

OFFICIAL ROMAN CATHOLIC TEACHING ON JUSTIFICATION

(This paper is nothing more than a catalogue of the main official statements of the Roman Catholic Church concerning justification. No attempt has been made to form out of them an integrated account of the doctrine. References are to Denzinger-Schoenmetzer, *Enchiridion* = DS.)

Carthage XV (A.D. 418) (The relevant canons received papal endorsement; cf. the *Indiculus*: DS 245)

Can. 5 condemns the view that the grace of justification (*gratia iustificationis*) is given so that we can achieve more easily what we can already do by virtue of free will (DS 227). (Can. 4, 6 and 7 are to the same effect.)

Orange II (A.D. 529) (Confirmed by Pope Boniface II in A.D. 531: DS 398-400. The significance of these canons was generally overlooked until Trent)

Can. 5 condemns the opinion that the beginning and the growth of faith, by which we believe in him who justifies the sinner and come to the regeneration of baptism, is not due to grace, but is in us naturally (DS 375).

Trent, Decree on Original Sin (A.D. 1547)

Ch.3. condemns the opinion that by the grace of Jesus Christ, which is conferred in baptism, the guilt (*reatus*) of original sin is not remitted, but is only "shaved or not imputed". The reborn are made "innocent, immaculate, pure, blameless and sons of God", although concupiscence remains in them (DS 1515).

Trent, Decree on Justification (A.D. 1547)

Ch. 1 states that free will was not extinguished but weakened and biased (*attenuatum et inclinatum*) by original sin (DS 1521).

Ch. 3 affirms that people would not be justified unless they were reborn in Christ, "when by that rebirth through his merit of the passion the grace by which they become just is attributed (*tribuatur*) to them" (DS 1523).

Ch. 4 defines justification as "the transference from the state in which a man is born as a son of the first Adam to the state of grace and of the 'adoption of sons' (Rom 8.15) of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ our Saviour; which transference since the promulgation of the Gospel cannot take place without the bath of regeneration or its desire (*votum*)" (DS 1524).

Ch. 5 affirms that the beginning of justification in adults is God's prevenient grace through Jesus Christ, that is "his call by which they are called through no existing merits of theirs (*nullis eorum existentibus meritis*), so that those who were turned away from God by their sins, are through his arousing and helping grace disposed to convert themselves to their own justification (*ad convertendum se ad suam ipsorum iustificationem*) by freely assenting to this grace and cooperating with it; so that, when God touches man's heart by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, a man neither does nothing at all himself in receiving that inspiration, since he can also reject it, nor can he without the grace of God move himself by his own free will to justice in God's sight" (DS 1525).

Ch. 6 describes more fully the process by which men are disposed to receive justice (DS 1526).

Ch. 7 affirms that the justification which follows this preparation "is not only the remission of sins, but also sanctification and the renewal of the inner man" (DS 1528). The corresponding canon 11 condemns the opinion that men are justified solely by the imputation of Christ's justice without the infusion and inherence of grace and charity (DS 1561). The final cause

of justification is the glory of God and Christ, and eternal life; the efficient cause is the mercy of God; the meritorious cause is Jesus Christ; the instrumental cause is baptism, "without which no one ever obtains justification"; the one formal cause is "the justice of God, not that by which he is just himself, but that by which he makes us just" (Augustine, *de Trinitate*, 14.12.15), by which ... we are not only considered (*reputamur*) just, but are truly called and are just, each one of us receiving justice in himself as his own, according to the measure which 'the Holy Spirit distributes to each as he wills' (1 Cor 12.11), and according to each one's own disposition and cooperation" (DS 1529). No one can become just except those to whom the merits of Christ's passion are communicated (*communicantur*), "while by the merit of his most holy passion, through the Holy Spirit, the love of God is poured out in the hearts (cf. Rom 5.5) of those who are justified and inheres (*inhaeret*) in them. Thus in justification itself as one's sins are forgiven, one is inserted into Christ and at the same time (*simul*) receives all these: faith, hope and charity" (DS 1530). Faith does not make one a living member of Christ's body, unless it is accompanied by hope and charity: "faith without works is dead" (cf. Jas 2.17ff) (DS 1531).

