

# *ARCIC II and Justification: Some Difficulties and Obscurities relating to Anglican and Roman Catholic Teaching on Justification.*

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There is considerable interest in, and disagreement concerning, the results of the first Anglican-Roman Catholic International Consultation (ARCIC), which did so much to clarify the respective positions of a group of Anglicans and Roman Catholics drawn from across the world. Much credit is due to Henry Chadwick and Edward Yarnold for their wisdom and discretion in their handling of such divisive questions as the nature of the eucharistic presence. It is a tribute to their success that the consultations are to continue.

At the insistence of the evangelical constituency of the Church of England, the second consultation is to include discussion of the justification of man before God, a question which is rightly regarded as lying at the centre of the protest of the Reformers against the theology of the church of their day. Even as late as 1535, Martin Luther was prepared to submit to papal authority, provided that the justification of man was conceded to be based solely upon the grace of god in Christ: 'I am willing to kiss your feet, pope, and to recognize you as the supreme pontiff, if only you will adore my Christ and recognize that we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life through his death and resurrection, and not through the observance of your traditions'.<sup>1</sup> It is, of course, open to question whether the church of Luther's time actually had lapsed into some form of Pelagianism: what is clear, however, is that the absence of any magisterial pronouncement on the part of the church for nearly a millennium on the specific question of justification had led to considerable confusion within the church of the later mediaeval period concerning what the orthodox teaching on justification actually was. The Second Council of Orange, meeting in 529 A.D., is generally regarded as having endorsed a doctrine of justification with which even the young Luther could have found little

fault:<sup>2</sup> however, as Bouillard has shown, the decisions of this council appear to have been unknown during the mediaeval period, being rediscovered only on the eve of the Council of Trent in the middle of the sixteenth century!<sup>3</sup> Until the eighth century, the decisions of this Council were widely regarded as authoritative, but from the tenth until the middle of the sixteenth century (i.e., at least two decades after the Reformation began in earnest), theologians of the period appear to have been unaware of the *existence*, let alone the *teaching*, of this council! Thus Gabriel Biel, the highly influential theologian of the later mediaeval period against whom much of Luther's polemical work was directed, based his doctrine of justification upon the teaching of the Council of Carthage (418 A.D.), which is vague concerning points which were to become crucial in the later mediaeval period. By the standards of his own day, Biel taught an orthodox doctrine of justification,<sup>4</sup> even if the nature of orthodoxy would change with the rediscovery of Orange II and the incorporation of much of its teaching into the decrees of the Council of Trent.

It related to justification, it is beyond dispute that the movement which we call the Reformation had a decisive effect upon the development of the doctrine of justification. It is seriously incorrect to assume that the Reformers merely reasserted an anti-Pelagian doctrine of justification: they also altered the generally-accepted understanding of the *nature* of justification itself.<sup>5</sup> The leading features of Protestant teaching on the nature of justification, based on a survey of Protestant literature between the years 1530 and 1710, may be summarized as follows:

1. Justification is the forensic declaration that the believer is righteous, rather than the process by which he is made righteous, involving a change in his *status*, rather than his *nature*.

2. A deliberate and systematic distinction is made between justification (the act by which God declared the sinner to be righteous), and sanctification or regeneration (the internal process of renewal by the Holy Spirit which is inseparable from justification, but distinguished from it).

Further differences between the Reformers and Trent are also evident in connection with the nature of justifying righteousness, and the assurance of salvation. An examination of the Protestant polemical literature directed against the Council of Trent's teaching on justification, whether it came from the Lutheran camp (e.g., Martin Chemnitz' *Examen Concilii Tridentini*) or from the Reformed (e.g., John Calvin's *Acta Synodi Tridentini cum Antidoto*) demonstrates that Protestant disagreement with Roman Catholic teaching centred upon three points:

1. the nature of justification, to which we have already referred.
2. the nature of justifying righteousness. For the Protestant, justifying righteousness, or the formal cause of justification, is the

alien righteousness of Christ, external to man and imputed to him, not a righteousness inherent to man, in any way located within him.

3. The question of assurance. For the Protestant, the believer may rest assured that, on account of the objective and external work of Christ, all that need be done in achieving his salvation has been done by God. The theme of the assurance of salvation is a leading feature of evangelical spirituality, as evidenced by the celebrated Methodist hymn, 'Blessed assurance! Jesus is mine!'. The Council of Trent excludes any such assurance, except by special revelation.<sup>6</sup>

This, then, represents the situation from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards. But what of the present situation? Two factors are of particular importance in relation to ARCIC II:

1. The fact that Anglicanism has traditionally asserted that it possesses, either actually or potentially, a mediating doctrine of justification, the *via media* between the positions of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

2. The publication of Hans Küng's celebrated book *Justification* (in German, 1957; in English, 1964), in which he claimed that there is fundamental agreement between the position of Karl Barth and that of the Roman Catholic church, seen in its totality.<sup>7</sup> As Barth was widely regarded within the Roman Catholic church as encapsulating modern Protestantism, this result was regarded with both enthusiasm and astonishment.

