example. Johann Arndt is a guide of the way not to travel toward a Lutheran theology which includes both grace and discipleship. We will need to look elsewhere in our tradition.

Notes

- ¹ Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*, trans. Peter Erb, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). This edition of *True Christianity* will hereinafter be abbreviated TC. Johann Arndt, *Vier Bücher von wahren Christenthumb...* (Braunschweig: Andreas Dunckern, 1606) will be abbreviated WC1. There are several pagination errors in WC1. In cases of multiple pages with the same number I will indicate, e.g., 45(1) or 45(2). I would like to thank Peter Erb for making a copy of WC1 available for my use. Where I differ with the translation of TC I have indicated so in a footnote, except in translating *Mensch* or *Menschen* more inclusively, which changes are not noted.
- ² Preface to TC, xv.
- ³ TC, xvi.
- ⁴ E.g., cf. Luther's definition of faith in the preface to Romans (LW 35, 370–371) and Arndt's in Bk. I, chap. 5 (TC, 45–48; WC1, 43–50).
- ⁵ Albrecht Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus in der lutherischen Kirche des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1880–1886). Ritschl's section on Arndt is vol. 2, pp. 34–63.
- ⁶ On Arndt specifically, cf. Christian Braw, *Bücher im Stabe: Die Theologie Johann Arndts in ihren Verhältnis zur Mystik* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986). For Pietism in general, cf. F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), and *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973).
- ⁷ Cf. Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Third Edition, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs

- (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961 [reprint of 1899]), 407–409. It is the case that a full-blown discussion of the *ordo* as such originates in Lutheran systematic theology with Calov. The Reformed developed this discussion much earlier. Cf. *ordo salutis* in Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985) 215.
- 8 Introduction to TC, 22 and 22–23n22. Wilhelm Koepf, *Johann Arndt: Eine Untersuchung über die Mystik im Luthertum* (Berlin, 1912; reprinted Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1973) 283, mentions briefly Arndt's influence on the *ordo salutis* through his teaching on the *unio mystica*. Erb believes that Arndt's influence extends to the whole of the *ordo*.
 - 9 Carl Braaten, *Justification: The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 28–37. Even Schmid objects to the structure of the later Scholastic systems on this point, p. 408.
 - 10 The full title of *True Christianity* is *Vier Bücher Von wahren Christenthumb heilsamer Busse: herzlicher Rewe unnd Leid uber die Sünde....*, with the lines featuring repentance and sorrow emphasized.
 - 11 TC, 42; WC1, 36–37.
 - 12 TC, 43–44; WC1, 42.
 - 13 TC, 55; WC1, 69. The first line reads: *Nun ist die Busse nichts anders dann durch ware Rewe und Leydt der Sünde absterben...Is der Sünde genitive or dative?*
 - 14 We should note that Arndt is *not* focusing on sex when he speaks of “fleshly lust”, as can be seen by his inclusion of honor, glory, wisdom, power, independence and other “virtues” in the category. Here we are reminded of both Luther and Augustine.
 - 15 Numerous statements about the “completely bestial, earthly, fleshly, ungodly, and loveless” state of fallen human nature cause one to question whether Arndt's anthropology did not follow Matthäus Flacius Illyricus. It would certainly be ironic if one who was accused of Synergism and Majorism was actually a Flacian.
 - 16 TC, 41–42; WC1, 35–36.
 - 17 TC, 43; WC1, 39–40.
 - 18 TC, 42; WC1, 37–38.
 - 19 TC, 43–44; WC1, 41–42.
 - 20 Cf. Bk. I, chap. 1: TC, 29–32; WC1, 1–11.
 - 21 TC, 41; WC1, 33–35.
 - 22 I have corrected TC's translation of *durchs Gesetz und durch ernstliche betrachtung des H. Leydens Christi* here.
 - 23 TC, 56; WC1, 71.
 - 24 TC, 39; WC1, 30.
 - 25 TC, 40; WC1, 31–32.
 - 26 TC, 24; WC1, vorrede.
 - 27 TC, 55; WC1, 68.
 - 28 TC, 40; WC1, 33.
 - 29 TC, 41; WC1, 36.