Ch. 8 affirms that we are justified "through faith and gratuitously" (*per fidem et gratis*; Rom 3.22, 24): through faith, because "faith is the beginning of human salvation" (*Rituale Romanum*, Ordo Baptismi, n.1), the foundation and the root of all justification; gratuitously, "because none of the things which precede justification ... merits (*promeretur*) the grace of justification itself" (DS 1532).

In ch.9 the Council rejects what it takes to be the Reformers' doctrine of assurance. "Although it is necessary to believe that sins are not, and never have been, remitted except gratuitously by the divine mercy on account of Christ, nevertheless no one, boasting of his assurance (*fiducia*) and certainty of the remission of his sins and resting on that assurance and certainty alone, may say that his sins are being or have been forgiven... For just as no good Christian ought to doubt the mercy of God, the merit of Christ and the power and efficacy of the sacraments, so too anyone who reflects upon himself and his own weakness and indisposition can be anxious and fearful concerning his grace, for no one can know with the certainty of infallible faith that he has obtained God's grace" (DS 1533-1534).

Ch. 10 affirms that the justified "grow in the justice which is accepted through the grace of Christ and are more justified (*magis iustificantur*), as 'faith cooperates with good works' (cf. Jas 2.22)" (DS 1535).

Ch. 11 denies that the justified are exempt from keeping the commandments (DS 1536). People who fall into venial sin do not cease to be just (DS 1537), but it is not true that "the just man sins at least venially in every good work" (DS 1539).

Ch. 12 warns against presumptuous certainty about one's predestination, as if the justified could not sin, or could be certain of conversion if they should sin (DS 1540).

Ch. 14 states that those who through sin lose the grace of justification can be justified again (*rursus iustificari*) by the merit of Christ through the sacrament of penance, whether one makes one's confession actually or in intention (*in voto*). Through fasting and other pious exercises satisfaction is made for the temporal punishment which may be due to forgiven sins (DS 1542-1543).

Ch. 15 asserts that through mortal sin the grace of justification is lost, even though faith is not lost (DS 1544).

Ch. 16 affirms the doctrine of merit. "Eternal life is to be set before those who work well 'to the end' (Mt 10.22) and hope in God, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus, and 'like a payment' (cf. Augustine, *de Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, 8.20) to be

faithfully made for their good works and merits in accordance with God's promise" (DS 1545). Christ, the vine and the head of the body, imparts power (*virtutes influat*) to the justified, so that they are able to merit (*promeruisse*) an increase of grace, eternal life and an increase of glory (DS 1546, and canon 32, DS 1582). "Justice is said to be ours because we are justified through it as it inheres in us; it is also God's, because it is poured into us by God through the merit of Christ" (DS 1547). Although scripture speaks of a reward for good works (e.g. Mt 10.42), "a Christian should not trust or glory in himself and not in the Lord, whose goodness towards all men is so great that he wills his gifts to be their merits" (DS 1548).

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The Constitution *Unigenitus* of Clement XI (A.D. 1713) (This document condemning various Jansenistic propositions can hardly be regarded as a dogmatic definition of the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification. For, first, the censure attached to them varies from "heretical" to "captious" and "offensive to pious ears"; but which are heretical and which captious is not stated. Secondly, the propositions are not condemned in abstracto, but within the context of the writings of P. Quesnel. I would therefore not recommend the inclusion of this Constitution in this Appendix.)

N. 39 condemns the opinion that "the will, if not helped in advance by grace, has no light except to err, no fire except to fall, no strength except to wound itself, is capable of any evil and incapable of any good" (DS 2439). Several other similar statements are also rejected.

N. 51 condemns the proposition that "faith justifies when it operates, but it does not operate except through charity (Acts 13.39)" (DS 2451).

N. 52 condemns the opinion that "all the other means of salvation are contained in faith as in their germ and seed; but this faith is not without love and trust (*fiducia*)" (DS 2452).