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### Justification: A Note

In the disputes of four centuries ago Catholics and Protestants each seemed to the other side to be guilty of language implying that human merit can be the ground of a believer's acceptance before God apart from the redemptive work and grace of Christ. Debates about the grand issue of justification came sadly to approximate to a dialogue of the deaf. The sophisticated complexity of intricate arguments about original sin, predestination, grace, free will and merit turned the controversy into a confrontation between opposed scholasticisms at a considerable remove from the existential religious concern, which lies at the heart of the question about the ground of justification. [Lutherans themselves have long been divided on the question, according to whether the authoritative text is the Augsburg Confession or the Formula of Concord.] To sixteenth century Roman Catholics some of the language used on the other side about justification by grace alone by faith alone, utterly irrespective of conduct and works of love, sounded perilously <sup>Antinomian</sup> ~~Antinomian~~, an anxiety which some radical Protestant groups appeared to confirm. Protestant critics of popular piety of the time fixed on the sale of indulgences and mediaeval notions that merit can be acquired by pilgrimages to the shrines of the saints, or by special works of 'supererogation'.

Between Roman Catholic and Anglican theologians today there is no dispute that the ground of salvation lies in the sovereign grace and mercy of God shown forth and acted out in Christ's redemption; that as this, under the power of the Spirit, is received in faith, the believer is thereby called to holiness and obedience; and that in this way of sanctification the Christian is at every stage dependent on the grace of God.

H.C.