

## The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

Some comments from an Evangelical Anglican perspective arising out of ecumenical dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. The declaration was signed on 31st October 1999 (482 years to the day after Luther pinned his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg).

Gerald Bray and Paul Gardner

### 1. Introductory comments

In 1980 our present archbishop, speaking of the doctrine of 'Justification' finished an article he had written with the following comments: "The consequences of this doctrine for the life of the Church are momentous. It affects our ministry and priesthood, the sacraments of the Church, penance and discipline, our pastoral doctrine and our service in the world, because the doctrine explains that the work of Christ is utterly decisive and completely satisfactory for the entire needs of the Church".<sup>1</sup> It is because we share this view of the importance of this doctrine that we offer here some brief comments on the 'Joint Declaration' (JD). Furthermore, we offer these comments because, as Anglicans, we are embarked upon similar ecumenical dialogue with the Roman Catholic church. We also want to provide indications of where we would wish to see further debate, discussion and clarification before we could be party to any similar 'joint declaration' that might be made between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church.

In any ecumenical dialogue there are often a number of distinct areas of discussion that can too easily become confused and ambiguous when there is pressure to produce a final document or to come to some 'agreement'. For example, in the JD, there is a need for both sides to articulate again for this generation what they actually believe. There is the need to see whether the two parties have actually understood each other properly and to see whether the historical statement of differences on the doctrine accurately reflects the

---

<sup>1</sup> George Carey, "Justification by Faith in Recent Roman Catholic Theology" in *The Great Acquittal* Gavin Reid (ed.) (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1980), p. 88.

extent of current differences. The JD seeks to do this. However, this raises further questions, for there is then the need to be clear as to whether modern statements, being made by theologians round an ecumenical discussion table, accurately reflect where their own denomination or tradition actually stands. It is also vital that any document seeking to express unity, as this JD does, must be as unambiguous as possible and thoroughly clear on the meaning of words that are used, specially where those words have been the subject of debate and division in earlier generations. We shall see that in this area and others the ambiguity of the document leaves us with serious questions about the type of consensus that has really been achieved. It has also left us as *Evangelical* Anglicans concerned that in any of our discussions with Roman Catholics there should be greater clarity in the expression of our agreements and disagreements.

## 2. The Preamble of the JD

The preamble spells out the differences between the two churches on the doctrine of justification, rightly stating that at the time of the Reformation the Roman Catholic Church ‘... asserted and defended a doctrine of justification of a different character’ from that espoused by the Reformation churches. Because of the significant status of this doctrine as central still to the modern Lutheran understanding of Christ’s work and of the church, the preamble rehearses their many papers and discussions where ‘Justification’ has been central.

This section clearly indicates that the JD ‘does not cover all that either church teaches about justification’, but goes on to say that the two churches have reached a ‘common understanding’ on the doctrine and any ‘remaining differences’ are ‘no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations’ (Para 5). This certainly reflects accurately the content of the JD but also highlights one of a number of serious deficiencies with the work, namely, that certain other doctrines relate directly to justification and are not dealt with here. Presumably this is because they would contradict or seriously undermine some of the clearer statements of consensus.

## 3. Anglican Concerns

At no point in the JD is there any mention of Anglicans, but it would be

wrong to think that the paper does not concern us as well. For a start, various Anglican churches have recently moved into virtual inter-communion with different Lutheran bodies, which means that a dialogue of this kind involves Anglicans almost as much as it does Lutherans.

Secondly, there is no doubt that the Church of England adopted the Lutheran view of justification as early as 1536 (in the Ten Articles), following detailed theological discussions between ambassadors of King Henry VIII and both Luther and Melancthon in Wittenberg. From that date to this, all the Anglican formularies have maintained this position. It is now most clearly expounded in Articles XI-XIV and in the homily on justification, which was composed by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in 1547, only a year after Luther's death. This came very soon after the Roman Church published its own declaration concerning justification at the Council of Trent (13 January 1547). There is therefore every reason to suppose that the Anglican doctrine of justification is a faithful reflection of Luther's own teaching, preserved to this day in a historically authentic form, and that it was consciously opposed to the Tridentine decree on the subject, though it did not attempt to refute the latter in any detail.

In the debate between Lutherans and Rome, therefore, Anglicans are clearly on the side of the former. Having said that, it must also be remembered that the Church of England never became 'Lutheran' in any recognisable sense, and there have been times since the sixteenth century when theological relations between the two communions have been less than cordial. This is at least partly because Anglicans have taken their theological framework not from Lutheranism, but from the Reformed churches, whose covenant theology was mediated to them by a long succession of divines, beginning with John Jewell and continuing to the present day. It may be an exaggeration to say that Anglicans are Calvinists in the way that the Presbyterians and other Reformed churches are, but there is no doubt that Anglican theology has moved in the orbit of Reformed theology, rather than of Lutheran, for most of its post-Reformation history, and this fact nuances the Anglican approach to the doctrine of justification.