These two factors, when combined, appear to make agreement on the question of the justification of man before God a virtual inevitability at ARCIC II. We therefore wish to point out that both, when critically examined, do not necessarily lead to such a conclusion, leading instead to the formulation of certain precise questions which *must* be answered before any real progress in this important discussion can be made. The remainder of this study is divided into three parts, which will consider the two factors noted above, and the consequences of our observations for ARCIC II.

## I

The most significant work on justification from the pen of an Anglican writer is generally considered to be John Henry Newman's *Lectures on Justification* (1837). In this work, Newman developed the idea of a mediating doctrine of justification, constructed in terms of a dialectic between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Newman found the former conveniently personified in Martin Luther, and the latter in Vazquez and Bellarmine. By analysing the positions of these writers, Newman is able to construct the *via media* dialectically. However, it will be obvious that such an attempt is totally dependent upon a correct analysis of both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic positions on justification, which Newman summarizes thus:<sup>8</sup> 'It is the

divine presence that justifies us, not faith, as say the Protestant schools, not renewal, as say the Roman.' This is an absurd caricature of both Protestant and Roman Catholic teaching alike! An examination of Newman's *Lectures* shows that he is quite innocent of any understanding of the nature of Luther's doctrine of justification, and suggests that he deliberately misrepresents Luther in order to score off him.<sup>9</sup> Having set up a straw man, Newman duly knocks him down before turning his attention to the unfortunate Bellarmine, who suffers more grievously at the hands of Newman than he ever did at the hands of a Protestant! However, a more fundamental point remains. Newman's conception of the *via media* in the *Lectures on Justification* represents his attempt to 'build up a system of theology out of the Anglican divines'<sup>10</sup> – and yet a careful analysis of the teaching of the Caroline Divines on justification indicates that while the post-Restoration divines, such as Bull and Taylor, do indeed have a theology of justification comparable to that which Newman claims as the *via media*, the pre-Commonwealth divines adopt a theology of justification which is much closer to that of Reformed Orthodoxy than Newman may care to admit. Furthermore, it can be shown that the decisive shift in Anglican thinking on justification appears to have coincided with the period of the Commonwealth, and therefore represents an instance of theological reaction against the Reformed theology of the period, which happened to be similar to that of the pre-Commonwealth divines on the matter of justification.<sup>11</sup> The historical precedent for a *via media* doctrine of justification is thus seen to rest upon the teachings of a group of theologians who operated over a mere thirty-year period which immediately followed the greatest upset in English history since the Norman Conquest. It is therefore fair to question Newman's appeal to the post-Restoration divines as in any way encapsulating the essence of Anglican teaching on justification. To do so would be to lapse into an arbitrary historical positivism, which cannot be justified, for three reasons:

1. Anglicanism cannot be defined with reference to what such a small group of theologians, operating over such a short period, believed.

2. If any such group can be thus singled out, the *first* generation of Anglican theologians, such as Cranmer, or those of the Elizabethan settlement, such as Hooker, have far greater claim to the distinction than the post-Restoration divines. Indeed, if the Elizabethan Settlement is regarded as having defined the essence of the structure of Anglicanism, it is reasonable to argue that the opinions of the theologians of the period should be given considerable weighting in the establishment of an authentically *Anglican* doctrine of justification. However, this consideration is embarrassing to Newman, who is obliged to admit that Hooker (*the* theological luminary of the Elizabethan Settlement), far from supporting his theology of justifica-

tion, 'decides the contrary way, declaring not only for one special view of justification . . . but that the opposite opinion is a virtual denial of gospel truth'.<sup>12</sup> The 'opposite opinion' is remarkably similar to Newman's *via media* position!

3. As we have argued in detail elsewhere, the Caroline Divines as a whole are sharply divided on the doctrine of justification. The pre-Commonwealth divines adopt a theology of justification which is very close, at points, to that of Reformed Orthodoxy, whilst those of the post-Restoration period adopt a very different theology of justification, in effect *reversing* the previously accepted Anglican teaching on the matter, and thereby weakening still further their claim to be regarded as representative of Anglicanism as a whole in this matter.

