

**A Lutheran-Episcopal Response to ARCIC II's  
Salvation and the Church**

For over a year members of the Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue in New York have met to discuss the 1987 Agreed Statement by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II) entitled, Salvation and the Church. We are not, for the most part, academic theologians. We are parish clergy and lay people, and we offer this paper in response to the Commission's stated willingness "to receive observations and criticisms made in a constructive and fraternal spirit."<sup>1</sup>

The Agreed Statement comes, as the co-chairmen tell us in the Preface, in response to a request by the Anglican Consultative Council that ARCIC II address the doctrine of justification, which, as the Preface observes, "at the time of the Reformation was a particular cause of contention."<sup>2</sup> We Anglicans and Lutherans share formative theological roots in the controversies of the sixteenth century Reformation. In our study we have come to appreciate the essential concord with which our two traditions treat the doctrine of justification--despite differences in tone and emphasis. In our evaluation of Salvation and the Church, Lutheran and Anglican members of our committee speak with a single voice. There is much that we like, but we have serious reservations about the ambiguity with which the Agreed Statement treats the crucial matter of "imputation."

<sup>1</sup>ARCIC II, Salvation and the Church, An Agreed Statement by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (Cincinnati: Forward Movement Publications), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

## The Historic Impasse

Anglicanism lacks a primary theological architect of the stature of Luther or Calvin. But once the Elizabethan Settlement prevailed in the latter part of the sixteenth century, and parameters of ecclesiastical polity were defined, Richard Hooker emerged as the definitive apologist for the classic Anglican position. In 1585, Hooker devoted a lengthy essay to the topic of justification, which addressed particularly the manner in which the Church of England parted ways with Roman Catholicism. In "A Learned Discourse of Justification, Hooker undertakes a project similar to that of ARCIC II. He seeks a "way to plain understanding of that grand question, which hangeth yet in controversy between us and the Church of Rome, about the matter of justifying righteousness."<sup>3</sup>

Hooker begins by acknowledging the many points on which Anglicans and Roman Catholics are agreed. Both, for instance, teach that,

...all have sinned...that God doth justify the soul of man alone, without any other coefficient cause of justice...they teach as we do that unto justice no man ever attained but by the merits of Jesus...they teach as we do that although Christ as God be the efficient, as man the meritorious, cause of our justice, yet in us also there is something required.<sup>4</sup>

Carefully avoiding caricature, Hooker delineates the common ground. Both sides agree that God alone reconciles a sinful humanity to himself, that this is solely by the merit of Jesus Christ, and that this nevertheless calls for a response from us.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Hooker, A Learned Discourse of Justification, in Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, Faith and Works, Cranmer and Hooker on Justification (Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow Co., Inc.) p. 62.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 63.

Hooker concludes, "thus far we join hands with the Church of Rome." Only then does he ask, "wherein then do we disagree?" The disagreement, he says, lies in the "very essence of the medicine whereby Christ cureth our disease."<sup>5</sup>

It is agreed that Christ saves us by his grace, but in what manner? In the language of the day, what is the "formal cause" (unica formalis causa)? And how does this salvation take effect in the lives of the justified? Hooker's answer is this:

...the righteousness wherein we must be found, if we will be justified, is not our own; therefore we cannot be justified by any inherent quality...even the man which in himself is impious, full of iniquity, full of sin; him being found in Christ through faith, and having his sin in hatred through repentance; him God beholdeth with a gracious eye, putteth away his sin by not imputing it.<sup>6</sup>

Hooker denies that we are made right before God by any "inherent righteousness"--there is nothing that can be called our own with which we come before God. Our standing before God is based entirely on what Christ has done. As a result of Christ's atoning work alone, God looks upon us and "imputes" to us his divine righteousness.

The Council of Trent, on the other hand, taught that we are justified by an "inherent righteousness"--that is, a righteousness that we can call our own. It is our own because God bestows it upon us; he "infuses" his grace within us. Thus, says Hooker, "this grace they will have to be applied by infusion, to the end that, as the body is warm by the heat which is in the body, so the soul might be righteous by inherent

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

grace."<sup>7</sup> As Trent put it, "not only are we reputed, but we are truly called, and are just, receiving justice within us."<sup>8</sup> Trent insisted that our justification is not merely imputed.

If anyone denies that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which is conferred in baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted, or says that the whole of that which belongs to the essence of sin is not taken away, but says that it is only cancelled or not imputed (emphasis ours) let him be anathema.<sup>9</sup>

The Counter Reformation interpreted the Reformation doctrine of imputed righteousness as merely a "legal fiction" that left the justified fundamentally unchanged. ARCIC II neatly summarizes the matter in this way,

Catholics took [Reformation theologians] to be implying that imputed righteousness was a legal fiction, that is, a merely nominal righteousness that remained only external to the believer. They objected that this left the essential sinfulness of the individual unchanged, and excluded the imparted, or habitual actual, righteousness created in the inner being of the regenerate person by the indwelling spirit. (para. 5)

It is here that the classic Roman Catholic concern for good works appears. In arguing for an "infused", and, hence, "inherent" righteousness, Trent is looking for a change in the justified--a change that shows itself in good works.

