

GROUP 2

The memory of the 16th century has left some of us with an ill-defined feeling that justification by faith remains a less than fully resolved issue between Canterbury and Rome. There was a substantial decree on the topic of justification from the Council of Trent and in the seventeenth century a series of weighty treatises on the subject was written by Anglican theologians. Nevertheless that debate has not remained central in either of our theologies, because it has been subsumed for both of us under the wider categories of the Church and salvation.

Following Luther, those who passed out of communion with the See of Rome focussed their critique of late medieval piety on the relationship of grace and works. It has been well said in the US Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue Statement on Justification by Faith, paragraph 29ff:

"The starting point for Luther was his inability to find peace with God ... Terrified in his own conscience, he became increasingly convinced that the theology in which he had been trained and the spiritual formation which he had received did not resolve the deep spiritual struggle (Anfechtung) of his quest for a gracious God... In the context of ... controversies over indulgences and penance, Luther ... insisted that justification and forgiveness of sins came solely through faith in Jesus Christ, which was for him the heart of the gospel."

Luther's original protest against the medieval penitential system sprang from a sense of outrage at the sale of indulgences, which were by many being treated as means by which to placate a wrathful God. Luther characteristically went back to first principles and sought for a doctrinal mistake which underlay this abuse. He found it for himself in his understanding of the Epistle to the Romans. As he himself said "I had been taught to understand God's justice of that formal or active justice by which God is just and punishes sinners. By God's mercy I began to understand 'God's justice' as that by which the just lives by God's gift of faith" (Preface to Luther's Latin works, 1545. WA54 179ff).

From this beginning Luther's protest needs to be seen in wider

context. Catholic doctrine concerning satisfaction¹ was at the time being distorted to support a variety of abuses such as not only the sale of pardons but also commerce in masses for the dead, the invocation of saints as though they were deities and the superstitious use of relics. These were rightly denounced by Luther and many reforming Catholics shared Luther's objections. Many of these abuses were corrected by the reforms of the Council of Trent. At the same time Trent continued to affirm the mediatorial role of the Church in the forgiveness of the sinner and in doing everything possible to foster and ensure that the penitence was authentic. (cf. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, Justification by Faith, 115).

The problems in understanding justification in a way which does justice to the diverse passages of Scripture as well as ^{to} the protests and affirmations of Martin Luther are not inherent in the confessional division between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, but became caught up in the wider disputes of the sixteenth century. The Council of Trent in 1547 published a long Decree on the doctrine of justification, accompanied by censures of condemned propositions. The Church of England's Thirty Nine Articles, published in 1571 on the basis of earlier drafts, also contained statements about justification. What these documents say on this subject is not in fact mutually exclusive.

The Council of Trent, in so far as its doctrine was polemically formulated, was directed against propositions associated with Luther or with his more extreme followers. Its intent, however, was neither to present nor to condemn a coherent statement of Lutheran teaching. The fathers of Trent were alarmed at hearing that human works cannot really be good at all, and wished to reaffirm the strong biblical emphasis that we are judged by our works, whether they be good or bad. In asserting the merits of good works the Council did not teach that the believer can have merits other than by Christ's merits. The believer is indeed justified on condition of faith, but not a faith evacuated of any element of moral resolution or credal assent. Unless joined to hope and love, the assent of faith is dead and does not unite the believer

(1) In Roman Catholic doctrine satisfactions are acts which signify a true repentance and reparation not works by which we escape external punishment.

to Christ. Nothing prior to justification merits justification, on the other hand, true faith is not identical with that certitude which is one of its fruits. Trent's decrees are concerned to avert both the denial of free will and the assertion of irresistible grace. They also seek to exclude the potential, or indeed in places actual antinomianism that could be read off protestant denials that good works are a condition of entry to the kingdom of heaven.

Anglican formularies from 1547 onwards began to articulate a position on justification but did not reach a formally approved shape until the Articles of 1571. These emphasize (1) that we are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of Christ by faith, and not for our works or deservings: (2) that good works after justification are the fruits of faith, and though unable to put away our sins, are nevertheless pleasing to God and spring necessarily out of a true and living faith.

The Anglican Articles contain no word denying the freedom of the will. They do not assert faith to be the cause of justification nor to consist in a sense of subjective certitude, nor to be divorced from hope and charity..

(Drafting note: A footnote on the Homily on Justification may need to be introduced at this point).

What the Decree of Trent and the Anglican formularies say are not in fact mutually exclusive, however as long as a polemical climate persisted they continued to be interpreted in a controversial way with the result that some of the questions implied are still often seen to be an issue of debate among Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

Principal areas among these are:

- i) How does the sinner become acceptable to God?
- ii) What do we understand by justifying faith?
- iii) Does the goodness of the justified person please God and therefore merit reward?
- iv) How far can we be certain of our salvation without arrogance or libertinism?
- v) Is there an antithesis between imputed and imparted righteousness?

vi) What do human beings contribute to their salvation?

(Drafting note: The order of these may need to be changed.

Also it will in due course be necessary for the Commission to give attention to areas of belief and practice which are listed on page 4 of the ARCIC II 23/1).