It will, of course, be obvious that Newman's failure to construct a *via media* doctrine of justification does not prejudice or invalidate the general principle of such a mediating doctrine of justification. Given that Newman's *Lectures on Justification* are typical of their period (i.e., inaccurate regarding their historical foundations, and given to polemic, rather than serious theological analysis), it would seem reasonable to argue that a serious analysis of both Protestant and Roman Catholic doctrines of justification, undertaken by unbiased scholars in the light of the sources now available to us, could lead to the construction of a *via media* doctrine of justification which avoids the unfairness, the inaccuracy and the arbitrariness so characteristic of Newman's earlier attempt. There are, however, serious historical and theological difficulties which underlie such an enterprise, and which require critical examination. To illustrate this point, let us consider how the essence of Protestant doctrines of justification might be established.

In its simplest form, this could be done by selecting a leading theologian of Protestant inclination, and establishing with the utmost impartiality exactly what his teaching on justification is. But how would such a theologian be selected in the first place? In effect, the very process of selection will determine the essence of Protestant doctrines of justification, given the differences between Lutheran and Reformed theology in general, and the unquestionable development of Lutheran theology, particularly in relation to justification, from the time of Luther onwards. It would be convenient if every Protestant theologian had exactly the same doctrine of justification, but the simple fact remains that the diversity in theologies of justification associated with Protestantism over the period 1530–1710 is so enormous that it would be difficult to justify the selection of one *theological school*, let alone one *theologian*, as typical of Protestantism! Furthermore, it will be evident that the rise of Pietism on the Continent and Methodism in England, with the decisive shifts in teaching on justification *away* from those of Protestant Orthodoxy associated with these movements, poses still more difficulties for this process of

selection. The Pietists, whose theology is essentially represented in England by John Wesley and his followers, criticized many aspects of Protestant doctrines of justification, particularly the doctrine of imputed righteousness, on the grounds that they failed to promote piety. The Protestant teaching on the passivity of justifying faith was rejected for the same reason, and replaced with the idea of an *active* justifying faith, which the German Pietists referred to as *der lebendige Glaube*, and Wesley as a 'lively faith'. Thus, although Protestant in practically every other respect, it has to be questioned whether Pietism's doctrines of justification are characteristically Protestant.

The direct appeal to the confessional material of the Protestant churches is also of questionable value, as it is not clear precisely what force this material has. In general, it is only fair to point out that the spirit of free inquiry and emphasis upon scripture, rather than tradition, which is so characteristic of Protestantism, militates against the historical approach to the *via media*. What Protestants thought in 1530 does not correspond with what they thought in 1710, or with what they now think in 1984 – because to be bound to a normative interpretation of scripture, as established by a founding church father, such as Luther or Calvin, is effectively to place tradition above scripture. Protestants, it must be emphasized, do not care to place human intermediaries between themselves and scripture! Indeed, the obvious rejection of Luther's teaching on certain aspects of the doctrine of justification (e.g., his doctrine of the *servum arbitrium*, and of double predestination) is characteristic of modern Lutheranism, and most Lutherans would maintain that they were correct in departing significantly from Luther's teaching on justification in these, and other, respects.<sup>13</sup> *Ecclesia reformata, ecclesia semper reformanda*: true Reformation does not mean that the church, having once been reformed in its history, may rest upon the results of that Reformation – rather, reformation is to be understood as a continuous process within the true church, constantly asking whether the church is faithful to the word of God, and amending its life, worship and doctrine in the light of that constant self-examination. A Reformed theologian never writes for posterity – he exhibits the living Word of God *today*. Karl Barth once said of John Calvin: 'Calvin est pour nous un maître dans l'art d'écouter'. The true Reformed theologian teaches us to listen to the Word of God; rather than to himself. The very nature of the Protestant tradition is such that Protestantism is essentially dynamic, rather than static, continually applying its faith in the creativity of the word of God to the situation of today, rather than perpetually attempting to re-pristiniate the answers of yesteryear. The Protestant of today will probably show interest in and respect for the teaching of men such as Luther and Calvin – but he owes allegiance to a higher principle, the authority of the word of God. As such, the historical approach to the establishment of the essence of Protestant

doctrines of justification must be regarded as resting upon untenable historical and theological presuppositions.

