

## THE REFORMATION IN DOCTRINE: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

By the Rev. E. STEINLY, M.A.

*Tutor, St. Aidan's College, Birkenhead.*

**I**N Holy Writ, God is proclaimed as He Who created heaven and earth. The universe is thus regarded as an act of God's Will, not an emanation of His Being. As such it is, moreover, a personal or supra-personal act. Both the manner and the meaning of this act are incomprehensible to the human mind, since the fact of creation *ex nihilo* has no analogy in human experience. Thus, in a *created* universe man is confronted by a Wisdom deeper than any depths which the human mind can fathom, and by a Righteousness higher than any heights to which the human will can attain. This inscrutable Wisdom and this challenging Righteousness are nothing less than the living Word of the Creator, spoken in the first instance to this or that individual soul through seemingly contingent and fragmentary facts of human history. For the organ of the Self-revelation of God is never the whole Church as such but the Holy Remnant. By that revelation man is summoned to share in a deeper Wisdom and a higher Righteousness than the speculations and imperatives which he himself is able to prescribe.

In Holy Writ also, man's failure to acknowledge the Divine Wisdom and obey the Divine Righteousness is emphatically asserted. Such failure springs from no transitory ignorance of the human mind nor from any accidental maladjustment of human life to outward circumstances. Man's failure is something positive. Sin is a perversion of the will. In consequence God stands over against man as an alien God. For the relationship of the Divine Will to human life is a dynamic and not a static one. All knowledge of God, therefore, which embraces in its scope man's own status before God is knowledge of God's condemnation and wrath.

In such circumstances the problem of life is not, 'How can man know, or rather, be known of God,' but 'How can man know God and live.' For God is inescapable by man. "If I climb up to heaven Thou art there; if I go down to hell thou art there also." God's Word comes to individuals and communities alike when they least expect it. "In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh." That it is or can be ultimately a Word of Salvation is beyond the bounds of hope in any heart brought face to face, as it were, with itself. Yet such, according to the Gospel, is in fact, the Word of the Cross. In Christ crucified God has declared his saving Righteousness and the riches of his Wisdom. By the Word of the cross God "justifies the ungodly" and chooses "the

foolish things of the world that He may put to shame them that are wise." The cross is thus God's miracle of grace whereby He creates *ex nihilo*, that is, out of condition of sin and death, a new creation which is beyond the reach of either. This new creation is at once discontinuous and continuous with the old ; discontinuous since Christ died and in his resurrection the old creation is not restored but, as it were, revolutionized ; continuous since He Who was raised is He Who died. Thus Christ is no mere new living soul in a world order of fate or chance similar to the old, but rather is the life-giving Spirit in an order of divine freedom. He is the Lord who has merited or obtained for man the saving righteousness of God. Henceforth God is the " Justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus."

The doctrines of Creation, the Fall and Justification through the merits of Christ were formally common both to the medieval Church and to the Reformers. Yet so diametrically opposed to each other were the interpretations they respectively affirmed that " the matter of justifying righteousness," to quote the testimony of Richard Hooker, became " that grand question which hangeth yet in controversy between us and the church of Rome." The controversy between the two parties centred mainly round the meaning to be attached to such statements as that of St. Paul when he writes that man is " justified by faith."

For St. Paul " faith " was the co-relative in the human heart of the Self-Revealing Word of God or Word of Christ. " Faith," he wrote, " cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." Moreover faith, for St. Paul, stands in contrast to " works." Neither the efforts of the human intellect as the Greek imagined, nor the endeavours of the human will as the Jew believed, can bring man into the knowledge and service of God. St. Paul also contrasts " faith " with " sight," that final contemplation and rest in which the life of " works " reaches its consummation. Faith is not a human vision any more than it is a human activity. Faith is *passio* on its human side, not action, as Luther taught. It is the moment of passivity out of which all activity springs because in it God acts. Thus it is the answering echo in the human heart of the Spirit of God to the creative activity of God through His Word. And since it is that creative activity which alone gives meaning and purpose to man's life, God may never be identified with objects fashioned on the lower structural levels either of human wisdom or of human effort.

This identification, however, was exactly that which the mediæval Church attempted to make. In the first place the chief scholastic thinkers identified the God of revelation with the object of human thought as set forth in the philosophy of Aristotle. Faith thus becomes a further extension of human reason. By faith, knowledge of God was more adequately brought within the scope of human intellectual activity. For Aristotle's God was related to the Universe, not creatively and dynamically, but causally and statically. He induced motion within " primary matter " whereby it approximated to a cosmos but such motion fell wholly within the cosmos thus fashioned. He Himself was the Unmoved Mover, immaterial, motionless, wholly engrossed in the contemplation of His own perfection. Knowledge of God, therefore,

meant not the Self-revealing Wisdom of the Creator but a human "work," induced in man by a passive artificer, and enabling him finally to pass beyond his own activity into the motionless self-contemplation of the Divine Being.

