

LATIMER STUDIES
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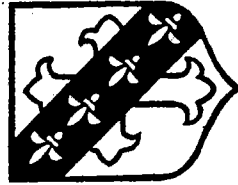
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LATIMER STUDIES

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JUSTIFICATION TODAY: THE ROMAN CATHOLIC & ANGLICAN DEBATE

R G England



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ROMAN CATHOLIC AND ANGLICAN

DEBATE

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INTRODUCTION

IN July 1977 an Open Letter was sent to every member of the Anglican diocesan episcopate and signed by about 130 members of the Anglican church who represented the evangelical tradition of that church. The event was unusual both in that such happenings do not occur frequently and in the sense that the contents of the Letter concerned a subject about which Anglican evangelicals had not spoken in public hitherto in such a collective way: the growing contact between the Anglican church and the Roman Catholic church. While welcoming generally the move towards more positive and Christian relationships between the two bodies, the Letter expressed concern for a deeper investigation of certain areas which the signatories saw as both important enough to warrant it and in which there seemed to be disagreement that could not be overcome without it. Among the four specified topics, justification-by-faith-through-grace-alone was mentioned. It is the intention of this study to look at that issue.

In a sense this essay is out of fashion, in that we live in an age when the past is largely at a discount as a source for solutions to the problems which bedevil our contemporary world. Nowhere is this more so than in the area of religious disagreement. In the wake of the ecumenical movement of the past decades, Christians are impatient of rehearsing old quarrels or of uncovering areas of doctrinal agitation which have been largely forgotten. It is thought better to accept the common Christian experience which transcends the demarcations of past eras and to allow the issue on remote controversy to fall where it may. It is certainly true that the doctrine of justification is not one which has commanded serious attention from Anglicans in the recent past, if we are to judge from the reports of successive Lambeth Conferences. Many would see this as a healthy sign, while others, more theologically aware, might argue that the small attention paid to the doctrine of justification has been out of all proportion to the benefit such discussion has brought to the Church generally, and in contradiction to the space devoted to this doctrine in the New Testament.

Despite such misgivings we intend to proceed. It is hoped to show that the attention given to the topic here (and hitherto) has not been misdirected, and that the place accorded to it in the past was not ultimately an inflated one. The perspectives which time and less heated reflection have lent the study of the subject will be reviewed, and an attempt will be made to present the current debate, as it relates to Anglicans and Roman Catholics, in such a way as to remove-misunderstanding about it. For this reason a short review of the situation among those who have written authoritatively about related matters, such as Luther studies, has been included. Finally, some indication of the position now arrived at and the course of action best suited to the future is set out.

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1. JUSTIFICATION AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

WITHIN the New Testament, justification and righteousness are common themes, but the formal treatment of the doctrine of justification is found mainly in Paul's writings, where it is effectively restricted to the epistles to the Galatians and Romans. Before turning to the subject matter of these letters, something of the background to the issue as it arose in the life of the young church is required.

The letter to the Galatians breathes controversy; it is the counter-attack against what Paul conceives to be a distortion of the Christian gospel, which, if left unchecked, will result in there being no gospel to preach. The exact point at which the history in the Acts of the Apostles interlocks with the occasion when Galatians was written is an open one, but the general situation seems clear. The offer to the Gentile 'God-fearers' and the pagan Gentile world of the gospel was an epoch-making step. The events surrounding the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10) are described in terms which put the divine ordering of this incident beyond doubt. Peter is prepared for it by a vision, and Cornelius himself is prompted to summon the apostle by an equally divine initiative. The outcome of Peter's preaching is the unmistakable outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Spirit leaves Peter in no doubt that such people should receive Christian baptism and count as Christians.

The implications of this were far-reaching and raised certain urgent questions. Did such people, as Christians and Gentiles, enjoy full equality of table fellowship with their Jewish fellow-Christians? The logic of the situation pointed to a positive answer. Equality of fellowship was the necessary concomitant of that equality of relationship with God which baptism expressed. At this point controversy broke out in the church at Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas had been active. They had followed through the principle of equality and had set aside the Jewish regulations which governed social relations with non-Jews. Such regulations, which had a religious character, were particularised in the refusal of Jews to share meals with a non-Jew. At Antioch this convention was allowed to lapse and the common allegiance to Christ became the basis of a common (sacramental?) table fellowship. In Paul's absence a party of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem challenged the propriety of this course of action and succeeded in winning over some of the Jewish Christians at Antioch. Peter, who was then present and who had previously agreed to the principle of a common table, withdrew his support in the face of the Jerusalem faction. Even the more stable Barnabas joined in the defection.

On the surface the issue seemed trivial enough, but Paul saw in it a threat to the whole Christian gospel. When the same Jerusalem party crusaded for their viewpoint among the churches of Galatia, Paul wrote

the epistle of that name to meet the challenge. We shall now look at the essential arguments presented in that letter and draw upon the letter to the Romans where it supplements and elucidates the position argued in Galatians.

The fundamental premise, which was at risk in the inconsistent behaviour of Barnabas and Peter, was the root conviction that 'a man is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Christ Jesus'. This belief had led Jews such as Peter and Barnabas to seek their justification before God through faith in Christ. It was this faith which lay behind the acceptance of Gentile Christians into fellowship: all Christians stood on an equal footing as justified sinners. The position of the Christian before God owed nothing to his ability to observe the Law of Moses. Paul indicates the centrality of this fact for his argument by asserting it three times in the space of a single verse. 'The Law & works done in obedience to it are rejected in the strongest terms as a possible basis for the sinner's justification. In grasping this fact the Jews discovered themselves to be what they on their own account must always remain in God's sight, namely, sinners. It does not follow that Christ is in any way a means of furthering sin, for Paul never sees in Christ an opening of the door to sinful conduct. He repudiated any suggestion along these lines with vigour. In justifying man God does not condone sin, for, as Paul sees it, there is an intimate and indissoluble relationship between justification and the atonement made for sin. In verse 20 he speaks of Christ as the one who 'gave himself' and summarises the connection between the two realities in the following verse: 'for if justification were through the Law, then Christ died to no purpose'.

The purpose of Christ's death is related explicitly to man's situation under the Law. Here the man in question is a Jew in the first instance. He has been given the revelation of God in the Law, but this privilege runs parallel to the unyielding demand of God through that Law for total obedience. In terms of acceptance before God there is no other or lesser alternative: the exact correlate of the Law is complete obedience. Disobedience brings with it the penalty of being under a 'curse'. It is from this cul-de-sac (the outcome of human inability to keep the Law) that Christ has delivered men. Paul states this in words which are breath-taking in their audacity and awe-inspiring in their implications. Christ redeemed men by 'having become a curse on our behalf'. To analyse what precisely is meant here would involve a detour into a complicated field of exegesis, but it would be difficult to say less than Professor James Denney's words: 'In his death everything was made his that sin had made ours - everything in sin except its sinfulness'. This understanding of Christ's death in relation to sin lies at the basis of everything else Paul has to say about the gospel. He returns to it again in Romans, in what is the centre of his case for proclaiming the universal validity of the gospel by which God justifies men. There as here, he then turns to the position of Abraham who was viewed by Christian and Jew alike as

indicative of, and normative for, understanding the ways of God with men.

The case of Abraham

Abraham is a key figure in Paul's argument. He is the founder father of the Jewish people and the archetypal Believer. Indeed, it has been argued that the rabbinical background to Paul's exposition in Romans 4 indicates that for Paul Abraham was the representative sinner as such.⁹ Certainly a burning question for both Paul and his Jewish opponents was: on what basis was Abraham justified? Paul's answer both in Galatians and Romans is an appeal to Genesis 15:6, 'Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'. In Galatians Paul states boldly that in using such language the Old Testament scripture foresaw the principle of justification by faith and that this text 'preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham'. The details of his supporting argument are found in Romans chapter 4, where Paul sets out to establish two things: 1) that Abraham - hence all men - is justified freely through faith; 2) what is meant by faith in this context. Before examining the essentials of Paul's argument, the position of Abraham within current Jewish tradition must be appreciated.

Abraham had acquired a special position in Jewish tradition and theology. He was viewed as the acme of virtue and piety. He above all other men had acquired merit upon which succeeding generations of his descendants might draw. Abraham's merit implied a perfect obedience to the Law and therefore he could be and was accepted as perfectly righteous, or justified, in God's sight. That Abraham was justified by his works was almost self-evident to a devout Jew.¹⁰ Attached to this conviction was the common notion that a man could be righteous before God if his merits outweighed his transgressions. Where the former were insufficient he could draw upon the super-abundant merits of Abraham. It was precisely this view which John the Baptist attacked when he warned: 'Do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham to our father".'¹¹

Paul chose the text from Genesis chapter 15 with good reason, as it was a verse which his fellow Jews generally took as providing support for the thesis that Abraham was indeed justified by works.¹² In his treatment of it Paul fastens on the precise meaning to be attributed to the term 'reckon', and determines its meaning by an appeal to another Old Testament passage, Psalm 32 verse 1. From this verse 'reckon' is seen to be the equivalent of 'non reckoning of sin' or in positive terms 'forgiveness'. On this showing the Genesis verse not only points to what Abraham did not do - a work of merit - but specifies the only alternative: Abraham was in effect numbered among the ungodly and accepted on the principle of faith. This faith was exercised before Abraham stood in formal covenant relationship with God, as this was expressed in the rite of circumcision. There can be no question of Abraham having a claim on God through anything he has done. His justification is God's act and is related solely to Abraham's faith.

The characteristic of this faith is its absolute trust in the word of God's promise. In human terms the promise, whose fulfillment depended upon the natural heir of Abraham, seemed beyond realisation. Abraham's faith was so absolute that it remained undaunted by what seemed the physically impossible. Indeed, Abraham became more convinced of the truth of what God had promised, 'being fully assured that what He had promised, he was able to perform'. Faith here was not of course a 'work', something meritorious, but rather the only appropriate response to the promise of God. Faith must not be separated from its object, namely, the living God who makes his will known in the word of his promise.