Yet, Hooker does not say that justification leaves the believer unchanged, nor does he disparage the importance of good works in the Christian Life. But for Hooker, and for the reformers in general, these matters fall under the rubric of "sanctification". Hooker is even willing to talk about "inherent

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 63f.

<sup>8</sup> see C. FitzSimons Allison, The Rise of Moralism, The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter (Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow), p. 213.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

righteousness" in the believer, so long as it is in the context of sanctification.

Now concerning the righteousness of sanctification, we deny it not to be inherent; we grant, that unless we work, we have it not; only we distinguish it as a thing different in nature from the righteousness of justification.<sup>10</sup>

Hooker, in other words, acknowledges two forms of righteousness: (1) The righteousness that is not inherent. This is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which God imputes to us. On the basis of Christ's righteousness alone we are forgiven our sin, restored to God's favor, and counted worthy to stand before him--as Hooker put it, "God beholdeth [us] with a gracious eye." The righteousness that is not inherent is the righteousness of justification. (2) In our new standing with God through justification, however, God has poured out his Spirit upon us (Rom. 5:5, Gal 4:3) which effects a real change in us--a change that bears fruit in good works. This is the righteousness of sanctification, and it is inherent.

Hooker makes two careful stipulations about sanctifying righteousness. First, it is logically a consequence of justification--it is not that which makes us acceptable to God, rather, it follows from our being deemed acceptable to God. Secondly, in this life it is imperfect--and its work within us is gradual.<sup>11</sup> Hence, Hooker proposes yet a third righteousness--a

<sup>10</sup>Hughes, Faith and Works

<sup>11</sup>Hooker distinguishes two forms of the righteousness of sanctification, "habitual" and "actual". Habitual Righteousness is "that holiness wherewith our sould are inwardly endued the same instant when first we begin to be the temples of the Holy Ghost"; Actual Righteousness is the holiness that we cultivate by our works of virtue. See Hughes, Works, p. 79. Also see Lee W. Gibbs, "Richard Hooker's Via Media Doctrine of Justification," Harvard Theological Review, vol. 74, No. 2 (1981), pp. 211-220.

final, perfect, and inherent righteousness that we will have in glory.

There is a glorifying righteousness of men in the world to come; and there is a justifying and a sanctifying righteousness here. The righteousness wherewith we shall be clothed in the world to come is both perfect and inherent. The righteousness whereby we are justified is perfect, but not inherent. That whereby we are sanctified, inherent but not perfect.<sup>12</sup>

### Simul iustus et peccator

This third righteousness is the eschatological fulfillment of the good work that God has begun in us through justification and sanctification. In the meantime, however, those who are in Christ retain the peculiar status of simul iustus et peccator--we are at once justified and sinners. A footnote in the Agreed Statement observes that "simul iustus et peccator is a Lutheran not a characteristically Anglican expression."<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless simul iustus et peccator neatly sums up not only Hooker's proposition, but also that of virtually every significant Anglican theologian in that formative period between the Elizabethan Settlement and the British Civil War.<sup>14</sup>

Is there sin in the justified? Here the divergence between the reformers and the Church of Rome is most apparent. Trent teaches that the justified retain only "concupiscence" or "an inclination to sin, which, since it is left for us to wrestle with, cannot injure those who do not acquiesce." Trent insists that "this concupiscence...the Catholic Church has never understood to be called sin in the sense that it is truly and

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>ARCIC II, Salvation, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup>The thesis of Allison, The Rise of Moralism

properly sin in those born again."<sup>15</sup> By "inhesion", justifying grace necessarily expels sin--the two can never co-exist. Hence, if in a Christian's life there is an appearance of sin, either (1) it is not sin at all, but concupiscence, or (2) that person is no longer in a state of grace, and salvation is once again in doubt.

For the reformers, this teaching undermined a believer's assurance of salvation through the atoning work of Christ alone, and it confused our present state with that which we are to become. This, then, is the classic controversy between Anglicans (Lutherans, as well) and the Church of Rome. Our question to ARCIC II is this: how has Salvation and the Church resolved the impasse regarding the matter of imputation--particularly as expressed in the formula, simul iustus et peccator?

