

Editorial.

THE fourth Centenary of the death of Martin Luther has focussed attention on the great Christian doctrine of Justification by Faith, which was the inspiration, dynamic and victory of the Reformation. It has been said that one of the urgent needs to-day is for a new emphasis on the teaching of this doctrine. This is true, but the real secret of the vitalising power of the Reformation was not the rediscovery of this vital doctrine of New Testament theology, which had been falsified by mediaeval teaching, but in a deep spiritual experience of its truth by the reformers.

In opposition to "the general belief that man could merit God's favour by good deeds of his own, and that works of mercy, charity and self-denial procured (through the intercession of Christ or perhaps of the Virgin Mary) pardon for sin and acceptance with God," Luther fought tenaciously, asserting by his doctrine of "justification by faith only" that man is justified only by the merits of our Saviour Christ and that the sole instrument of his justification is faith. In the great crisis of Luther's life it was not a question of belief in this doctrine as opposed to the dogma of justification by works, but a struggle of the soul, the reality of the burden of sin and the consciousness of guilt; "my conscience was filled with trouble and torment." As with St. Paul, so with Luther, the sublime, divine truth flashed into his heart, "the just shall live by faith," with mighty liberating power, "when by the Spirit of God I understood these words, I entered by an opened door into the very Paradise of God. From that hour I saw the precious and Holy Scriptures with new eyes."

It was a deep personal experience which revolutionised his life and revitalised the Christian Church. The same can be said of Wycliffe, Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer. It was this spiritual experience, through the revelation of the cardinal message of the Gospel, which was the starting-point of the Reformation. As Lindsay declares: "The Reformation started from this personal experience of the believing Christian, which it declared to be the one elemental fact in Christianity which could never be proved by argument and could never be dissolved away by speculation. It proclaimed the universally neglected truth of mediaeval theology, that in order to know God man must be in living touch with God Himself. The great reformers never attempted to prove this truth by argument; it was something self-evident, seen and known, when experienced." It was this experience which gave them the great assurance. They knew they were accepted before God, they knew that they had peace with God, they were justified before Him; all the guilt of their sin had been met by Jesus Christ, and his righteousness was imputed to them. This vitalising truth we need to recapture to-day; it is the realised experience of "justified by faith only" which will revive the Church in our day, as it did in the 16th and 18th centuries.