Abraham has therefore demonstrated the truth of Paul's contention that a man is justified before God not by works but by faith. Paul then takes his case a step further. Abraham's faith is the norm for all those who seek justification. It was not written for his sake alone that his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness'. Saving belief has a uniform structure both for Abraham and for every other person who seeks justification before God through faith in the promise offered to mankind in Christ Jesus. Of course, in the case of the Christian the relationship of faith to Christ is more explicit. It is worth noting that whereas Abraham is said to have believed on God who gives life to the dead, the Christian's faith is directed towards God 'that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification'.¹³ This verse is in many ways a key to Paul's understanding of how the death and resurrection of Christ, especially the latter, dovetail into the concept of justification. It is often made clear how the death of Christ is the basis upon which God offers forgiveness to the sinner, but it is less obvious how the resurrection relates to man's justification. To understand this one has to keep in mind that for Paul the doctrine of justification involved two things. It was a legal declaration of acquittal pronounced over the sinner when he believes, and it involved a relationship to the final day of judgement when the lives of all would be scrutinised by God. The acquittal pronounced here must be ratified in the day of judgement. That it will be so is not and cannot be guaranteed by our subsequent works as Christian people (that would be a new legalism!). It is guaranteed by the living Christ who has been raised to defend his people in the final judgement. Paul states this with triumph in Romans 8:34-35: 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died, yes who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.'¹⁴

When Paul has completed his exposition of the case of Abraham, he has reached the end of his presentation of the need and the ground and the means of justification. The remainder of the letter is concerned with the implications of the doctrine both in theology and practice. However, in the position Paul has reached there are two starting points which have been assumed in this account of his teaching but which are

both important in themselves and have become the object of heated debate. To these we now turn.

Wrath

In Paul's teaching in Romans and elsewhere the term 'wrath', or less frequently 'the wrath of God', is used to denote an essential component of his thinking. In Romans 1:18 the latter expression occurs at a point which many commentators consider crucial for the structure of the argument. It is therefore imperative that we understand what Paul means by such expressions. Here there is sharp disagreement. For some the essence of the matter is that we live in a moral world, and that evil has its cumulative effects. These can be seen in all their repulsiveness in the lives of those who sin remorselessly, and in the consequences for others which such resolute sinning brings about. The brunt of God's wrath is met in this world, as is clear in the state of affairs which Paul so graphically describes in Romans 1 and Ephesians 4. The implication of this argument is that the wrath of God is something within history. The notion of an ultimate encounter with God which visits upon men the just reward of their deeds is excluded. Wrath does not belong to the time of the end but to the present experience of history.

Behind this type of argument is not only exegesis of the biblical text, but the conviction that it is unworthy to attribute wrath to God. The pioneer of this type of viewpoint objected to attributing to God 'the irrational passion of anger'.¹⁵ This objection is valid as stated, but it is not what is implied when Christians speak of God's wrath. Still less do they think of God as being 'subject to fits of schizophrenia during which the two contrary impulses conflict in him, one to love and the other to be angry'.¹⁶ This is a caricature of what is intended when Evangelicals and others speak of God's wrath, and it would not be worthy of attention did it not carry the imprimatur of its respected and widely read author, Professor R. P. C. Hanson. It is difficult to see how God could remain aloof from human sin and simply leave events to take their course, and still be perfectly good. It is also unwise to make the human the measure of the divine, and to argue from human wrath to divine wrath. Human wrath is always the wrath of sinners, and is thus compromised by the presence of sin. God's wrath is not analogous to ours at this decisive point. Further, the revelation of God's wrath, as Paul understands it, is bound up with the revelation of his righteousness. Both are disclosed in the proclamation of the gospel, because both have been disclosed fully in the events of Gethsemane and Calvary which are prior to the proclamation.¹⁷

The concept of the wrath of God taken in personal terms carries with it the corollary of the Day of Judgement. From what has been said already, it follows that this concept is embedded in the theology of justification, especially as this is found in Romans. Professor C. K. Barrett captions sections of his commentary dealing with chapters 1 and 2, 'judgement and the Gentile', 'judgement and the critic', 'judgement and the Jew'.¹⁸ At every point this truth is presupposed, namely

that God 'has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed'.¹⁹ In arguing like this, Paul is doing no more than building on his Jewish heritage, as can be seen in the ministry of John the Baptist. He, like his contemporaries, saw the arrival of the Messiah, the gift of the Spirit and the final day of judgement as components of the arrival of the kingdom of God.²⁰ Jesus accepted the assumption that these were interlinked realities, but he saw the relationship between the final judgement and the other elements differently. In his own assessment of the work of the Messiah, Jesus cites the Old Testament, but breaks off significantly in the middle of the passage of Isaiah he is quoting. For him there is a time-gap between the advent of the Messiah and the final judgement. In E. M. B. Green's phrase, Jesus split the eschatological moment into two.²¹ This combination of fulfilment and postponement is carried over into the rest of the New Testament, so that the expectation of the Last Day remains an important feature of New Testament teaching. At this point Paul is loyal both to his Jewish inheritance and to his Christian antecedents.

Acquittal

The context of justification is clearly the judgement of God upon sinners. It might be assumed that the meaning of the word could be easily agreed upon, but this has not proved the case. Differing Christian traditions have appealed to the vocabulary of 'justification' in the New Testament to uphold their particular doctrinal stance.²² The subordination of linguistic to doctrinal considerations is insupportable, and there has consequently grown up a body of literature devoted to an exact analysis of the New Testament vocabulary. Despite such exhaustive analysis there is as yet no unanimity of opinion, but certain conclusions have wide support among scholars.

Paul sees 'justification' as a term which refers in the first place to law. It refers to God's act of forgiveness towards the sinner, who is a lawbreaker, described in the terms of the proceedings of a lawcourt.²³ The essential quality of justification is the restored relationship between God and man. C. E. B. Cranfield, who is writing in full awareness of the linguistic studies mentioned above, puts the matter emphatically:

There seems to us no doubt that dikaios as used by Paul means simply 'to acquit', "confer a righteous status on", and does not in itself contain any reference to moral transformation.²⁴

On this understanding justification is a declaratory act which restores the relationship between God and man.

The eschatological setting of justification, i. e. its direct link with the events of the end of time, is crucial. In justification the final judgement is brought forward and holds good for the believer now. Because this verdict of 'acquitted' is part of the ultimate nexus of events, it retains its orientation towards the believer's entire life. 'He is justified not

only from the sins committed before the time of belief; he is justified from ALL guilt.²³

When these two points are appreciated, the edge of some often-stated objections is turned. Justification is not 'fictional'. It really alters the situation. The alteration is not as such in the moral sphere, although the repercussions there are immediate. Further, the eschatological setting of justification places it at the very centre of the New Testament gospel, which is almost totally conditioned by its doctrine of the last things. The charge that justification is peripheral to the gospel as the New Testament presents it, is totally misplaced, on this ground alone. For all their limitations, those who controverted so vigorously over the issue in the sixteenth century did see the centrality of the issue. How they saw it and how their contrary viewpoints split the church of Christ is our next concern.

NOTES

¹ cf. D. Guthrie, New Testament Introduction: The Pauline Epistles (London, 1961), p. 8 ff. F. F. Bruce, New Testament History (London, 1969), pp. 279 ff.

² Acts 10:1-8.

³ Galatians 2:16.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Romans 3:5; cf. also Paul's teaching in Galatians 5:13 ff. and its theological basis in Romans 6:1 ff.

⁶ Galatians 3:13.

⁷ The Death of Christ (London, 1951, edited by R. V. G. Tasker), p. 94.

⁸ Romans 3:21-26 cf. C. E. B. Cranfield's remark on this section, "It is the centre and heart of the whole of Rom. 1:16b - 15:13": The Epistle to the Romans Vol. I (ICC, London, 1975), p. 199.

⁹ cf. A. T. Hanson, Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology (London, 1974), pp. 54-56, esp. p. 56 "Abraham is a representative of the Gentiles, but a representative in being forgiven and justified."

¹⁰ cf. C. K. Barrett, From First Adam to Last (London, 1962), pp. 31-32, and R. A. Stewart, Rabbinic Theology (London, 1961), p. 127 ff.

¹¹ Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8.

¹² Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

¹³ Romans 4:24-25.

¹⁴ The argument here follows that of G. E. Ladd, I believe in the Resurrection of Jesus (London, 1975), p. 148.

¹⁵ C. H. Dodd, Romans (Moffatt New Testament Commentary, London, 1932) p. 50.

¹⁶ R. P. C. Hanson, The Attractiveness of God (London, 1973), p. 145; Hanson's overall position is that espoused by his brother, A. T. Hanson, in The Wrath of the Lamb (London, 1957), as the former acknowledges, p. 154.

¹⁷ cf. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p. 109-110. In addition to the literature cited there, mention should be made of L. L. Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (London, 1975), pp. 161-167, and the discussion in D. E. H. Whiteley, The Theology of St. Paul (London, 1964), pp. 61-71.

¹⁸ covering Romans 1:18-32; 2:1-11; 2:17-29 respectively. ¹⁹ Acts 17:31.

²⁰ cf. Matthew 3:1-12, esp. vv. 11-12.

²¹ E. M. B. Green, The Meaning of Salvation (London, 1965), p. 99. The Old Testament passage referred to is Isaiah 61:2, cited in Luke 4:18-19.

²² J. A. Ziesler, The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul (London, 1972), pp. 1-14. Ziesler's claim to have overcome the traditional difficulties in the area of the vocabulary relating to justification has not been uncritically received: cf. Ronald Y. K. Fung, 'The forensic character of justification' (Themelios, Vol 3:1, p. 21, note 61), and the thesis referred to there.

²³ C. K. Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

²⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 95.

²⁵ cf. G. E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (London, 1975), p. 449.

2. JUSTIFICATION AND CHURCH DISUNITY

THE doctrine of justification by grace did not feature as largely as one might expect in the post New Testament church. In the Apostolic Fathers and their successors there was a decline in the understanding of grace if not an actual distortion of it.¹ Only with Augustine of Hippo was there effective recognition again of God's all-enabling and sufficient grace.² Within the complex of problems which surround the reality and the efficacy of God's grace in man, justification formed an important topic. Thus, it is treated under the theme of grace within the normative work of Thomas Aquinas, who provided the framework within which the discussion of man's justification was conducted until the fifteenth century. It must be recognised clearly, however, that late medieval thought was not simply a repetition of what Aquinas had said. Variations stemming from Aquinas' thought not only existed but were such as to undercut the essential evangelical concerns of the original Thomist theology.