#### Salvation and the Church

In the introduction, Salvation and the Church notes four historic difficulties, and then addresses each in four subsequent sections, "Salvation and Faith", "Salvation and Justification", "Salvation and Good Works", and "The Church and Salvation." ARCIC II notes that in each of these areas, the historic conflict "encouraged each side to produce caricatures of the other's beliefs" (para. 8). ARCIC II goes to great lengths to set caricature aside, and state not only the position of each side but also their underlying concerns. ARCIC II suggests, in fact, that behind the mutually antagonistic language, there lie basic concerns that may not be so irreconcilable after all.

The Agreed Statement implies, in this, that the two sides

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<sup>15</sup> in Allison, Rise of Moralism, p. 213.

did not so much disagree as misunderstand one another. ARCIC II points out, for instance, that while Roman Catholicism relied on the Latin terminology of the Vulgate, Reformation teaching was based on the Greek usage of the New Testament.(para. 14) Yet there is semantic discrepancy between the Greek dikaion, meaning "to pronounce righteous", and the Latin iustificare which means to "make righteous". As a result, "Catholic understanding of the process of justification, following Latin usage, tended to include elements of salvation which the Reformers would describe as belonging to sanctification rather than justification." (para. 14) We find this a significant and illuminating observation. But it does not so much resolve the controversy, which ARCIC II seems to imply, as give it focus. After all, Hooker recognized this same fact when he alleged that Tridentine teaching confused the role of inherent righteousness--linking it with justification rather than treating it as a component of sanctification.

Our committee commends ARCIC II for clarifying misunderstanding on both sides, but we are not convinced that these theological controversies can be reduced to a failure of each party to grasp the terminology of the other. Was it merely that neither side understood the other? Or did caricature exacerbate what were already real disagreements?

Salvation and the Church seems more inclined to work around these real disagreements than to address them directly. From the beginning, ARCIC sets justification within the broader context of the doctrine of salvation as a whole in order to "rediscover" the "balance and coherence of the constitutive elements of the



Christian doctrine of salvation [that] had become partially obscured in the course of history and controversy." The document begins, in paragraph 1, with a broad overview of the New Testament doctrine of salvation. In paragraph 13, ARCIC II recognizes the "wide variety of language" with which the New Testament describes salvation, of which "there is no controlling term or concept." The terminology of "reconciliation", "expiation", "propitiation", "redemption", "adoption" and "justification" are all complementary. The Agreed Statement implies that the polemics of the sixteenth century overly weighted the discussion on the issue of justification--that Lutheran orthodoxy was mistaken to lift up the article of Justification as that on which the Church stands or falls. Hence, in seeking to reestablish a broader perspective, ARCIC II speaks of "Salvation and the Church" in which justification is only a constituent part.

There is value in placing the doctrine of justification within this broader perspective--especially given the fact that, for Anglicans, justification has not classically been the overriding theological preoccupation that it has been for Lutherans. Nevertheless, we are concerned that by broadening the perspective, ARCIC II minimizes the significance of historical points of contention, without actually resolving them. Again, as we have seen, Hooker himself freely admitted that there was a great deal in regard to the doctrine of salvation about which Anglicans and Roman Catholics were agreed. Hooker's purpose in A Learned Discourse of Justification was to bring greater scrutiny to bear on the points of divergence. It was an exercise in

"magnification", that the difficulties might be more evident, and hence, better understood. Salvation and the Church, it seems to us, risks doing the reverse. This approach leads to what we feel to be an ambiguous and evasive treatment of the historical impasse.

Yet even here, there is much to commend. Paragraph 5 provides a tidy encapsulation of the historical problem. Paragraph 18 gives an expression of imputation that we cannot fault.

The term justification speaks of a divine declaration of acquittal...through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, God declares that we are forgiven, accepted and reconciled to him. Instead of our strivings to make ourselves acceptable to God, Christ's righteousness is reckoned to our account.

Paragraph 21 seems to part company with Trent when it acknowledges that "the growth of believers to maturity, and indeed the common life of the Church, are impaired by repeated lapses into sin." ARCIC II acknowledges that our sanctifying righteousness is partial; "even good works," they say, "can be flawed by human weakness and self-centeredness", faults that might traditionally have been subsumed under the rubric of "concupiscence." All this is "expressed by the paradox that we are at once just and sinners." A footnote even quotes Vatican II (Lumen Gentium 8) as describing the church as "holy and at the same time always in need of purification."

The closest ARCIC II comes to resolving the imputation/infusion question is in paragraph 15. While the Agreed Statement asserts that justification is not a "reward for faith or works", it goes on to say that justification is

"indissolubly linked with [God's] sanctifying recreation of us in grace." Our question is: in what manner? The way in which justification and sanctification are related, after all, was at the center of the sixteenth century controversy. Paragraph 15 specifies that this is being "worked out in the course of our pilgrimage" and in the midst of "imperfections and ambiguities." But we ask, by whose working? And what exactly do we mean by "imperfections and ambiguities"? Are we talking about sin, or concupiscence, or something else? We seek less ambiguity here and more clarity.

