

COMMENTS ON THE 'PLESHEY DRAFT'by Fr Charles Acton,
a colleague of Fr Soane.

Pp. 3-4. In a description of 'difficulties' in sixteenth century theologies of justification, it seems strange to omit altogether the question of whether the 'faith alone' through which we are justified is living or dead faith - i.e. whether it is faith operating through charity, or whether, as Luther held at times, it is faith without and before charity'. In the text as it stands, the agreement reached on p. 13, par. 22 seems to answer a question which hasn't been raised.

P. 7 (Durham para I.6). 'nor has it (the Church) any power of itself over the effect in the hearer'. This seems to me much too ambiguous a statement, and on the face of it a contradiction of p. 18 (Durham II.12), which refers to the Church as a Sign which at least should be truly effective. How can it be effective if it has no power over the effect in the hearer? Catholic sacramental theology certainly does acknowledge that the Church has an effective power in the hearers of the word. If the 'of itself' in the offending phrase is intended to mean 'independently of the Spirit', this should be made explicit.

P. 7 (par 14). There seems to be some confusion here between the freedom men have because they are rational creatures and the freedom from sin they are given by the Spirit. As it stands, the text suggests that a man who rejects the Spirit does so without freedom or responsibility, because he has not been freed by the Spirit. For reasons of this kind the Council of Trent etc insisted that free will is not extinct even in those who are 'slaves to sin'.

P. 10 (par 19). While in general the account of justification seems admirable, it may be an oversimplification to say that in Pauline usage it is a 'juridical category', a declaration 'expressed in the language of law, as a verdict of acquittal of the sinner'. When Paul represents God as a judge declaring his verdict, he 'renders to every man according to his works' and 'shows no partiality' (Rom 2:6-11): i.e. he doesn't justify the wicked and condemn the righteous, which the Old Testament (Pr 17:15) declares an abomination. But that representation of God as a judge is confined to his activity at the Last Judgment. The activity by which God 'justifies the ungodly' is in fact opposed to the activity by which he judges men, as in Ps 143:1,2. So as used by Paul it seems 'justification' is not an act of God as Judge, but as Creator and Father - i.e. is not a ~~juridical~~ 'juridical category'.

P. 11 (par 19). 'The restoration of the possibility of human freedom' seems to suffer from the same confusion mentioned in the comment on p. 7 (par 14).

6 P. 13 (par 21). Not only the power to respond but also the actual response itself is a gift of grace.

7 p. 14 (par 23). This paragraph needs to be more clearly expressed together with par. 7 and par. 25 - e.g. what is the precise meaning of terms like 'relative certitude', 'assurance', 'moral certitude' etc?