It was against this homogeneous, if not uniform, background that the Reformation protest on the matter of justification was born in the person of Luther. The latter may not properly serve as a psychological case history, but he may properly serve as a theological case history. The common theology of the day taught that, in spite of man's fallenness and sin, he could, if he were willing, fulfil God's commandments to the letter. Yet even this did not secure salvation, which was only granted on the basis of meritorious works. Such merit could only be bestowed on works through God's mercy. Nonetheless, the granting of this merit was a fitting response to man's effort, and in its turn the merit thus granted made man acceptable to God. This merit was known as 'congruent' merit, and it was the outcome of the individual doing what he could. The Latin tag which covered this pattern of God's acceptance of man was '*facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*', God does not deny grace to one who does what is in him. The person accepted in this way could then be given the grace of justification and under its influence do works which would please God without reservation and so gain merit in the strictest sense. In virtue of these truly meritorious works a man might gain eternal life. Such merit was known as 'condignant' merit and was open only to the justified man who had received God's initial favour and acceptance through the congruent merit previously bestowed.

The weakness of such a scheme of salvation is obvious. How could a man know when he had done 'what in him lay'? Luther's trouble arose from his refusal to accept less than honest assessments of what such a demand implied. The medieval church could grant assurance through the system of penance, but Luther's hurt remained incurable through his insistence that God's demand was absolute and that no mitigation of it by means of the penitential system was acceptable or indeed possible.

'His case against the penitential system of the late medieval Church in the light of Nominalist theology... was not that it failed to solace but that it succeeded too well.'⁴ The story of how Luther found release from his burdened conscience is not our concern as such, but the essential theological break-through which it expressed was re-echoed and repeated in the theology of justification expounded by the English Reformers. Their works too pulsate with the sense of joyful discovery, though the personal history of any particular one of them may be far removed from that of Luther.

The theology of justification was not peripheral to the English Reformers. Dr. T. H. L. Parker has rightly protested against historians who would assess the Reformation in terms which refuse to place it in the sphere of confessing that 'Jesus Christ is the complete and only mediator between God and men' and the adjustments in faith and practice which follow upon such a confession.⁵ That the doctrine of justification was central to this confession of Jesus Christ can hardly be gainsaid, and its importance for the Reformers has been amply demonstrated.⁶ The centrality of the doctrine is most clearly confirmed when one turns to two documents which embody the prevailing theological thought of the period and which were intended to secure this doctrine of justification for the Church of England settlement: (i) the Homily on Salvation, and those Homilies related to it; (ii) the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion.

(i) The Homily on Salvation
This homily, which stands as number 3 in the First Book of Homilies, is almost certainly the work of Archbishop Cranmer, and was intended to have a theological as well as a sermonic character.⁷ Originally the two books of Homilies were designed to be read in church to meet the deficiency in preaching (and doctrine) among the parish clergy. This particular Homily is to be taken with those which deal with true and living faith and with good works respectively. There is less certainty as to who wrote the latter Homilies, though their style, presentation and doctrine are similar to those found in the Homily on Salvation.⁸ No uncertainty attaches to the fact that the Homily referred to in Article 11 of the Thirty Nine Articles under the name 'the Homily of Justification' is in reality that found with the title covering the theme of salvation. This gives the Homily in question more than occasional interest; it may be regarded as 'the normative exposition in the Church of England of justification from this time forward.'⁹

The Homily is concerned to point out that its doctrine is not a novelty. The doctrine of justification by faith only is said to be supported by 'all the old and ancient authors, both Greeks and Latins', of whom three are cited as representative.¹⁰ This accords with what we know of Cranmer's own view of the matter as expressed in his 'Notes on Justification', which are in themselves very short but supported by a plethora of citations from the Bible, the Church Fathers

and the medieval theologians or schoolmen. The foundation of man's justification, according to the Homily, is God's mercy shown in Christ, whose sacrifice on the cross has put away God's wrath against man's sin. Justification is understood as 'remission, pardon and forgiveness of (his) sins'.¹¹ Upon Christ's sacrifice the salvation of infants no less than adults depends. Christ has not only died for men, but he has fulfilled the law of God on their behalf, and there is no disharmony in God's free forgiveness of sinners: 'So the grace of God doth not shut out the justice of God in our justification.'¹² On the other hand God's action in Christ does exclude the 'justice of man', by which is meant the 'justice of our works, as to be merits deserving our justification.' What is required for justification is faith, which is not seen as a sort of human work but as a divine gift. This point is emphasised, and the nub of the matter is put succinctly: 'our justification doth come freely, by the mere mercy of God', not conceived as a divine 'flat' but expressed in Christ's work of providing a ransom for men and fulfilling the law on their behalf. Justification is 'the office of God only; and is not a thing which we render unto him, but which we receive from him'.¹³ This view excludes and expels all human works or merits as a ground for justification.

It would be false to suppose that there is no human activity required in justification. As we have seen, faith is required from man: 'by faith only we obtain remission of our sins'.¹⁴ Equally, such faith is not viewed as a work in response to which (or as a reward for which) justification is granted to the sinner; 'that were to count ourselves to be justified by some act or virtue that is within ourselves'. Faith is the vital matter in that 'it putteth us from itself and remitteth or appointeth us unto Christ for to have only by Him remission of our sins or justification'.¹⁵ This referral to Christ is spoken of as embracing the promise of Christ. The nearest the homily comes to giving a definition of faith is as follows:

For the right and true Christian faith is not only to believe that holy Scripture and all the foresaid articles of our faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence in God's merciful promises. . . . whereof doth follow a loving heart-to-obey his-commandsments.¹⁶

Three elements of faith make up the whole, namely, assent, trust and obedience. The homily and the two which follow it are at pains to refute the charge that faith, as the Reformers conceived it, is idle or inactive.¹⁷ Cranmer uses the term 'lively faith' to denote this aspect of his teaching. The key distinction which secured the Reformed insight is made when it is stated that

faith doth not shut out repentance, hope, love, dread and the fear of God to be joined with faith in every man that is justified; but it shutteth them out from the office of justifying.¹⁸

With this conviction established, there is a continual exhortation to works done in faith and love, with an eye to the Epistle of James and its controversial stance on the subject of faith. The reader (or hearer) is left in no doubt that faith devoid of repentance and good works is mere 'naked faith'. Faith should be tested by life, and a Christian man is to be diligent in maintaining it and allowing it to increase daily.

The Homily on Salvation is a sermon and lacks the precision of a theological treatise, but its clearness of grasp and pointedness of expression makes it unequalled as a summary expression of the doctrine of justification by faith only. The doctrinal formulation was to come later in the careful wording of the Thirty Nine Articles.

(ii) The Thirty Nine Articles

The only theological statement of official standing which the Church of England produced in the sixteenth century was the Thirty Nine Articles. It is technically to these that one must look if the doctrinal stance of that church is to be determined. This is widely misunderstood, especially in the inter-church discussions which take place (even at an academic level), but the status of the Articles can hardly be disputed.¹⁹ Like all similar documents, the Articles were born of the controversies of the time. Chief among these was the doctrine of justification, and the Articles bear on this directly in numbers 9 to 14 and also in numbers 16 and 17. The structure of the Articles shows that the doctrine of salvation was at the centre of their theological concern. Only one anathema is pronounced against those who dissent from their teaching, and it occurs in Article 18 with its declaration of salvation only in the name of Christ. It is in line with this emphasis on salvation that Article 2, which deals with matters generally agreed between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, adds a clause extrapolating the saving value of Christ's death on the cross. However, the concern to elucidate the teaching on salvation expresses itself most extensively in the treatment of the theme salvation through grace by faith alone.

The theological standpoint of the Articles has been authoritatively described as 'demonstrably Protestant . . . and within the Protestant spectrum Reformed as opposed to Lutheran'.²⁰ One of the dominant motives behind the framing of the Articles was in fact the wish to see a 'more solid front against Rome'. The authors sought to define no more, and no more narrowly, than was deemed necessary for the peace of the church.²¹ The very form of the reply to the errors they attacked reflects a particular view of what the gospel was held to be.²² On this showing, it is not true to see the Articles as primarily a 'meeting place of Catholic and Protestant doctrine', if such a statement is meant to suggest a compound of both in a random mixture.²³ On the issues with which they were concerned to deal, the Articles were not seen as particularly irenic or as purposely ambiguous. Professor G. W. H. Lampe, who is far from being an uncritical admirer of the Articles, says bluntly that the position adopted by them on the controversies of the time is 'generally uncompromising'.²⁴

In dealing with justification, the Articles start from the position of man after the fall of Adam. Here it is clearly affirmed that man in himself is 'very far gone from original righteousness'. The radical deterioration of man's nature is not eliminated in those who are regenerated, though an exact analysis of the defect remaining is not given. The scholastic term for the inner dislocation caused by the Fall was 'concupiscence', and it is maintained (a) that concupiscence remains after regeneration, and (b) that such concupiscence is of itself sinful. Man by nature is in bondage to sin, and in respect of his own unaided power he is now incapable of acting in such a way as to prepare himself for justification. Articles 10 and 13 are of a piece in that they are both aimed against the medieval notion of doing what in one lay, which has been mentioned above. It is in respect of their power to justify - and in this respect only - that the morally acceptable works of the unregenerate are said to be 'not pleasant to God'. In the light of God's scrutiny, sinful man not yet liberated by the gospel can do nothing (however commendable in terms of human morality) which could provide a platform from which he can in any way achieve his own justification.

The understanding of justification resulting from this view of man is summarized in Article 11. Justification is being 'accounted righteous before God'. There are no human grounds for this; Christ alone is the basis. The formula 'by faith' is used twice in the short Article, and on the second occasion it is in the controversial form of 'by faith alone'. At every point the Article is in accord with the Lutheran and Reformed positions on justification by faith.