30 TC, 55; WC1, 69.

31 We should note that there are statements where Arndt uses faith as the instrument of renewal. E.g., TC, 58; WC1, 77: "True faith renews the person and mortifies the sins in a person, makes a person living in Christ, that is, s/he lives in Christ, in his love, humility, meekness, patience." Here faith has taken the place usually occupied by repentance.

32 TC, 43; WC1, 40.

33 TC, 59; WC1, 79-80.

34 TC, 47; WC1, 50.

35 TC, 41; WC1, 33-34. For a more complete text, cf. p. 8, n20.

36 Certainly Luther had no trouble incorporating *Anfechtung* into his doctrine of justification as a work of the Holy Spirit which reduced the achievements of the self-righteous to nothing, and Luther's *Anfechtungen* can sound remarkably like Arndt's *Rewe*.

37 TC, 41-42; WC1, 33-36.

38 TC, 24-25; WC1, vorrede.

39 TC, 56; WC1, 71 (cf. n22 above).

40 TC, 43-44; WC1, 42 (cf. n12 above). Also TC, 55; WC1, 69 (cf. n13 above).

41 TC, 42; WC1, 36-37 (cf. n11 above).

42 TC, 56; WC1, 71.

43 TC, 43; WC1, 40.

44 TC, 57; WC1, 75-76.

45 TC, 55; WC1, 69-70.

46 TC, 58; WC1, 76-77.

47 TC, 40; WC1, 33.

48 Cf., e.g. *Large Catechism*, Baptism, Tappert edition, p. 436-446.

49 TC, 58; WC1, 78. This particular passage could be read in itself to assume that repentance and a contrite heart are the result of the forgiveness of sins. I am reading it in light of the passages cited above at n42-n46 which clearly state that contrition, repentance, and even mortification precede forgiveness.

50 TC, 58-59; WC1, 79.

51 TC, 59; WC1, 79-80.

52 The Supplement was completed after Thomas' death by students using material from the master's commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. We will be using volume V of the translation prepared by the English Dominican Province in 1911 and revised in 1920 (Reprint: Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1981), hereafter abbreviated ED V. The use of the Supplement is not intended to ignore the great diversity of high and late Medieval theology. It is precisely this diversity that forces one to use one example in a short article, recognizing that this is but one example. To gain a broader perspective on contrition in late Medieval theology, cf. Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) 233-273.

- 53 Supp. 1, 1; ED V, 2561 (Cf. Tentler, 235).
- 54 Ibid. (Cf. Tentler, 236-238).
- 55 Supp. 1, 1; ED V, 2562.
- 56 Supp. 2, 2; ED V, 2564.
- 57 Supp. 2, 6; ED V, 2566-2567.
- 58 Supp. 3, 1; ED V, 2567-2568.
- 59 Supp. 3, 2; ED V, 2569.
- 60 Supp. 4, 1; ED V, 2571.
- 61 Supp. 5, 1; ED V, 2573.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Supp. 5, 3; ED V, 2574.
- 64 For Thomism, either actual participation in or the intention to participate in a sacrament are equivalent.
- 65 TC, 25; WC1, vorrede.
- 66 *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Durham, N.C.: The Labyrinth Press, 1983 [reprint of 1963]) 181- 182.
- 67 More research will be needed to determine whether Arndt introduced these ideas into post-Reformation Lutheran theology or is reflecting the work of someone earlier. Dietmar Lage, *Martin Luther's Christology and Ethics* (Queenston: Edwin Mellen, 1990) 151-165, would place the blame on Luther himself because of the Reformer's own confusion about the relation of faith and works, but Lage's arguments are not sustained by the passages he presents from Luther.