A second point which must be made in this connection is that the dialectical approach to the construction of a *via media* doctrine of justification has a disturbing tendency to lead to a mediating theology of justification which is already discredited. This point becomes clear when the Colloquy of Regensburg (sometimes also known as the 'Colloquy of Ratisbon') is considered. This Colloquy, which met in 1541, succeeded in reaching agreement between Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians on the question of justification, before disagreement on transubstantiation brought the Colloquy to a close. A careful examination of the documents relating to this Colloquy suggests that this agreement was little more than a scissors and paste job, with the respective elements of Lutheran and Roman Catholic teaching being set alongside one another, with the use of vague terms and phrases to allow each side to interpret its pronouncements in the best possible light, viewed from their own sides.<sup>14</sup> The formula by which the two sides were reconciled was drawn up by Johannes Gropper, a German theologian already committed to the theology of justification known as *double justification*.<sup>15</sup> In essence, the Regensburg theology amounted to the statement that man was justified by faith *and* by works, and that *both* imputed *and* inherent righteousness were instrumental in effecting man's justification. Thus the Venetian ambassador reported that Protestants were prepared to concede that they ought not to preach justification 'by faith alone' unless the phrase 'love, the fear of God, penance and good works' was added.<sup>16</sup> In essence, the Regensburg theology amounted to nothing more than a combination of the essential features of Protestant and Roman Catholic theologies of justification, without making any attempt to resolve the contradictions implicit in this combination. The agreement remained little more than a *concordia palliata*, to use Contarini's phrase, an empty agreement between men of good will, reflecting nothing more than their own opinions, and not the authoritative positions of their churches. The agreement was disowned by Wittenberg and the Roman Curia alike. Furthermore, as the conceptual foundations of the agreement were subjected to analysis by Roman Catholic theologians, it became clear that the Protestants had, in effect, got much the better of the agreement, in that the 'concessions' made to the Roman Catholic theologians at Regensburg did not actually relate to man's *justification*, but to his *sanctification*. The explicit rejection of a doctrine of double justification by the Council of Trent thus became a matter of course, despite the attempts of Giralmo Seripando to argue its merits. The real significance of the failure of Regensburg, however, is generally regarded to lie in the fact that the Regensburg theologians simply did not represent the communities from which they were drawn. As Jedin has pointed out,<sup>17</sup> the *institutional differences* between the parties

far exceeded the *individual agreement* between the theologians concerned. Incidentally, the relevance of this observation to ARCIC cannot be overlooked, as neither the Anglican nor the Roman Catholic participants can be said to represent their churches: the question of authority is, it would seem, prior to that of justification today, irrespective of what it was in the sixteenth century. This point will be developed further later in the following section.

For reasons such as those which we have outlined above, we regard the historical method of constructing the *via media* as unworkable, leading to results which can only be regarded as resting upon the most questionable of historico-theological presuppositions. In practice, it may be regarded as near-certain that Anglican theologians will continue to embrace a spectrum of theologies of justification, reflecting the comprehensive character of the Anglican church. Those of its members with evangelical persuasions will doubtless continue to hold theologies of justification which place them closer to Protestant, and those who are Anglo-Catholic theologies of justification which place them closer to Roman Catholic, teaching on the matter. By its very nature, the Anglican church may therefore be said to possess a *via media* doctrine of justification. This does not mean, however, that Anglicans are agreed upon a single doctrine of justification which occupies a middle position between Protestant and Roman Catholic, but rather than the tensions between the Protestant and Catholic wings of the Anglican church are such that a spectrum of theologies of justification, ranging from Protestant to Catholic, results. That such a *via media* exists in this sense is undeniable: whether it has any real significance is open to doubt. It may be possible for *some members* of the Anglican church to reach agreement with Roman Catholics over justification on account of this, but it is not any easier for the *Anglican church* to reach such agreement, which must ultimately rest upon the *consensus fidelium*.

## II

The appearance of Küng's work on justification did much to further scholarly interest in the relationship between the doctrines of justification associated with Roman Catholicism, the Reformed theological tradition, the Church of England, and Barth himself.<sup>18</sup> It is now possible to evaluate Küng's contribution to the ecumenical debate with some degree of objectivity, and we propose to devote the present section to this evaluation, with particular reference to ARCIC II.

The common theological heritage of the western churches is an anti-Pelagian, Christocentric doctrine of justification. By this, we mean that a real alteration in the relationship between God and man has been effected from God's side, and that this relationship has the locus of both its disclosure and possibility in Christ. It is, of course, possible to phrase this in a number of different, and equally acceptable



manners; Orange II, the Augsburg Confession, the Council of Trent, the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Heidelberg Catechism express the same sentiment in varying manners, before going their separate ways on other aspects of the theology of justification. It is, however, important to emphasize from the outset that the historic formulations of faith of all the western churches concur on this aspect of the theology of justification, because Küng has done little other than show that Barth and Trent share this common heritage. In what follows, we propose to develop three major criticisms of Küng's work, and indicate their consequences for ARCIC II.