Two corollaries which follow from the position taken in Article 11 are drawn out in Articles 12 and 17. The former asserts that Christians perform good works but that these too are subject to God's judgement and are in any case incapable of putting away human sin. For Christ's sake they are pleasing to God but not on account of their inherent value. This is the logical outcome of the position taken on concupiscence. Good works are the necessary evidence of justification and relate to the final judgement passed on man, but the Article does not elaborate on the connection between them. Such drastic discounting of human achievement in respect of justification is the reverse side of another stress within the reformed theology, namely the emphasis upon the sovereignty of God. In theological terms this found expression in the doctrine of predestination. Though it adopts a distinctly reformed tone in dealing with the matter, Article 17 has little to say about the more controversial aspects of the doctrine. The doctrine in itself was not of course a new one.²⁵ What was now stressed, and what the Reformers recovered, was the proper grounds upon which God elected to salvation. God elected according to his own good pleasure, which was bound up with his will in Christ, but its ultimate rationale was unknown to man. Thomas Aquinas had related election to human merit, but this notion is absent from the Anglican statement. Man's election is made known in its outworking through the divine call and justification. Those so called follow the path to salvation until they reach everlasting

felicity.

The Article is couched in language which is virtually a mosaic of passages drawn from biblical sources, especially Romans and Ephesians. The tone is decidedly pastoral rather than controversial. The Article avoids drawing logical inferences (e.g. as to the fate of those not elected), and points to the principle of following the general and explicit will of God as found in scripture, whilst acknowledging that in the final analysis divine election is something of which we have no rationale.

In summary, the Articles agree with the Homilies in seeing the ground of man's justification in Christ alone, without reference to man's merits, which are non-existent. The Homilies give more place to the propitiatory character of Christ's death as the basis of justification, though the difference is one of wording and emphasis, with the Articles speaking of Christ's merits. At each essential point there is a decisive break with the traditional doctrine as the Reformers had inherited it, and an alignment with the re-discovery of the doctrine as set out in the teaching of the leading Reformers both English and Continental.

The Teaching of Trent

The Council of Trent (1545 onwards) was the official response of the Roman Catholic church to the convulsions which had by then sundered the unity of Christendom. The Council was aware of its duty to provide a Catholic reply to the teaching of the Reformation, the theology of which was centred upon the theme of justification. Prior to tackling this subject, the Council issued a decree on original sin which is relevant to the more widely discussed issue of justification.²⁶ The decree on original sin maintained that Adam through his sin 'was changed in body and soul for the worse' and immediately 'lost the holiness and justice in which he had been constituted'.²⁷ Adam's loss has been transmitted to all his posterity - not merely through imitation - and can be removed only by the merits of Christ which are applied to both adults and children through baptism 'rightly administered in the form of the Church' (in forma Ecclesiae rite collatum). Such baptism is fitting and necessary for children, who are no less in need of regeneration. The effect of baptism is to remove original sin and to remove 'the whole of that which has the true and proper nature of sin'. To quote the decree at length: in those so reborn 'there is nothing that God hates because (they)... are made innocent, immaculate, pure, harmless, beloved of God', so that they are now fitted for heaven. Like the Reformers, Trent ascribed 'concupiscence' to the baptised though the term denoted something different. Trent concedes that Paul identifies this element as sin, but argues that the Catholic church has never understood his words to mean sin in the full meaning of the term. Concupiscence is so designated because 'it is from sin and inclines to sin' (sed quia ex peccato est et ad peccatum inclinatur).²⁸ This teaching is of particular importance, since the teaching on concupiscence 'laid

the foundation of the subsequent decree on justification.¹⁹

The Tridentine Decree on Justification is an extensive and authoritative exposition of what the Roman Catholic church saw to be the essentials of her position in the matter.²⁰ The importance of the topic was appreciated by the Council fathers, who in a report to Rome on June 21, 1546 commented:

The significance of this Council in the theological sphere lies chiefly in the article on justification; in fact, this is the most important item the Council has to deal with.²¹

In view of this it is not surprising that the Decree was the outcome of prolonged, detailed and sometimes acrimonious debate. On one occasion the Council fathers so far forgot themselves as to engage in physical assault! The Decree has sixteen chapters and thirty three canons which pronounce 'anathema' upon those who dissent from the theses they embody. It needs to be remembered that no really satisfactory discussion of Luther's (and the Reformers') doctrine of justification existed on the traditionalist side in 1546, which meant that the Council itself had to debate the issue. This it did fully, within its own limitations. The resultant document is not a mere reassertion of the common doctrine of the Middle Ages. It needs to be studied in its entirety, and does not lend itself to summary. Certain prominent elements will be presented, and reference to the Decree under the rubric 'Trent' will punctuate the discussion at other points.

The Decree limits itself to the case of the adult seeking justification, where one can thus speak meaningfully of faith. The operation of the Holy Spirit in preventent (or actual) grace is essential; such grace consists of God's call to men, which is in no way related to any merits on their part. Man has no access to salvation, nor can he earn by his works the grace which gives him access to it. This point is strongly emphasised.²² Yet man's will is active in receiving grace, and it can refuse its consent to such grace. Man is prepared for justification when he believes what God has revealed and promised to be true; considers the mercy of God; is raised to hope and to trust that God will 'be propitious to him for Christ's sake'. These attitudes or dispositions lead in turn to man's loving God, hating sin and seeking baptism, which is an essential element in the preparation. All these activities are included in the preparation for justification, and are the outcome or effect of preventent grace. Justification itself occurs when God grants man remission of sins and renewal of the inward man through the infusion of grace (designated 'created' or 'habitual' grace in formal theology). Such grace pours faith, hope and love into man's heart, though the faith mentioned in this connection is of a different character from that referred to when speaking of the preparation for justification. Faith is now moulded or 'formed' by hope and love, and only as such can it effectively unite the believer to Christ and convey the righteousness (of character) in which justification consists.²³

Justification on this description is a process which arises out of a divine initiative and culminates in a divine gift conveyed through the sacrament of Baptism. The inherent virtue of righteousness communicated to the individual is commensurate with each person's disposition to receive it and his co-operation with the divine grace proffered. But in every case two realities follow justification. Original sin and its legacy of concupiscence is eliminated from man's life. Love poured into the believer creates in him a new basic attitude or 'habitus', so that man is now capable of doing works which are truly meritorious before God. Such works can and should increase the state of justification granted to the sinner. In as much as these works consolidate man's position before God they can be said to merit eternal life.

The Roman Catholic position, like that of the mainstream Reformers, did not accept that man could be perfect, though Rome did insist that there is nothing hateful to God in the person of the believer. The small blemishes and lapses which afflict all men do not undermine the state of the justified. Loss of righteousness occurs through grave or 'mortal' sin. This is not to be equated with the sin of apostasy but includes those moral transgressions detailed in the New Testament as barriers to entering the kingdom of God.²⁴ When this calamity occurs the only recourse open to the estranged sinner is to recover his position through the sacrament of penance and priestly absolution. These secure forgiveness and extirpation of guilt which would incur final punishment. Punishment otherwise due can be met by doing penance and the residue of such punishment may be discharged after death in purgatory.

The possibility of sinning, and sinning grievously, means that justification can never be taken for granted, in the sense that there is no assurance that all is well and all will be well with the believer. The only indicator of a man's position before God is the constancy of his moral life, and by definition this can provide no basis for confident assurance of salvation. To claim such assurance is a form of presumption, except in those rare cases where a special revelation has been made to an individual of his own salvation.

Such, in abbreviated form, is the Tridentine reply to the Protestant Reformation. It was seen then as a decisive rejection of the central contentions of Reformed theology. On that point at least there was mutual agreement! At all key points the positions seemed beyond any agreed accommodation: faith; the essence of justification; assurance; merit; good works; all these seemed to belong to a different range of truths in the opposing theologies. Anglican divines whose aim was moderate recognised this. Richard Hooker spoke for many when he gave this reaction to the teaching of Trent:

This is the mystery of the man of sin. This maze the Church of Rome doth cause her followers to tread when they ask her the way of justification.²⁵

Justification had come to prominence in the theology of the churches, but it had created a division which seemed then, and for centuries to follow, beyond healing.

NOTES

- ¹ cf. T. F. Torrance, The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers (London, 1946); Ziesler, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-216.
- ² cf. R. P. C. Hanson, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
- ³ cf. G. Rupp, Luther and Erasmus (Library of Christian Classics Vol. XVII), London, 1969, p. 2.
- ⁴ cf. G. Rupp, The Righteousness of God (London, 1953), p. 115.
- ⁵ cf. T. H. L. Parker, English Reformers (Library of Christian Classics Vol. XXVI), London, 1966, p. xvii.
- ⁶ D. B. Knox, The Doctrine of Faith in the Reign of Henry VIII (London, 1961), and G. Rupp, The English Protestant Tradition (Cambridge, 1947), pp. 156-194.
- ⁷ G. W. Bromiley, Thomas Cranmer Theologian (London, 1956), p. 30.
- ⁸ cf. T. H. L. Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
- ⁹ cf. D. B. Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 265.
- ¹⁰ cf. Homilies (London, 1864 edition), p. 24; all subsequent references are to this edition.
- ¹¹ *idem*, p. 20.
- ¹² *idem*, p. 22.
- ¹³ *idem*, p. 26.
- ¹⁴ *idem*, p. 25.
- ¹⁵ *idem*, p. 27.
- ¹⁶ *idem*, p. 30.
- ¹⁷ *idem*, pp. 33 ff. and 47 ff.
- ¹⁸ *idem*, pp. 22-23 (emphasis mine).
- ¹⁹ cf. J. I. Packer, The Status of the Articles, in the symposium The Articles of the Church of England (London, 1964), pp. 25 ff.
- ²⁰ cf. Subscription and Assent to the 39 Articles (London, 1968), par. 2, p. 9.
- ²¹ *idem*, par. 4, p. 10.
- ²² cf. J. I. Packer, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- ²³ cf. E. Routley, Creeds and Confessions (London, 1962), p. 104.
- ²⁴ cf. 'The Revision of the Articles', in The Articles of the Church of England, p. 95.
- ²⁵ cf. Dictionary of Christian Theology (ed. A. Richardson, London, 1969), under 'Predestination', pp. 264-272.
- ²⁶ cf. H. Jedin, A History of the Council of Trent, Vol. 2 (E. T., London, 1961), p. 171.
- ²⁷ cf. Heinrich Denzinger, Enchiridion Symbolorum (20th edition, Freiburg, 1932), par. 788. This work will be referred to hereafter as *Denz.*
- ²⁸ *Denz.* 792.