The climax of the paragraph, and as ARCIC II member Dr. J. Robert Wright has pointed out,<sup>16</sup> the crux of the Agreed Statement, is found in these words:

God's grace effects what he declares: his creative word imparts what it imputes. By pronouncing us righteous, God also makes us righteous. He imparts a righteousness which is his and becomes ours. (para. 15)

Clearly, this is an attempt to reconcile the terminology of imputation and infusion. There is no doubt that God's declaration is effective. Whether in creation, or in the verdict that God utters on the cross of Jesus Christ, the powerful Word that God speaks cannot be mere fiction, legal or otherwise--it is New Creation (II Cor 5:17, Gal 6:15). But we ask, when and how does God's word "impart what it imputes"? In what sense is his righteousness also ours? If it is ours, presumably it is what the sixteenth century spoke of as "inherent"--and hence we ask again, in what sense? Is it perfect and complete now--and

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<sup>16</sup> Dr. Wright made his remarks at a presentation to an Episcopal, Roman Catholic and Lutheran ecumenical gathering, held at Graymoor Ecumenical Institute, in Garrison, NY in June 1987.

hence the infused justifying righteousness of Trent? Or is it partial now and awaiting fulfillment in the world to come--and thus the sanctifying righteousness of which Hooker speaks? We echo the criticism of C. Fitzsimons Allison: "Given the agreed preciseness of the historical argument, what excuse is there for this ambiguity?"<sup>17</sup>

Much about Salvation and the Church is splendid--its broad theological and biblical scope, its efforts to discard caricature and work behind the polemics of the sixteenth century to the motivating concerns of each side, and especially those points at which it seems to affirm simul iustus et peccator. But we do not find the careful arguments of the sixteenth century treated with sufficient clarity.

We do not demand a verdict from ARCIC on the conflicts of the sixteenth century. We do not expect twentieth century Anglicans and Roman Catholics to arbitrate the Reformation debate so that one side is compelled to make the humiliating admission that their predecessors had been in the wrong. In the Final Report, ARCIC I described its task in this way:

in the spirit of Phil. 3:13, "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead," to discover each other's faith as it is today and to appeal to history only for enlightenment, not as a way of perpetuating past controversy.<sup>18</sup>

We appreciate the aptness of this approach, and have no desire to "perpetuate past controversy." We recognize that the theological

<sup>17</sup>"The Pastoral and Political Implications of Trent on Justification: a Response to the ARCIC Agreed Statement Salvation and the Church", St. Luke's Journal of Theology, June 1988, Vol. XXXI, No. 3., p. 218.

<sup>18</sup>ARCIC I, The Final Report, (Cincinnati: Forward Movement Publications, 1981)

ground has indeed shifted, and new perspectives have opened up, particularly in the area of Pauline scholarship.<sup>19</sup>

But the work of the present best builds upon a clear and unambiguous assessment of the controversies of the past. We find it significant that the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in its Observations on "Salvation and the Church", has mirrored our own reservations with the stipulation,

if the formulation simul iustus et peccator is to be retained, it should be explained more fully so as to avoid all ambiguity...If one really wishes to maintain this formula, it would be necessary to state exactly what is intended, not the existence of two states in the baptized person contradictory to one another (that of grace and mortal sin), but the possible presence, in the righteous one who possesses sanctifying grace, of that "sin which does not lead to death" (1 John 5:17)<sup>20</sup>

Certainly this is a "prickly" document. We recognize that it displays a profound reluctance to relinquish the language of past controversies. But might not the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith have been more amenable had ARCIC II first been less ambiguous about simul iustus et peccator, and then moved boldly to break new ground on the basis of recent New Testament scholarship?

We support the effort to forge a new consensus in the place

<sup>19</sup>See Marcus Barth, "Jews and Gentiles: the Social Character of Justification in Paul," JES, 5/2 (Spring 1968); J. Christiaan Beker, Paul the Apostle, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); Ernst Kasemann, "The Righteousness of God in Paul", in New Testament Questions of Today, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); Krister Stendahl, Paul Among Jews and Gentiles (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969). While this is hardly an exhaustive list, each of these works takes a fresh look at the Pauline understanding of justification in a manner which suggests possible avenues for theological convergence between Protestants (including Anglicans) and Roman Catholics.

<sup>20</sup>"Observations on Salvation and the Church", Origins, Dec. 15, 1988, Vol. 18: No. 27, pp. 431f.

of past controversy, and we applaud ARCIC II for the work that has been done. But we still contend that the sticky question of imputation has not been handled with sufficient clarity, and as a result, ARCIC II's agreement "on the essential aspects of the doctrine of salvation" remains ambiguous and inconclusive.

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