1. *Küng is unduly selective in those aspects of Barth's theology of justification which he expounds and compares with Trent.* Elsewhere, we have argued that there are four areas in which Barth and Trent are in serious disagreement, and that Küng has not adequately dealt with them. They are: the nature of justification itself; the freedom of the will; the nature of election; and the assurance of salvation.<sup>19</sup> While Barth's introductory letter makes it clear that Küng has not misrepresented his teaching, and has dealt with those aspects of his thought which should be included in any such discussion, it is clear from a closer examination of the work itself that Küng has not drawn attention to areas of disagreement where these evidently exist. For example, in his analysis of Barth's teaching on election, Küng neglects to point out that the universalist tendencies of the doctrine are unacceptable to the *magisterium*. Other Roman Catholic scholars have pointed out that the universalism implicit in Barth's theology of election is quite unacceptable, even if Küng does not.

It is helpful to ask the following question: what do Barth and Trent have in common that Calvin and Trent do not also have in common? Calvin and Trent are not noted for being in agreement on justification – what has happened between then and now to make this more likely? It can be shown without any difficulty that Barth's teaching on three matters of decisive importance in relation to the ecumenical debate on justification is essentially that of Calvin, these matters being the nature of justification, the freedom of the will, and the assurance of salvation. Barth's doctrine of election sets him apart from Calvin, but brings him no closer to Trent! So how, then, is it possible for agreement to be any closer when there appears to be no decisive alteration in substance? It seems to us that the answer lies partly in the improved ecumenical climate, but largely in the manner in which Küng interprets the Council of Trent – which brings us to our next point.

2. *Küng does not interpret the Tridentine decree on justification in terms of its historical context.* It is important to appreciate that the Council of Trent was not concerned with resolving the various disputes within Catholicism over justification, but with meeting the threat posed by the Reformation itself. An analysis of the development of the doctrine of justification during the later mediaeval period, which is conspi-

ciously absent from Küng's discussion, indicates that there was an astonishingly wide spectrum of theologies of justification current within the Catholic Church, ranging from a predestinarianism at least as severe as that of Calvin to what approaches, but does not actually constitute, Pelagianism. Trent was not concerned with resolving these disputes within its own house. In his magisterial history of the Council of Trent, Jedin states with characteristic brilliance the fundamental principle of Tridentine hermeneutics:<sup>20</sup>

Since the council's intention was to draw a line of demarcation between Catholic dogma and Protestant teaching – not to settle controverted opinions in the Catholic schools of theology – it follows that in all doubtful cases previously professed theological opinions may continue to be held.

In other words, unless the Council of Trent *explicitly* excludes a particular teaching which has previously been associated with Catholic theologians, that teaching may continue to be held and regarded as Catholic. As such, what Trent *does not* say must be determined with as great a precision as what Trent *does* say: both are of importance in determining whether a theology of justification may be held by a Roman Catholic. In practice, Küng tends to adopt only a Thomist interpretation of Trent, which is quite unjustifiable on historical grounds – others are permitted, and Küng's interpretation of Trent is only one of a large range and, most importantly of all, happens to be that which is most easily accommodated to Barth's position. We propose to illustrate this with reference to Küng's interpretation of Trent's teaching on the question of whether man can merit his own justification.

Can man be said to merit justification? In his discussion of merit,<sup>21</sup> Küng concentrates upon the question of the nature of merit *after justification*,<sup>22</sup> and is able to show that Roman Catholic teaching on the subject, is not in any way offensive. But can man merit his own justification – in other words, is there merit prior to justification, and can this merit lead to man's justification? Küng does not deal with these questions explicitly, although such discussion would appear to be called for. He cites from the Tridentine decree on justification to the effect that 'everything in justification is from God, even the involvement of man':<sup>23</sup>

We may be said to be justified freely, in the sense that nothing that precedes justification, neither faith nor works, merits the grace of justification.