²⁹ Jedin, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

³⁰ Jedin, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-196 and 239-316.

³¹ *idem*, p. 171.

³² *Denz.* 797.

³³ *Denz.* 808; see, for example, I Corinthians 6:9 ff.

³⁴ cf. 'A Learned Discourse of justification, works and how the foundation of faith is overthrown', in Works: (ed. J. Keble, Oxford, 1845), vol. 3, p. 489.

3. JUSTIFICATION AND CHURCH REUNION: (A) THE ACHIEVEMENT OF HANS KÜNG

IN the centuries following the Reformation era the debate on justification waned, and where it was carried on it became sterile. Each side had adopted a fixed position which was enshrined in doctrinal formulations, and these documents were regarded both as binding and as determining the outcome of theological controversy. In addition, the inter-church controversy assumed new dimensions, and the topics of concern moved away from justification to questions more directly bound up with the Church of England's claim to be a genuinely catholic church. There were rare attempts to interpret the doctrine of the Articles in a light favourable to Rome and compatible with her teaching, but the success of such enterprises may be measured by the oblivion which now surrounds them.

Within Anglicanism itself, there was controversy about justification. Even the Puritans were not always true to the position reached by the Reformers, while the central tenet of the reformed position was called into question with some effect by Bishop Bull in 1669 in his *Harmonia Apostolica* or *Agreement of St. Paul with St. James on Justification*. Its publication was described by T. P. Boulton as marking an era in English theology. Certainly Bull's standpoint was at variance with the reformed view of the matter. He insisted in taking the biblical statement that 'by works a man is justified, and not by faith only' as definitive for the theology of justification and sought to claim Pauline support for it to the detriment of the Articles. Bull can hardly be said to have proved his case, but the impact of his work was such that as late as the nineteenth century (1833) J. T. O'Brien, bishop of Ossory, issued a monumental reply which effectively refuted Bull.² It did not add materially to the content of the reformed position nor did it anticipate the work of J. H. Newman, whose lectures on justification were to have a wide influence.³ These were written during Newman's Anglican period but were re-issued with further notes after his conversion to Rome.

It is in the Roman communion in particular that the impact of Newman's lectures has been acknowledged up to and including recent times. Such contemporary writers as Hugo Meynall, Piet Fransen and above all Hans Küng are explicit in their reference to the importance of Newman's work for their own thinking. None the less, we are not going to examine Newman as such, on the assumption that the essence of his position is embodied in the one recent Roman Catholic contribution to the theology of justification which has become a classic in its own right, namely, Hans Küng's work *Justification*.⁴

In 1957 Hans Küng published his doctoral dissertation and caused a sensation in the theological world. He examined with care and some

brilliance the teaching of the Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, on the justification of the sinner. He further explored the teaching of his own tradition and concluded that 'it is undeniable that there is a fundamental agreement between Karl Barth's position and that of the Catholic Church in regard to the theology of justification seen in its totality'.⁵ Küng's conclusion was all the more astonishing in view of the fact that Barth in a foreword to the book declared unambiguously that his teaching had been fairly and accurately represented by Küng. Although the strict theological climate which prevailed during the pontificate of Pius XII was at its height, the church authorities allowed the unhindered publication of Küng's work. Allowing for the immediate criticism that Barth's position cannot be equated without (serious) qualification with the reformed teaching, it is still of major interest and importance to examine Küng's presentation of Roman Catholic dogma as he conceives it.

Christ: pre-existent

At the very centre of the doctrine of justification is the person of Jesus Christ. He, and not a doctrine about him, is the nerve centre of the gospel. Any attempt to treat the doctrine of justification in isolation from that fact is to make it into a severed branch. Christ is more than just the man Jesus. The evidence available in the New Testament makes it clear that in it he is understood to have been eternally pre-existent. This teaching is not a mere abstract notion, but bears directly on the question of man's salvation. Christ was active on man's behalf in his eternal relation to the Father. Küng views the union of God and man in history as implying an ultimate union between God and humanity in eternity. Thus the pre-existence of Christ is always related to the redemption he accomplished as incarnate. The incarnation seen from this eternal perspective could make the redeeming power 'radiate even before it became a historical event. Therefore too... the grace of Jesus Christ could intercede when men fell through sin, and could already be present in a mysterious way in creation.'⁷

The union of mankind with Christ expresses the Father's eternal decree, and this latter concept is basic to Küng's whole understanding both of justification and of the way of God in bringing about man's salvation. God's commitment to men is expressed in his eternal decree, and it leads him to maintain his purpose for man in the face of man's sin. That God can so affirm his purpose is possible only on the basis of the interlocking of creation and redemption in the one Jesus Christ. 'God's plan of salvation was already operative in creation', says Küng.

The implication of this position for the doctrine of justification is fundamental, since it makes man's standing as a creature - his ontological status - dependent upon Jesus Christ. Further, the world viewed simply as a 'natural' order is everywhere and always a Christian reality. All sin is sin against Christ, and the conservation of the natural state of man as something capable of redemption is already

the grace of Christ at work. What now remains as man's nature is not somehow immune from sin; it is rather evidence of the redemption already implicit in the integration of the created order into Christ.

The reality of sin

Küng conducts a wide ranging discussion on the basis outlined above. In his opinion, the position he has established enables him to take sin with the utmost seriousness. It is an attack on the very essence of man, its heinous character is made plain in that sin is not perpetrated simply against God's law but against Christ. The restoration of man cannot be conceived on the basis of any remnant of human goodness, for man sins with all his might. Sin is inhibited from having its full effect only through the power of Jesus Christ present in creation. Thus and only thus is man preserved for justification. Strictly speaking, without the grace of Christ present in the created order nothing could exist at all, and it was a great mistake when (some) reformed theology represented the sinner as entirely without grace. In this connection it is important to realise that the power of choice remains with man, although man has lost the freedom to choose good. What the Bible terms 'the freedom of the children of God' is granted to man only through justification. But to say all this is not in any way to detract from the bondage of the sinner or to seek to minimise it.

Although all creation is ontologically related to Christ, there are different levels of living out and realising the existence allowed to the created order.⁸ This applies to the man who may use his existence to express wilful and obstinate rebellion against God. For such a man 'his irrevocable existence through Christ and his ontological orientation (are) torn asunder'. In final damnation the tension remains: 'even the damned sinner will have a continued existence in Jesus Christ'.⁹ Küng concedes that this leaves a surd in theology, but it is in any case beyond our capacity to comprehend how a merciful and just God can grant being and permanence to those who are beyond redemption.

From such a platform Küng seeks to survey the legacy of past doctrinal feuding and controversy. He tackles the classic points of division between the reformed and Roman Catholic doctrines. The areas are not given equal attention, and not all his comments can be surveyed here. Three key issues emerge as priorities: (a) the doctrine of grace; (b) the outcome of justification; (c) the effect of faith. We shall look at what Küng says about each and, where appropriate, comment later on the value of his results.

(a) The concept of grace

The Old Testament has no word for grace understood as a created supernatural inner endowment, whilst in the New Testament the predominant meaning of grace is the favour and benevolence of God shown to us in Christ. This must be the starting point in the theological understanding of the term too. Grace therefore is not primarily (if at all) a 'physical entity in the human subject but rather something entirely

personal.' To receive grace is thus to receive the favour of God.¹⁰ This understanding of grace implies the immediate action of God and rules out the thought of a 'something' between man and God. Küng maintains that Catholic theology has defined grace correctly at the level of philology and exegesis, but that this knowledge has been inadequately appropriated in the field of theology. Grace is indeed God's favour, and its wholeness is found in Jesus Christ, who is 'THE favour, the personified benevolence of God towards us men'.¹¹

Grace is not a private affair; it establishes a fellowship and a community through the Holy Spirit with Jesus Christ. Nor does grace leave a person unchanged; it transforms him inwardly and enlightens and revives him in the centre of his being. The bestowal of grace and the favour of grace mean that the triune God takes up residence in the man who has received grace. Since this is so, man must be 'properly prepared' for grace by God himself. God does this by his own indwelling, but in such a way that something actually happens in the area of the created being. It is this that Roman Catholic theology has tried to explain by making use of the concept of 'created grace'. Küng does not see the position outlined as essentially different from Barth's position, but locates the obstacle in understanding in the discrepancies of terminology. Equally, the break-down of grace in Roman Catholic theology into what may be styled its component parts does not mean that the theology splinters and sunders the unity of grace. The distinctions made in this way are aimed at giving expression to the overwhelming and variegated effect upon man of God's sovereign action through grace.

(b) The outcome of justification

In the first instance, justification really implies a declaring just.¹² By this is meant a non-imputation of sin to the sinner, and this meaning holds good in respect both of philology and of theology. Küng states quite boldly that justification expresses 'an actual declaration of justness and not an inner renewal'.¹³ But the reality is greater than the actual event denoted by the term 'justification'. It is GOD who declares man just or righteous, and such a declaration brings about what it asserts. Hence it follows that the declaration implies a making just or an inward renewal. Because it is God who speaks, his word accomplishes what it declares; it is creative of what it affirms and it never returns to him void. Küng is at pains to point out the forensic element in justification, but equally he subsumes being made holy, being reconciled, and being incorporated into the body of Christ under this one reality. He says justification is 'the one single act which simultaneously declares just and makes just'.¹⁴ This position has the consequence, which Küng notes, that when the status of the justified man, who is in some sense still a sinner, is discussed, the question is understood quite differently by Roman Catholic and reformed theology. As we shall see, the difference here is not a small one, and points to one of the least satisfactory elements in Küng's general position.

(c) The effect of faith

The phrase 'sola fide' was a watchword of the Reformers. It made its celebrated entry in Luther's translation of Romans 3:28. Küng finds no difficulty with the phrase, even as a translation of that passage. The underlying meaning can equally well be assimilated when it denotes the sinner's incapacity to justify himself and indicates that he expects nothing from himself but expects everything from God. The slogan, so understood, is entirely orthodox. In justification, argues Küng, 'man achieves nothing; there is no human activity'.¹⁵ He sums up his position as follows:

Justification occurs through faith ALONE, inasmuch as no kind of work, not even a work of love justifies man, but simply faith, trust, abandoning oneself to God, giving oneself over to God's grace in response to God's act.¹⁶

Such faith is, and must be, a living faith which will delight to work through love. Further, such faith has within it the acceptance of the proclaimed message of the gospel, and there is the closest possible connection between faith and truth. Both elements have a single object in the person of Christ, who is the content of the gospel. Other aspects of the Christian life such as repentance, penance and above all baptism are intrinsically related to faith, though Küng does not work out this side of the matter in detail. Nonetheless, faith is crucial in that through it God's saving deed in Christ is appropriated, and in it the new life is brought about.