In the second place, the Creator was identified with the object of human will, that is, the guardian of human morality. Faith thus became also an extension of virtue whereby man was enabled to conform his life to the religious and moral order according to natural and supernatural law or tradition. Righteousness meant, therefore, not the redemptive activity of the Creator through the Word Incarnate, but a human activity set up in man by God through the Sacraments, and enabling him finally to achieve his own justification and to enter into the rest, that is, the motionless self-service of the Divine Being.

It was Luther, of course, who shattered the mediæval synthesis of Biblical truth and Aristotelian teaching. Not unfittingly, therefore, those Anglican articles which deal with the problem of Justification were based upon articles contained in contemporary Lutheran formularies. This mediæval synthesis, moreover, was not dissimilar from that made by Pharisaic Judaism between prophetic and scribal teaching and which the Christian Judaizers wished to perpetuate in the early church. St. Paul, however, forestalled their effort. For the Reformers, as for St. Paul, the saving righteousness of God was external to man, since it was the gift of the Word Incarnate undivorced from the Giver. Faith, likewise, was not a human virtue but the renunciation of all human credentials whatsoever. For their opponents, however, righteousness was an activity set up within the relatively autonomous life of man, and faith was a human virtue that took its place alongside other virtues.

"When they are required to show," wrote Richard Hooker, "what the righteousness is whereby a Christian man is justified, they answer that it is a divine spiritual quality ; which quality received into the soul doth first make it to be one of them who are born of God : and secondly, endue it with power to bring forth such works, as they do that are born of him ; even as the soul of man being joined unto his body doth first make him to be in the number of reasonable creatures, and secondly enable him to perform the natural functions which are proper to his kind ; that it maketh the soul gracious and amiable in the sight of God, in regard whereof it is termed grace ; that it purgeth, purifieth, washeth out all the stains and pollution of sin ; that by it, through the merit of Christ, we are delivered as from sin, so from eternal death and condemnation the reward of sin. This grace they will have to be applied by infusion, to the end that as the body is warm by the heat that is in the body, so the soul might be righteous by inherent grace : which grace they make capable of increase ; as the body may be more and more warm, so the soul more and more justified, according as grace shall be augmented ; the augmentation whereof is merited by good works, as good works are made meritorious by it. Wherefore, the first receipt of grace is in their divinity the first justification ; the increase thereof, the second justification. As grace may be increased by the merit of good works, so it may be decreased by the

demerit of sin's denial ; it may be lost by mortal sin. Inasmuch, therefore, as it is needful in the one case to repair, in the other case to recover, the loss which is made, the infusion of grace hath her sundry after-meals ; for which cause they make many ways to apply the infusion of grace." After alluding to these various " meals " and " after-meals " of infused righteousness or grace, Hooker writes : " This maze the Church of Rome doth cause her followers to tread, when they ask her the way of justification."

The " way of justification " thus described by Hooker appears in a modified form in the various doctrinal formularies that were put forth during the reign of Henry VIII after the breach with the Papacy. The first of these was the " Ten Articles," set forth by royal authority in 1536. In the article on Justification, it is stated that " this word Justification signifieth remission of our sins, and our acceptance or reconciliation into the grace and favour of God, that is to say, our perfect renovation in Christ. . . . Sinners attain this justification by contrition and faith joined with charity," yet not as though " our contrition or faith or any works proceeding thereof can worthily merit or deserve to attain the said justification." Such wording obviously represents a compromise between the conflicting views. The Reformers were coming to regard justifying righteousness as being (to quote Hooker again) " without us, which we have by imputation," and " a thing in nature different " from sanctification or internal righteousness. Their opponents, however, conceived justifying righteousness to be something infused, and so, in the words of the article just quoted, identical with " our perfect renovation in Christ." On this latter view " to justify " meant " to make just," since God's activity was interpreted in terms of that, not of a Creator creating *ex nihilo* but of an Artificer fashioning given material, namely, the relatively autonomous will of man.

A year after their publication, the " Ten Articles " were incorporated in a more elaborate statement of faith entitled " The Institution of a Christian Man." This work, popularly known as the " Bishops' Book," since it lacked royal authority, formed a kind of experimental prelude to a second authorized statement of faith set forth in the year 1543 under the title, " A necessary Doctrine and Erudition of any Christian Man." It was popularly known as the " King's Book " to distinguish it from the earlier " Bishops' Book." In the " King's Book," the influence of the Reformers is much less apparent than in the " Ten Articles." For example, it is stated that " this word Justification, as it is taken in Scripture, signifieth the *making* of us righteous before God, where before we were unrighteous," and that " man, prevented by his (i.e. God's) grace . . . shall be also a worker by his free consent and obedience to the same, in the attaining of his own justification. It is further stated that " as the grace of God and the gifts thereof, that is to say, faith, repentance, dread, hope, charity, with other fruits of the Holy Ghost, do increase in us, so do we wax and increase in our justification. And therefore it is plain that not only faith, as it is a distinct virtue or gift by itself, is required for our justification, but also the other gifts of the grace of God, with a desire to do good works proceeding of the same grace." Such was the mediæval

view of Justification. It was not, in Hooker's phrase "a thing in nature different," from sanctification, nor was faith other than an inherent virtue to be exercised along with other virtues "for our justification."