This might be taken to indicate that the question of whether man can merit his own justification is to be answered in the negative. In fact, although this is a possible interpretation of the above statement, it is not the only one. The essential question is that of the nature of the merit in question. Catholic theology had, since the twelfth century,

drawn a distinction between two types of merit: 'condign' merit, which is merit in the strict sense, involving a real claim on God by the believer, even though this may ultimately be grounded in the divine liberality, and 'congruous' merit, which is merit in a somewhat looser sense, involving a claim on the basis of what seems appropriate, rather than what is deserved. This distinction will not be familiar to Evangelicals, but remains a commonplace in Roman Catholic theology, and is of particular value in relation to the question of whether man can be said to prepare himself for justification. Theologians of the Franciscan order generally taught that man could prepare himself for justification by ceasing to commit acts of sin and by doing his best to improve himself: if he did this, it seemed appropriate (i.e., congruous) for God to reward this preparation for justification by bestowing upon him the gift of justifying grace. As such, the preparation (or disposition) for justification was regarded as being meritorious, although in the weaker sense of the term. This teaching is not excluded by Trent: indeed, in view of the large number of Franciscan theologians present during the Tridentine debates on justification, it would have been surprising if they had censured the teaching of their own order! The essential point which we are making is this: the verb 'merit' in the passage cited by Küng can bear two meanings. Either, it means 'all merit, of whatever sort', or, 'merit, in the strict sense of the term'. Both these understandings of the term were well established by the later mediaeval period, and the use of the unusual Latin verb *promereri* instead of the more usual *mereri* is seen by many students of Trent as representing a diplomatic attempt to avoid condemning any traditional Catholic teaching on the question of the meritorious preparation for justification by using a term which could be interpreted in a number of ways. A similar device had been used in the previous session at Trent, which dealt with original sin: the Dominican and Franciscan orders had two very different understandings of man's original state, and Trent presents a form of wording which allows both understandings to be maintained.<sup>24</sup>

It will, therefore, be clear that Küng has not made the situation clear. While it is perfectly correct to assert that Trent teaches that man cannot merit his own justification, the term 'merit' is being used in a particular sense, which would not command universal agreement within Roman Catholicism. Here, in relation to so many other questions relating to justification, Trent permits a variety of opinions to be held, and Küng, by presenting *one possible* interpretation as if it were *the only* interpretation, would appear to have misled his readers who are not familiar with the development of the doctrine of justification during the mediaeval period. It is, of course, perfectly reasonable to argue that Küng has as his primary concern the reconciliation of Barth and Trent, so that it is quite acceptable to interpret Trent in this way. Küng's approach remains, however, a

very narrow and selective interpretation of both Barth and Trent. If Trent is expounded *in its proper historical context*, it becomes clear that it legitimates an entire spectrum of theologies of justification, so that it is meaningless to speak of 'the Tridentine doctrine of justification' in the strictest of senses, in that *there is no such single doctrine*. Küng has presented his readers with one extreme of this spectrum of theologies of justification, which approaches Barth's position on a number of points: there is no doubt that this is an authentic Roman Catholic doctrine of justification, but it is not *the only* such doctrine, nor is it even the most probable. There is, for example, the other extreme of the Tridentine spectrum, associated with the Franciscan theologians at Trent: had Küng expounded *this*, Barth might have had less pleasant things to say! To summarize our point once more: when viewed in its historical context, which *must* determine the interpretation of the decree on justification, it becomes clear that a wide range of 'Tridentine theologies of justification' exists, one extreme of which approaches that of Barth – but it is unrealistic and unrepresentative to isolate this one extreme, and present it as *the* Tridentine teaching on the matter. Like the Anglican Church itself, the Roman Catholic church possesses a variety of teaching on justification: Küng has no more claim to speak for all Roman Catholics than an Evangelical has to speak for Anglicans as a whole.

This point is of importance, and requires consideration. There remains, however, a consideration of even greater weight, to which we now turn.

3. Küng does not consider post-Tridentine developments within Roman Catholicism which relate to the doctrine of justification. The Council of Trent did not settle debates within the church on how man is justified before God. Indeed, most scholars of the Tridentine decree on justification are of the opinion that it deliberately allows considerable room for manoeuvre in certain areas, such as the respective human and divine roles in justification. As a consequence, the fifty year period immediately following the publication of the Tridentine decree on justification saw a number of disputes on justification arise within the Roman Catholic church, of which the most significant are associated with the Baianist, Molinist and Jansenist teachings.<sup>25</sup> Küng is aware of these disputes, and makes occasional reference to their significance. We are here particularly concerned with the papal constitution *Unigenitus*, issued on 8 September 1713 by Clement XI, which condemned over a hundred propositions from the works of the French Jansenist Pasquier Quesnel. Let us consider three propositions, condemned by this constitution (following the original numbering):<sup>26</sup>

10. Grace is the operation of the hand of almighty God, which nothing can hinder or retard.
13. When God wills to save a soul, and touches it with the inner

hand of his grace, no human will resists it.