Such, in outline, is Küng's presentation of his case. It is attended by the awesome learning which his later works have taught his readers to expect. Throughout what he has to say as a Roman Catholic theologian, Küng is engaging in a dialogue with his own background and tradition. The evangelical reader will want to ask questions. What he has heard may seem too true to be good!

Above all, he will want to ask the correct questions for disclosing whether Küng has laid to rest the matter of justification as an issue in controversial or ecumenical theology. To help in this, we will listen afresh to some of the acute observations Barth made, and then look at some key issues which remain.

The question of method

The importance of Küng's achievement was fully appreciated by his distinguished partner in the debate. Barth wrote an engaging and penetrating letter commending Küng's work, whilst putting his finger on a number of essential questions. Not least important among them was the following:

How do you explain the fact that all this could remain hidden for so long and from so many, both outside and inside the Church?¹⁷

The question was bound to arise. How could a situation which seemed deadlocked to the best minds of the sixteenth century and beyond alter so radically and so positively? Was it the result of indifference? Had Küng misread Barth? Had Küng distorted Roman Catholic dogma? Clearly the first suggestion is ruled out absolutely by the integrity of both Küng and Barth. The second possibility was excluded by Barth, who stated in this same letter that his views had been fully and accurately reproduced. Whether the third possibility applied remained to be seen, but in view of the close watch kept on all theological publications by the Roman Catholic authorities of the period, it is not an immediate solution to the question.

Barth's question was not captious but one which was and is serious, and which cannot be answered in a simplistic way. To some extent it was anticipated by Küng. At bottom, the issue comes down to how one relates oneself to the official formulations of Christian doctrine handed down from the past. The problem is one common to all the churches, but is perforce most acute for the one church which attributes the epithets 'irreformable and infallible' to these pronouncements. Anglican evangelicals are faced with the problem only less acutely, as they more than others hold to the Articles of Religion as vindicating both their distinctive standpoint and establishing their credentials within the Anglican fold. It should be pointed out that in 1957 Küng found no difficulty with the Roman Catholic teaching on infallibility, and his subsequent problems in this area do not bear upon our immediate discussion.

Küng approached the question of the doctrinal pronouncements of the council of Trent along the following lines. The formulae of Trent were not and were not intended to be, frozen formulations.¹⁸ Rather, they should be taken as living signposts for continual exploration and research. The Christian faith has one fundamental structure but (importantly!) it is capable of 'articulation for man in MANY structural patterns'.¹⁹ Equally important is the fact that the decrees of Trent are the outcome of a particular situation in the church's history. Dogmas, affirms Küng, 'are nothing more or less than EMERGENCY MEASURES to which the church is driven by heresies'.²⁰ As a result, there can be present in them an over-concentration on one or other aspect of the doctrine in question. For example, the Reformers provoked a certain man-centred approach in Trent's account of justification by their stress on the sovereign action of God. Finally, it should be remembered that the definitions of the council were not exhaustive. Küng asks rather petulantly: 'Did the council claim that it had said EVERYTHING to be said about the justification of man?'²¹ Later, Küng was to extend this argument by claiming that what was left unsaid at Trent was as important as what was said.²² Implicit in all this is the recognition of three important points:

- (a) Every doctrinal statement is limited by the historical circumstance which gave rise to it.
- (b) The Tridentine decrees are capable of being refined and perfected. To assume otherwise is to do them an injustice.
- (c) The decrees are not final, in that they are not exhaustive and may

be added to, though they may not be contradicted in their essential meaning.

When these factors are taken into account we find a crucial difference between Küng and the controversialists of former generations. Küng distinguishes between what has been aptly called 'the past received and the past investigated'.²³ In this respect, Küng's position was merely a reflection of an attitude long held by non-Roman Catholic theologians and of such fellow-Roman Catholics as Karl Rahner, to whom Küng pays tribute. Küng was, however, the most explicit harbinger of attitudes adopted by the whole theological world of that church after the second Vatican council. The endorsement of this general approach at the highest level was implied by the often quoted words of Pope John XXIII on October 11, 1962, when he made the distinction between the substance of the deposit of faith and the way in which this doctrine is presented; a differentiation reflected in many of the council's documents.²⁴ In general, the approach found in Küng to dogmatic formulations in his work on justification was accepted within his own communion, even if there were occasional important differences as to the results obtained by the application of the method to the Tridentine documents.

In response to Barth's question, the surprising assessment of the Tridentine decrees which Küng produced can be accounted for to a great extent by the canons of historical interpretation which he applied to them. Further, in this respect Küng would seem to have the general support of the main body of Roman Catholic thought. At this point his work may be said to be fully representative of the church. There are, however, questions outstanding between Küng and classical Reformation teaching. These need further attention, as does the continuing debate on justification. In the following chapter we propose to look at some of these matters in more detail.

NOTES

¹ The earliest attempt was by Francisus à Sancta Clara, alias Christopher Davenport, issued in 1646. cf. J. I. Packer, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

² O'Brien's work was first published at Dublin in 1833 under the title *The Nature and the Effects of Faith*.

³ *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification* (London, 1838). The third edition is further annotated.

⁴ Justification: *The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (E. T., London, 1964). The work did not in fact appear in English until 1966. All references are to this edition.

⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 264.

⁶ *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁸ *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

⁸ *op. cit.*, p. 159. Chapter 22 and 23 are central to Küng's Catholic thesis.

¹⁰ *op. cit.*, p. 189.

¹¹ *op. cit.*, p. 191.

¹² *op. cit.*, p. 203.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 210.

¹⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 240.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *op. cit.*, p. xviii.

¹⁸ *op. cit.*, p. 98.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ The phrase is taken from *Structures of the Church* (London, 1964), p. 349, though its content is found materially in the earlier work, p. 99.

²¹ *op. cit.*, p. 102.

²² cf. *Structures of the Church*, p. 350.

²³ cf. J. S. Whale: *Christian Reunion: historic divisions reconsidered* (London, 1971), p. 115.

²⁴ cf. the text in *The Documents of Vatican II* (ed. by W. M. Abbott, London, 1967), p. 715. An example of its outworking can be seen in the *Decree on Ecumenism*, ch. 2, section II: text in Abbott, p. 354.

4. JUSTIFICATION AND CHURCH REUNION: (B) THE DEBATE SINCE KÜNG

FROM a Protestant standpoint, the theology expounded by the decrees of the council of Trent seemed far from what they conceived to be Christian truth. Nowhere was the disagreement more pronounced than on the question of what is meant by faith. Up until our own times, respected and thoughtful Protestant theologians who were accustomed to speak with moderation were repelled by the account of faith found in Trent. Professor G. S. Hendry is a case in point. He saw the deficiencies in the Roman Catholic understanding of faith as responsible for what he termed the council's 'ludicrous caricature of the doctrine of justification by faith'.⁶ Dr Eric Routley expressed himself with more restraint but spoke of the 'deep cleavage at the point of faith'.⁷ On the other side, Dr Christa Hempel, in her analysis of the post-Küng debate, locates the nub of the problem for Protestants in the reality of justification.⁸ Despite Küng's own enthusiasm and his positive commitment to the principle of justification by faith only, this particular problem seems as yet unresolved in the opinion of many Protestant and Evangelical commentators.

We can best approach the issue by reviewing the teaching of Trent and noting the difficulties it presents to others. As Trent sets out the matter, the faith required in an adult for justification belongs to the first stage of justification. It is described in terms which relate primarily to the content of faith, or in terms of assent.⁹ Although such faith is the result of grace, it is not ranked with the faith which is said to be bestowed (together with hope and love) in baptism. Only the latter type of faith unites with Christ and bestows everlasting life. The question arises as to what can be meant when one is said to accept as true and to confide 'that God will be propitious... for Christ's sake';¹⁰ the condition governing such assent. Can anyone assent to such a proposition without seeing in it the personal dimension? If they can do so in an impersonal way, we may well ask what distinguishes such 'faith' from that attributed to the demons in scripture? They too believe without the personal factor which is the hallmark of biblical faith. Canon 28 of Trent voices a second side of the same underlying difficulty. There the man who has lost justifying faith i. e. the faith bestowed in baptism and formed by love, is said nonetheless to have 'true faith' and to be a Christian still. On Trent's own showing we must ask, 'Can such faith save him?' If not, what value has it before God? Is not faith meaningless if it is not effective for salvation?

A third form of the same difficulty recurs in chapter nine of the Tridentine decree. Here the issue in question is the assurance of the believer, an issue which is close to the centre of Evangelical certainties. (Strangely, Küng does not deal with this aspect of justification.) Trent

rightly disowns a vain confidence or a subjective arrogance as to the certainty of any particular individual's salvation. The chapter nevertheless well states that no devout person should doubt 'the promises of God and the efficacy of the resurrection and death of Christ'. We must note, however, that these are not general truths; they have their impact only in relation to individuals who profess them. Professor Peter Brunner in his sympathetic interpretation of Trent has pressed this point.⁶ For example, can one say, 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins', and mean it, without implying, 'I believe in the forgiveness of MY sins'? To put the case in purely biblical terms: can anyone say truthfully, 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners', without adding, 'of whom I am chief'?

On examination it would seem that, even when viewed in its most favourable light, Trent's teaching on faith is at best confused. Certainly, the function accorded to faith there is not parallel to that found in the Church of England formularies, nor in our opinion to that found in the New Testament. It is against this background that we must assess Küng's constant appeal to the Tridentine formula that 'faith is the beginning of human salvation, the basis and root of all justification'.⁷ Although Küng stresses the fiducial aspect of faith in a wholly admirable way, the meaning attached to the term faith in this quotation from Trent is different, in its historical context, from the Reformers' understanding of faith. At this point a difficulty with Trent remains.

