

SOME ANGLICAN CONCERNS

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to set out Anglican concerns on the doctrine of Justification, without attempting to provide answers to such concerns. The concluding section of the paper deals with matters of ecclesiology which may be affected by any theology of Justification.

Viewing the matter historically, Anglican emphases on Justification may be traced back to the controversies of the 15th/16th Centuries. This particular period saw the compilation of a series of religious formularies culminating in the 39 Articles of Religion of 1563. Justification is there defined in Article 11 in the terms of the Homily on Justification, also referred to as "the Homily on the Salvation of Mankind." This homily may be taken as an amplification of the statement of Article 11.

There was considerable interaction with Roman Catholic theology at that time, which from an Anglican point of view, found the fullest expression in the writings of Richard Hooker. Justification was a major point of dissent between the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Churches. Much Anglican theological exposition was taken up, as in Hooker, with refutation as well as affirmation. Within the debate on the Anglican side, Justification was placed in contrast to what was understood to be the Roman Catholic position, particularly as set out in the proceedings of the Council of Trent. Later Anglican theology would seem to have placed less emphasis on Justification in any larger theological scheme. A common view of Anglican theology would have seen a movement towards a theological pattern that was "incarnationally" orientated. However, within the broader Anglican structure, the doctrine of Justification has, for those within the Reformation tradition, remained central to their theology, preaching and pastoral care.

2. JUSTIFICATION - ITS NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE

What are the affirmations that have given so prominent a place to Justification in the convictions of Anglicans in the Reformation tradition? This question may best be answered by way of Article 11, which could be looked to as a formal expression of the doctrine. The Article affirms that "man is both accounted righteous before God ... only for the merit of ... Christ, by faith, and not for our own works and deservings." This statement gathers up the principal components of the doctrine of Justification, as thus understood. Justification means, that God declares the ungodly to be righteous. Justification does not of itself, denote a moral change or betterment in the person so justified. The ground of Justification is the merit of Christ. The merit or worth of man is no part of the process. The means whereby this gift of God is received, is faith.

The alleged points of difference between the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions could be set out as follows:-

- (1) Where Anglican formularies emphasize Justification, they do not only describe its ground, the manner of its reception and also its nature, they proceed to see Justification as the basis of man's relationship with and acceptance by God. Lack of emphasis in Roman Catholic theology on Justification in understanding man's relationship with God, thus remains a concern.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

- (ii) Justification does not appear to be a primary focus of Roman Catholic self-understanding. Further, its definition in the Tridentine formularies appears to be in contradiction of Article 11. The Roman Catholic position, as expressed at Trent, has been understood to declare that Justification is a sanctification and inner renewal of the justified person, that the righteousness of justified persons is their own, and that one may merit salvation, in part, through one's own good works.

Thus, the tension between the two positions, seems to lie in both as to the ground and the mode of receiving God's justification, and also what Justification as a biblical and dogmatic concept implies.

3. JUSTIFICATION AND ECCLESIOLOGY

In any systematizing of doctrine, Justification must be seen as part of a wider pattern of New Testament theology. Paul uses the forensic imagery surrounding Justification to display the justice and mercy of God. However, the imagery of the New Testament sees also the Christian as "in Christ", as a member of the Body of Christ, as one of a Brotherhood, a Family a Household. The Christian is a branch of the Vine, a living part of a Temple. To be justified is an integral and central part of the New Testament scheme of Christian salvation, which involves a union with Christ and a membership of a visible society. Thus, this same process of salvation means incorporation into Christ, with consequent sacramental initiation into the membership of the visible society.

The Anglican emphasis on Justification is seen as the affirmation of a primary New Testament doctrine, namely that unrighteous, undeserving man's acceptance by a righteous and merciful God, is received by man's faith in God; and not on man's own works or deservings. Man is seen and treated by God as righteous before Him. Moral growth, and good works are an inseparable consequence of such a faith, but a different concept than Justification *per se*. The faith which is the mode of man's receipt of God's gift of Justification, will find expression in baptism, and in consequence, membership of a visible community.

It could further be submitted that there is a distinctive Anglican position on matters of ecclesiology over which stands what might be called the shadow of the doctrine of Justification. Anglican Church order found its expression in the 16th and 17th Centuries, as learning much from the past, yet resisting the more extreme pressures of that time. While affirming Scriptural authority, Anglican thought rejected the view that Scripture is authoritative and determinative for all things, including Church order. If "faith alone" was necessary for salvation, matters of Church order, apart from the Sacraments, were not seen to be essential for salvation in the sense of that faith which justified man before God.

Movement in Anglican theology since that period has seen developments that were in keeping with movements referred to earlier. The Lambeth Quadrilateral represents a significant development in Anglican thought. The same trend can be observed in liturgical revision. Much of Cranmer's liturgical work was based on justification by faith as an implicit premise. Current revisions of Eucharistic Services move towards statements of God's act of salvation and the doctrine of the Church, with lesser emphasis on the faith of the recipient.

4. CONCLUSION

Insofar as the object of this paper is to set out Anglican concerns on Justification with a view to opening discussion on the subject, the principal questions are implicit in Section 2 above. Consideration of matters of ecclesiology and related concerns in this paper, should follow discussion of the material set out in Section 2.