30. All whom God wills to save through Christ are saved infallibly.

The student of Barth's doctrine of grace recognizes in these propositions the essence of Barth's own teaching on the unilateral, autocratic character of grace!<sup>27</sup> The essence of Barth's position is as well known as it has been heavily criticized, and may be summarized as this: all men, whether they know it or not, are elected in Christ. On account of the servitude of the human will, man is unable to make any response, whether it be positive or negative, to the divine election. As such, God's grace triumphs unilaterally and autocratically over human disbelief: whether men know it or not – indeed, whether they are even interested in it or not – they are all saved, in that no possibility exists for their rejection or even their own voluntary defection! Küng does not deal with this point at any length, either in his discussion of Barth or of Trent. It is clear that Barth's insistence upon the triumph of grace in the face of human sin stands in the sharpest of contrasts to Trent's insistence upon man's cooperation in his own justification. Even Küng cannot disguise the patent difference at this point by giving Trent a Thomist gloss!

We do not propose to develop this point here. Barth's doctrine of election has been the subject of much criticism by his fellow Reformed theologians, and it would be misleading to regard Barth as characteristic of Protestantism in this respect. The point which we wish to make concerns the status of *Unigenitus* itself. Vatican I, when defining the dogma of papal infallibility, declared that when the pope 'speaks *ex cathedra* (that is, when discharging the duty of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal church) . . . he is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine redeemer willed that his church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith and morals, and such definitions of the Roman Pontiffs are irrevocable, of themselves, and not by the consent of the church'.<sup>28</sup> It is clear that *Unigenitus* comes under the terms of this declaration, and that it therefore appears to be endowed with a retrospective infallibility. Its claim to be considered in the formulation of Roman Catholic teaching on justification cannot be ignored, for this reason.

The significance of *Unigenitus* to the Evangelical is that he recognizes therein many theological propositions with which he either sympathizes or identifies, and is thus forced to ask whether he too is condemned by it. It is at this point that certain obscurities and difficulties arise. For example, what *is* the status of this constitution within Roman Catholicism? The fact that it consists of a series of condemned propositions leads to the suggestion that it is possible that the propositions are only condemned if they are understood in a particular sense – but if this is the case, we are entitled to know what

these particular interpretations actually are. There is a suggestion that *Unigenitus* was, in fact, essentially a political document, aimed at the French church during a particularly troublesome period – but if this is the case, may we also apply similar extenuating considerations to other infallible declarations – e.g., *Ineffabilis Deus*, which defined as dogma the immaculate conception?

To summarize this section: the post-Tridentine debate on justification was effectively brought to a close with the publication of a papal document, which now appears to have the status of infallibility conferred upon it, which censures a series of propositions, many of which correspond to Evangelical teaching, and most of which would be regarded by Protestants as unworthy of censure in any manner. This document has not received any attention worth mentioning in Küng's discussion of the relationship between Roman Catholic and Barthian teaching on justification, and appears to have been the subject of neglect generally, even within Roman Catholicism. The lack of clarity is unsatisfactory to the Evangelical, who wishes the status and the precise content of the document in question spelt out – and ARCIC II provides an excellent forum for this to be done. If this is *not* done, it is difficult to see how any consensus on justification can have any significance, when the most important source of recent years relating to the subject has not been properly assessed and evaluated. Evangelicals are often accused of being unnecessarily anxious concerning Roman Catholic teaching on justification: this is simply not the case, because of such obscurities and difficulties relating to this teaching, and which ARCIC II is under obligation to resolve.

Finally, it will be evident in this respect that the question of authority is inseparable from, and quite possibly prior to, that of justification. The decree of the Council of Trent on justification is open to a considerable degree of latitude in regard to its interpretation, and such latitude can undoubtedly be exploited by ARCIC II. *Unigenitus*, however, is embarrassingly precise at points, which makes its status all the more vital to establish.

### III

In the previous sections, we have indicated that a considerable spectrum of theologies of justification exists within both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic church: it should therefore be possible to find some areas of agreement in addition to the common heritage of the western churches. Justification, however, remains a complex issue, having ramifications in other areas of doctrine which cannot be ignored – for example, in Mariology. In the present study, we have attempted to demonstrate that there remain certain hermeneutical questions concerning both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic understanding of how man is justified before God, and that until a

greater degree of clarity is achieved, certain difficulties will inevitably remain. To put this more precisely: the fact that neither Anglicanism nor Roman Catholicism can be said to define one single doctrine of justification makes it inevitable that any agreement reached by ARCIC II will be dependent upon the persons present, considered in relation to their individual theologies of justification. As such, the difficulty relating to the Colloquy of Regensburg is again raised: in what sense do these individuals represent the communities from which they are drawn? In the case of the Roman Catholic church, the magisterial pronouncements on justification thence come to be of considerable significance, which raised the question of 1) the precise status, 2) the actual content, of *Unigenitus*. The considerable similarities between Jansenism and Protestantism in relation to justification are thus likely to surface as a matter of importance, in that if the condemned propositions are *not* heretical in the sense in which Evangelical Anglicans have understood them, the question of the sense in which they *are* heretical as used by the Jansenists becomes acutely pressing, given the apparent infallible status of *Unigenitus*.