The reality of justification

One of the most far reaching disagreements between Roman and reformed teaching has been in deciding what justification essentially is. The Evangelical sees it as 'acquittal', and reinstatement through adoption as God's dear son. The basic blessing of the gospel is forgiveness, the non-imputation of sins, which is coincident with the appropriation by faith of the righteousness of Christ. Older works of dogmatics spoke of this as the 'imputation of Christ's righteousness', though the phrase is not found in the Bible. By contrast, the Tridentine teaching, while admitting non-imputation as an element in justification, saw the central reality as the bestowal of a new life, the new life of grace. In formal terms, justification encompassed sanctification. This no marginal issue, for chapter seven of the decree contains the heart of its case against the reformed position, as Professor Jedin has reminded us.⁸ The difference between the positions was indicated by the Anglican divine, Richard Hooker, in terms which can hardly be bettered:

The righteousness, wherewith we shall be clothed in the world to come, is both perfect and inherent. That whereby here we are justified is perfect but not inherent. That whereby we are sanctified, inherent but not perfect.⁹

The distinction between a righteousness which is inherent and one which is not inherent touches the root of the matter. The Roman Catholic quite fairly asks: 'Is man not changed through justification? Is there no

ethical transformation in the justified sinner? Is he then in any meaningful sense "a new creation" in Christ Jesus?" Such questions express a legitimate concern for man's inward renewal, and it is evident that, in part, such concern lay behind Trent's stress on the moral transformation of the Christian. Yet the root difference is not this moral concern as such. It is a different understanding of the ultimate basis on which God justifies man. Both sides agreed that what Trent called the 'meritorious cause' of man's forgiveness is the atoning death of Christ. The reformed conclusion was, and is, that this alone is the ground upon which man is accepted. The perfection which belongs to Christ's work of atonement also belongs to the new relation to God into which we enter when the atonement is appropriated by faith. The Roman Catholic teaching saw God as accepting man on the basis of Christ's work by making the sinner righteous with the very life of God. The new life and justification are identical. Only as a genuinely righteous man is the sinner accepted; initially this is through the divine life of grace which is freely bestowed upon him and which annihilates the old life of sin.

The Reformers resisted this conclusion, for on their view it undermined two things: 1) the depth and reality of man's predicament as a sinner; 2) the substitutionary character of Christ as man's righteousness before God, in the sense that man is always and only 'accepted in the Beloved'.¹⁰ We shall look at these in order.

1) The depth and reality of sin is a matter about which one would expect all Christians to be agreed. In fact, the fresh understanding of the power of the gospel, which the experience of the Reformers brought about, led to a clash in precisely this area. The situation can best be appreciated by looking at one of the formulae which became a standard watchword of the reformed position, 'simul justus et peccator'. The phrase is a piece of theological shorthand which was intended to safeguard a decisive element in the doctrine of justification. The primary aim was to point to the dual character of the justified sinner. On the one hand he is 'accepted in the Beloved', regenerated and made a dear son through adoption by the heavenly Father, while on the other he still shares the limitations of this sinful world. He is subject to temptation and he is subject to death. The nerve of the problem is reached when one states in what sense a Christian man is 'free from sin'. This type of vocabulary is found in the New Testament, but neither Rome nor the Reformers interpreted it as meaning that man is in a state of sinless perfection. The Reformers saw a Christian man as enjoying a new relationship with God, receiving his favour and endowed with the Holy Spirit. The Christian is transformed in that he is given new desires, new attitudes and a new life-style. But he is not inherently free from sin, owing to the imparted divine life granted at justification. (This latter was the Roman position.) All the Christian's actions are contaminated by the radical infection of the old nature, which, though subdued and broken by the indwelling Spirit, has not been eliminated.

Some contemporary Roman Catholics have attempted to reinstate the formula 'simul justus et peccator' within their theology by understanding it to mean that man, forgiven and infused with the divine life as he is, yet carries with him his past life in that he can never escape his own history. In that sense he is both a sinner and a righteous man at the same time. But this does not come to grips with the point the Reformers were trying to make, namely, that the Christian in this life carries within him the tension of his dual inheritance: his legacy of sinful nature and his new creation in Christ. Behind this dispute lay a difference in the conception of man as sinner. Professor Hans Rückert saw this as one of the basic cleavages between the two views of justification, what he termed 'the anthropological presuppositions'.¹¹ We should note, however, that the view of man held by theologians of either school in the sixteenth century is not that widely held to-day. The issues involved in the concept of original sin are more complex, and more intensive work here on both sides may lead to a way of considering the matter which will relieve the present impasse.

2) The substitutionary character of Christ's work for man, in relation to sin, is integrally related to the Evangelical understanding of the doctrine of justification. From this standpoint, the work of Christ provides not only for the forgiveness of sins but also for the continued acceptance of the believer with God. It is of course true that the New Testament sees growth and perfection of Christian character as something which Christ desires for his people and which he increasingly accomplishes in them through the Holy Spirit. But what the Evangelical resists is the conclusion that any such personal holiness of life can ever be considered a basis for justification. Evangelicals may take the point that too sharp a distinction between justification and sanctification is not conducive to the unity of Christian experience. There has been a marked shying away from the distinction even at a theological level, as the report of the fourth World Lutheran Federation congress makes clear. The departure from traditional Lutheran teaching here was so marked that it evoked a call for a redress in the balance from a Roman Catholic observer.¹² But behind the theological distinction, which is in our view a valid one, lies the question of merit, from which in practical terms the division in western Christendom arose. The seriousness of the topic entitles it to a section of its own.

Justification and merit

To non-Roman Catholics, this aspect of Roman Catholic teaching is particularly distasteful. Much of the piety of past ages seemed to gather around the notion of acquiring merit, and the excesses of pilgrimages, together with the widespread use of indulgences and attempted works of 'supererogation', seemed strong presumptive evidence that contact had been lost with the gospel of God's free grace. Contemporary theologians would admit that there were indeed excesses which did little to commend the Roman Catholic faith. It must in fairness be said that a great deal of such piety has subsided under the recovery of the Bible in the life and liturgy of the Roman church. Again, it would be

seriously misleading to judge any church on the basis of the extravaganzas which may accompany an unthinking, if fervent, devotion. We must make full allowance for these factors. But there remains a deep unease in Evangelical minds about the place of 'merit' in any Christian theology or devotion.

Earlier in western theology, the concept of 'congruent' merit had been introduced. Trent conspicuously avoided such terminology, and the experts are agreed that during the discussions at the council the more temperate views on merit prevailed. Any notion of merit before justification was in fact ruled out. Professor Hans Rückert, writing as far back as 1951, could assert that contemporary Catholicism, and the Thomism on which it was based, decisively rejected any such notion.¹³ Merit after justification was retained in the council's documents. Here the link with what was said earlier becomes clear. Man is totally renewed in justification: his works can be such that they do not reflect the taint of sin. True, that in itself is an outcome of justifying grace, but at the same time these works also belong to man. In this sense they are meritorious, and such merit adds to man's justified state and adds to his position before God both now and hereafter.¹⁴ This seems to be the minimum which must be said if the teaching of Trent is taken seriously. Despite the emphasis on the biblical notion of reward in some Roman Catholic theologians such as the distinguished Luther scholar O. H. Pesch,¹⁵ the concept of merit is still found in even the more sensitive works dealing with grace.¹⁶ The depth of the disagreement which the merit issue points to has been forcefully argued by Colm O'Grady, whose work like that of King is a response to the theology of Karl Barth. We are not concerned with those aspects of his critique which concern Barth as such, but the criticisms directed against Barth carry weight equally against the Evangelical rejection of merit. He says with commendable clarity that justification 'is not only God's action to and in man. It is God's action to and in and through man's action. With God's grace man really cooperates or sub-operates salvifically'.¹⁷ If man can do this, so that his action partakes of God's wholly divine action, then the doctrine of merit is inevitable. Or, as O'Grady chooses to make the point, the doctrine of justification 'by faith alone' stands in basic contradiction to such cooperation.

It is important to reiterate that the Reformation (and Evangelical) teaching, when it is true to itself, never despises morally good works. On the contrary, it sees them as the necessary product of truly Christian living. Nor does reformed theology seek to underplay the clear biblical teaching that judgement is according to works. For the latter truth never indicates an alternative way of salvation outside the boundary of justification by faith alone. Indeed, the intimate relationship between faith and grace forms the background to such works.¹⁸ Equally, there is no covert intention to play down the reality of divine reward, as taught in the New Testament. What the Reformers wished to secure is the truth that rewards have no function which can be isolated from God's mercy.¹⁹ Hooker caught the essence of the matter: 'The best things we do have

some-what in them to be pardoned'. As in the two preceding sections, there would seem here also to be an area of irreducible difference between the Roman and the reformed teaching, as they have existed hitherto.

To infer that nothing more can usefully be said would be unwise for several fairly obvious reasons. It would be particularly ill advised in view of the attention the doctrine of justification has received not from the systematic theologians (it has fared rather leanly among them on both sides) but from the specialists in Luther studies within the Roman Catholic church. The twenty or so years since the publication of Professor Küng's work has seen a vigorous, informed and positive debate between Luther and the contemporary church. The results in this area are highly relevant to our search for agreement on the question of justification. Anglicanism is not Lutheranism, but Evangelical Anglicans are like Luther in this respect: they too regard the doctrine of justification as 'the heart and the hub, the paradigm and essence, of the whole economy of God's saving grace'.²⁰

Three attitudes emerge in the current Luther debate.