From the moment that the doctrine of justification by faith began to be proclaimed controversy centred primarily round the meaning of the word faith as thus used. If it merely signified a human "virtue" or "work" then the "new teaching" was merely a shadow of the old and, as such, submersive of all morality. The early reformers, however, were not slow to repudiate such an antinomian gospel. "The faith in Christ's blood," wrote William Tyndale, "of a repenting heart towards the law, justifies us alone and not all manner of faiths." "It springs not of man's fantasy, neither is it in any man's power to obtain it, but is altogether the pure gift of God, poured into us freely." "If works follow not, it is a sure and evident sign that there is no faith in the heart, but a dead imagination and dream, which they falsely call faith." Hence, "faith justifieth before God in the heart . . . love springeth of faith and compelleth us to work . . . works justify before the world . . . and certify that our faith is unfeigned."

Although the "Ten Articles" of 1536 show traces of the influence of such teaching, it found no definite place in any of the Henrician formularies. Even the Article on Justification, drawn up with twelve others at a conference of Anglican and Lutheran divines in 1538, does no more than repeat the compromising language of the Ten Articles. It was not until the accession of the boy king, Edward VI in 1547, that the new teaching received some kind of formal sanction. In that year the First "Book of Homilies" was published in which the doctrine of Justification of Faith was formally and consistently set forth. Justification is declared to be "the office of God only, and not a thing we render unto him, but which we receive from him." "Christ Himself only (is) the meritorious cause thereof" so that faith means "we must renounce the merit of all our said virtues, of faith, hope, charity and all other virtues and good deeds which we either have done, shall do, or can do." Thus, three things go together in our justification: "Upon God's part his great mercy and grace; upon Christ's part justice, that is, the satisfaction of God's Justice, and upon our part true and lively faith in the merits of Jesus which yet is not ours but by God's working in us."

Six years after the publication of the First Book of Homilies a new body of Forty-Two Articles was issued to take the place of the "King's Book" as a formal statement of faith. The new article on Justification merely referred to the Homily on Justification, but in the Elizabethan revisions of the Edwardian Articles, made in the years 1563 and 1571 respectively, a formal declaration of the doctrine of Justification was added, together with an additional article on Good Works as the necessary fruits of "a true and lively faith." These new additions were adapted from a formulary which the ambassadors of the Lutheran state of Württemberg had presented to the Papal Council of Trent in 1552. The change of doctrine in regard to Justification was now formally complete. Justification is spoken of, on God's part as

something "reputed" and on man's part as "through faith." The formal statement ran thus: "We are accounted righteous before God only for the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings."

In the doctrine of Justification by Faith the Biblical witness to the Self-revealing Wisdom and Righteousness of God through His Word remains free from those perversions of the Gospel which arise when men equate that Wisdom with the content of a system of thought, and identify that Righteousness with the maintenance of a ceremonial and legal tradition. For through faith a new creation comes into being. "If any man is in Christ he is a new creation." Hence, through faith we "are known of God," that is to say, God is known by an activity which is not ours but His. Likewise, through faith, "I live and yet not I but Christ liveth in me"; that is to say, the ethically and religiously good subject is not the goal to which we attain but the starting-point which the Son of God attains for us. There is a necessary place, of course, within the economy of the world of men for philosophy and for tradition. The Gospel is not antithetical to the Law as Marcion taught, any more than it is identical with the Law as the Judaizer contended, or complementary to it as the scholastic mind assumed. To deify the conclusions of philosophy or the sanctions of tradition in the form of a law, however, is to erect an idol in place of the Creator. At best they are but the *stoicheiá*, the "rudiments of the world," not the Divine "Fullness." In the Gospel their interim authority is confirmed yet abolished, as the water of human wisdom and human action is replaced by the wine of Divine Revelation and Divine Righteousness. At certain periods in her history the Church has been tempted, under pressure of circumstances, to enter into alliance with the spirit of Hellenism or of Judaism. In consequence, Church history, and especially English Church History, often merely exhibits the opposition either between Aristotelian Realism and Platonic Idealism, or between a ceremonialism analogous to that of the Temple and a legalism analogous to that of the Synagogue, and nothing higher or deeper. The alliance has remained intact until, in time of some great crisis, the human heart has been brought face to face with its own naked, idolatrous, covetous self. Then it is that the more fundamental opposition between the Law, whether of thought or action (that is, of our grasp of the Wisdom and Righteousness of God), and the Gospel (that is, God's grasp of us in His Wisdom and Righteousness) is rediscovered. For then the Word of the Cross is sounded forth anew, faith is born, the eyes of the understanding are enlightened, and the Spirit of God clothes man's heart with a righteousness which is not its own, but is the free gift of God through His Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.