These questions are not merely of interest to Anglican Evangelicals, but to Protestants in general, and in particular those who would consider themselves 'Calvinist' in their theologies of grace, adopting the essential position of the Synod of Dort, with its five points. ARCIC II can do Christendom as a whole a great service by attempting to clarify some of the points which we have raised here. I am sure I speak for many when I wish them well in their task!

#### NOTES

- 1 WA 40, I.357.18-22
- 2 For the difficulties associated with the authority of Orange II, see J.M. Todd, ed., *Problems of Authority: An Anglo-French Symposium*, DLT, London 1964, pp. 63-64.
- 3 H. Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez Thomas d'Aquin*, Droz, Paris 1944, pp. 94-5; 114-121.
- 4 See A.E. McGrath, 'The Anti-Pelagian Structure of "Nominalist" Doctrines of Justification', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 57, 1981, pp. 107-119, *in fine*.
- 5 Alistair E. McGrath, 'Forerunners of the Reformation? A Critical Examination of the Evidence for Precursors of the Reformation Doctrines of Justifications', *Harvard Theological Review* 75, 1982, pp. 219-242.
- 6 Sess. VI Can. 16.
- 7 H. Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*, Burns & Oates, London 1964, p. 264.
- 8 J.H. Newman, *Lectures on Justification*, 3rd edn.; Rivingtons, London 1874, p. 154.
- 9 Alistair McGrath, 'John Henry Newman's "Lectures on Justification": The High Church Misrepresentation of Luther', *Churchman* 97, 1983, pp. 112-122.

- 10 J.H. Newman, *Apologia pro Vita sua*, Dent, London 1966, p. 86.
- 11 See Alister McGrath, 'The Emergence of the Anglican Tradition on Justification 1600-1700', *Churchman* 98, 1984, forthcoming.
- 12 Newman, *Lectures*, p. 402.
- 13 See H.J. McSorley, *Luther, Right or Wrong?* Augsburg, Minneapolis 1969, pp. 362-366.
- 14 See D. Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy*, CUP, Cambridge 1972, pp. 45-61, and references therein.
- 15 On this, see R. Braunisch, *Die Theologie der Rechtfertigung im Enchiridion (1538) des Johannes Cochlaeus*, RGST, Münster i. W.: 1974. See further R. Stupperich, 'Der Ursprung des Regensburger Buches von 1541 and seiner Rechtfertigungslehre', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 36, 1939, pp. 88-116.
- 16 Fenlon, op. cit., p. 55.
- 17 H. Jedin, *History of Trent*, 2 vols, Nelson, London 1957-61, I, p. 385.
- 18 E.g. R.G. England, *Justification Today: The Roman Catholic and Anglican Debate*, Latimer, Oxford 1979.
- 19 A.E. McGrath, 'Justification: Barth, Trent and Küng', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34, 1981, pp. 517-529.
- 20 Jedin, op. cit., II, p. 309.
- 21 Küng, op. cit., pp. 257-60.
- 22 I.e., *condign* merit, to use the proper term.
- 23 Küng, op. cit., p. 253 - cf. p. 252.
- 24 The interesting study of W.F. Dankbaar, 'Calvijns oordeel over het Concilie van Trente, bepaaldelijk inzake het Rechtvaardigings-decreet', *Nederlandsch Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 45, 1962, pp. 78-112 suggests that Trent's concession of the 'sola fide' refers only to the preparation for justification, and not to the act of justification itself.
- 25 We have analysed these in relation to the Tridentine decree on justification: Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3 vols, Clarke, Cambridge to be published shortly, II.
- 26 Text in H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 24-25 edn, Herder, Barcelona 1948, D. 1351-1451.
- 27 E.g. the excellent study of G.C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Paternoster, London 1956. For a highly critical analysis of the influence of Barth's doctrine of predestination on his doctrine of the work of Christ, see Alister McGrath, 'Karl Barth als Aufklärer? Die Relation seiner Lehren des Werkes Christi und der Prädestination des Menschen', *Kerygma und Dogma* 30, forthcoming.
- 28 Denzinger, op. cit., D. 1839.

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