- 1) Luther is seen as heretical in his teaching on justification, though there is no unanimity as to what his heresy consists in.
- 2) Luther is seen as Catholic in as far as is possible. From this perspective many elements, including his teaching on justification, can be accepted as essentially Catholic, or at least as capable of being assimilated to the Catholic tradition. There is of course inherent in this approach an unexamined assumption as to what exactly the term 'Catholic' covers.
- 3) The third approach seeks to understand Luther in his own terms. The strongly existential character of Luther's teaching is stressed, in contrast to the static modes of thinking of his Catholic opponents. When the different thought-structures are set aside, there is a large amount of common ground between the two sides. There are limitations to this approach, in so far as no Catholic scholar can sacrifice his intellectual integrity or his basic Catholic commitment as he conceives it. Granting these points, the results of the third method have been impressive. We can do no more than name some of the more outstanding scholars who have contributed signally in this field: people such as S. Pfürner,²¹ O. Pesch,²² August Hasler,²³ and above all H. McSorley.²⁴ McSorley's work, written in English, deals with the thorny problem of the bondage of the will. As he himself puts it:

If the doctrine of justification is the article on which the Church stands or falls, then the doctrine of the unfree will is the FOUNDATION of the article on which the Church stands or falls, or the article on which Luther's doctrine of justification stands or falls.²⁵

The value of McSorley's work may be gauged from the following accolade it received from Professor James Atkinson, himself a distinguished Luther scholar and a prominent Anglican Evangelical. 'Evangelical men', he wrote, 'have waited four hundred and fifty years for Roman Catholic scholarship of this quality to enter the debate'.²⁵ The long wait is over, and we must ask whether the third method of dialogue with Luther on the question of justification gives real hope of a positive outcome - of that 'real and tested agreement' of which the 1977 Open Letter speaks. We feel bound to report, that the considered judgement of some who are qualified to speak in Luther studies, is that such hope is not ill founded.²⁷

NOTES

- ¹ cf. The Gospel of the Incarnation (London, 1959), p. 150, note 1.
- ² cf. Creeds and Confessions (London, 1962), p. 42.
- ³ Rechtfertigung als Wirklichkeit (Bern, 1976), pp. 82 ff. Dr Hempel places two other items alongside this. One of these, 'co-operation', is relevant to our discussion.
- ⁴ Denz. 798.
- ⁵ Denz. *ibid.*: 'fidentes, Deum sibi propter Christum propitium fore'. The verb 'fideo' in itself would indicate more than bare assent.
- ⁶ cf. 'Die Rechtfertigungslehre des Konzils von Trident', in PRO ECCLESIA, vol. 2 (1966), pp. 141-169, esp. pp. 156-157.
- ⁷ Denz. 801, cited by Küng, *op. cit.*, pp. 239, 242, 246, 253 and 254.
- ⁸ *op. cit.*, p. 307.
- ⁹ *op. cit.*, See his Works vol. 3, (ed. Kehler), p. 485.
- ¹⁰ cf. Ephesians 1:6.
- ¹¹ cf. his essay 'Die Rechtfertigungslehre als Kontrovers-theologisches Problem'. The essay pre-dates Küng, but the point remains valid. Rückert did not correct it when he published it in 1972: cf. Vorträge und Aufsätze zur historischen Theologie (Tübingen), p. 305.
- ¹² cf. J. W. Witte's report, 'Die vierte Vollversammlung des lutherischen Weltbundes in Helsinki', in GREGORIANUM, vol. 45 (1964), pp. 119-130.
- ¹³ *op. cit.*, p. 300.
- ¹⁴ Denz. 842; cf. Rückert, *op. cit.*, p. 301.
- ¹⁵ cf. 'Die Lehre vom Verdienst als Problem für Theologie und Verkündigung', in the volume Wahrheit und Verkündigung (M. Schmaus Festschrift, Munich, 1967).
- ¹⁶ For example P. Fransen, The New Life of Grace (E. T., London, 1969).
- ¹⁷ cf. C. O'Grady, The Church in Catholic Theology (London, 1969), p. 247.
- ¹⁸ cf. G. C. Berkouwer, Faith and Justification (E. T., Grand Rapids, 1954), pp. 103-129.
- ¹⁹ *op. cit.*, p. 127.
- ²⁰ cf. Across the Divide (Basingstoke, 1977), p. 58. This booklet is a

quasi-official exposition of the Open Letter referred to in the introduction; pp. 55-63 contain a lively presentation of the authors' thoughts on justification.

- ²¹ cf. Luther and Aquinas on Salvation (New York, 1965).
- ²² A distinguished Dominican whose definitive work (1010 pages) deals with the doctrine of justification in Luther and Aquinas.
- ²³ cf. Luther in der Katholischen Dogmatik (Munich, 1968).
- ²⁴ cf. Luther Right or Wrong? (Minneapolis, 1969).
- ²⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- ²⁶ SCOTTISH JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY, vol. 23 (1970), p. 100.
- ²⁷ cf. M. Bogsdahn, Die Rechtfertigung Luthers im Urteil der neueren Katholischen Theologie (Göttingen, 1971); p. 269. Bogsdahn is thinking especially of the contribution of Pesch mentioned above.

5. RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

IF the analysis so far presented of the questions which cause difficulty between the Roman Catholic and Evangelical standpoints is correct, it would seem that problems remain to be solved in several areas. In at least one of these, namely, the understanding of faith, the difference would appear to lie with the formulations of the council of Trent rather than with the contemporary understanding of it among Roman Catholic theologians or even the official teaching of recent years. This situation raises the question of the authority to be attributed to such historical definitions. This in turn shifts the focus of the debate into one of the most active areas of inter-church discussion and inner church discussion. Nonetheless, it must be said that at the level of confessional compatibility there is a gap which historical interpretation of the formulae concerned does not finally bridge.

The other two areas of disagreement outlined above resolve themselves into forms of the one question: What is the correct understanding of post-justification man? We submit that the gap here is a genuine one, which is not amenable to explanations which see it as merely a difference in vocabulary or even in the concepts used to describe the same reality. We must consider whether the areas of agreement discernible on other fronts are such as to absorb this dislocation. There are many who would argue that this is or should be the case. The importance and the perspectives of the question could hardly be better expressed than in O'Grady's evaluation of it, written from the Roman Catholic standpoint. His comments apply 'mutatis mutandis' to Evangelicals.

There are secondary elements in the Catholic doctrine of justification, which are not less 'fundamental' to it than the primary. Both must be stressed in a truly 'Catholic' presentation. The primary must remain primary, but not to the detriment, glossing over, or exclusion of the secondary.

This is timely advice. Our only comment is that to some Evangelicals the issues in dispute between the two sides may not seem to be secondary.

On the face of it, there has been a genuine alignment of the reformed and Roman Catholic positions in the theology of justification. In our opinion this fact must be faced and welcomed. But the cleavages which remain, as a result of a deeper inspection, must also be faced. These present a challenge to further work, so that a recognised identity of belief which does justice to the biblical teaching may be uncovered, if this is possible. In such an eventuality, there should be a full and clear presentation of the evidence sustaining the newly found agreement. Regrettably, this cannot be said to have happened in the case of the most encouraging comment on the current situation which has been made from

a responsible quarter. At the Lambeth Conference of 1978, Professor Henry Chadwick (now of Cambridge) assured the church fathers gathered there in the following terms: 'We (i. e. the members of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission) were satisfied that there was no real and substantial conflict in the doctrines of salvation and justification by grace alone, on the condition of faith alone.'² If that is so, then the statement is of extraordinary importance, and the evidence for it should be published. This has not been done, and among the publications of the commission or those which reliably reflect its work there is no direct discussion of justification or anything immediately related to it. It is incumbent upon the commission to make clear on what they have based this evaluation, as to leave it unsubstantiated, is to encourage a degree of hope which could only mislead and discourage should it prove to be unfounded.

Evangelicals are not persuaded by the argument found in many of the more ecumenically orientated writers on justification, to the effect that the difference separating their (i. e. the Evangelicals') understanding from the Roman Catholic understanding of the gospel is no greater than that which divides many schools of thought within the Roman Catholic church itself. The logic here would seem to be that the Evangelical would find himself at home in the latitude allowed to theological diversity in the Roman communion. It is often pointed out that the situation within Anglicanism does not differ greatly from this in practice. The latter point is of course well taken. But the comprehensiveness of Anglicanism, in the sense of doctrinal disorder, is no part of the current situation which Evangelicals seek to promote or preserve. There is however, an important difference in the two situations, in that Evangelical Anglicans see in the basic stance of their church a commitment to a view of the gospel which allows the doctrine of justification the priority which they are convinced it must have if the church is to remain true to the gospel. It is this clear recognition of the priority of the doctrine of justification by faith alone that they find lacking in the formulations of Trent. Indeed, they are in many cases persuaded that the latter contradict the priority of this teaching. Thus the confessional statements of the past do have a relevance; they direct us to a re-examination of the basic form of the gospel, and they reflect ultimately a particular church's governing attitude towards that gospel. Like Roman Catholics Evangelicals hold no brief for indifference in doctrinal matters, nor should they be concerned about words or theological slogans. But they do not believe that we honour God's cause in the shape of Christian unity by thinking wrong thoughts about him.

In conclusion, it may be useful to draw up the following summary as to how things now stand, with suggestions as to how they might profitably proceed.

1. The doctrine of justification by faith alone through grace alone is integral to the New Testament and central to its gospel.

2. The doctrine of justification by faith alone through grace alone is integral to the confessional position of Anglicanism as expressed in the Thirty Nine Articles and the Book of Homilies.
3. The doctrinal differences between the Roman Catholic and the reformed position of Anglicanism in the matter of justification were more than verbal.
4. While the work of leading Roman Catholic scholars has eased the difficulties felt by Anglican Evangelicals with the teaching of Trent, it has not of itself removed certain basic difficulties.
5. Evangelicals must acknowledge without reserve the complete integrity of those Roman Catholics who have entered the debate.
6. Evangelicals should welcome the important gains made in the study of Luther's teaching on justification by Roman Catholic scholars, and seek to work out the implications of this for the wider debate on justification.
7. Evangelicals should seek to provide an adequate response to the stimulus provided by such study for the serious discussion of this doctrine: such response has so far been lacking.
8. The Anglican Roman Catholic Commission (or, if necessary, its successor) should devote attention specifically to this subject. If it has in fact already done so, the text of the discussion should be made public, to demonstrate the grounds for statements such as Professor Chadwick has made.

NOTES

- ¹ cf. Colm O'Grady, *op. cit.*, p. 244.
- ² cf. IRISH TIMES, August 3, 1978.

FOR FURTHER READING

The article 'Justification' by J. I. Packer in The New Bible Dictionary (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962); a masterly presentation of the biblical evidence from a leading Evangelical scholar.

Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection (E. T. London: Burns & Oates, 1964) by Hans Küng; the most sustained and influential Roman Catholic contribution in recent years.

Luther as Seen by Catholics by Richard Stauffer (London, 1967). This publication by the Lutterworth Press gives an accurate estimate of the situation a decade ago.