In particular, it means that Anglicans are less inclined than are Lutherans to stress the centrality of justification as 'the first and chief article' of the Christian faith, and would hesitate to make it, in Luther's words, 'the ruler and judge over all other Christian doctrines' [para 1]. Instead of this, Anglicans tend to give justification a key role within the order of salvation

(*ordo salutis*), which assumes greater overall importance. This approach can be observed in the homily on justification, which is actually called the homily 'on the salvation of all mankind'. Justification is its central theme, but it does not set the theological agenda in the way that it would in a Lutheran context.

A similar distance from Lutheran concerns can be observed in the Anglican attitude towards the Lutheran antithesis of 'law' and 'gospel'. The JD says [para 32]:

Lutherans state that the distinction and right ordering of law and gospel is *essential for the understanding of justification* [italics ours]. In its theological use, the law is demand and accusation. Throughout their lives, all persons, Christians also, in that they are sinners, stand under this accusation which uncovers their sin so that, in faith in the gospel, they will turn unreservedly to the mercy of God in Christ, which alone justifies them.

Sympathetic though Anglicans are to the affirmation that it is only faith in Christ which can justify sinners, we recoil from the notion that the law is primarily an accuser. This is one of its functions, but it must be seen in the wider context of God's covenant with his people, in which the law plays a fundamentally positive part (witnessed, for example, by the recital of the Ten Commandments in Anglican services of Holy Communion). If it is really true that the Lutheran understanding of the relationship between 'law' and 'gospel' is essential to their understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith, then it must be said that the Anglican approach is conceptually different from the Lutheran one, even if the content of the doctrine itself is similar. Here, as elsewhere, Anglicans (and especially Evangelical Anglicans) are more at home with Reformed thinking than they are with any kind of Lutheranism, and this will affect their response to certain aspects of the JD. It is therefore too simplistic to say that Anglicans and Lutherans are one and the same on this issue, even though their positions are certainly far closer to each other than either is to that of Tridentine Catholicism.

#### 4. The Biblical message of Justification. (JD part 1)

The first main section of the JD seeks to set forth the biblical understanding of justification. It refers to our 'common way of listening to the word of God in Scripture' which, it is said, has led to 'new insights' that allow this JD.

(para 8) The JD is to be commended for taking Scripture seriously and starting at this point rather than at the points of controversy. It is therefore entirely appropriate (and genuinely encouraging) that this section should be written without any sign of confessional bias. However, it is a deeply disappointing section and Evangelical Anglicans will no doubt say that it raises more questions than it answers.

First, there is a real failure to place the many quoted Scriptures in their biblical context. Even when verses which contain the word 'Justification' are mentioned, they are left dangling out of context, so that it is by no means clear what they are supposed to mean. In fact, the JD talks of 'diverse treatments of "righteousness" and "justification"' in different New Testament books, and then proceeds to cite a number of verses without examining those differences or establishing that there really is such diversity.

When talking of Paul's epistles we read that here 'also, the gift of salvation is described in various ways...'. The upshot is that the paragraph concludes that 'justification' is one of the 'chief' of these descriptions of the gift of salvation. While we would agree that 'justification' is part of God's gift of salvation, it misses the point of New Testament teaching and certainly of the Reformation arguments if we simply now agree together that this is indeed part of the 'gift of salvation'. Surely neither side has ever disagreed about this! The matter that concerns us as Evangelicals, and concerned the Reformers and Roman Catholics of the sixteenth century, has to do with the manner by which people are justified and hence the specific context in Scripture which alone can help us identify the fairly restricted nature of this metaphor. We need to know what justification actually *is*! Since a number of metaphors are used in the New Testament to describe aspects of salvation, we must allow each its full weight and this can only be discovered by careful contextual biblical work.

In paras 10 and 11 the JD appears to begin to tackle this. But the section is very disappointing and still leaves us with the question with which we started. We are told that:

Justification is (*sic*) the forgiveness of sins (*cf.* Rom. 3:23-5; Acts 13:39; Luke 18:14), liberation from the dominating power of sin and death (Rom. 5:12-21) and from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:10-14). It is acceptance into communion with God; already now, but then fully in

God's coming kingdom (Rom. 5:1f). It unites with Christ and with his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:5). It occurs in the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism and incorporation into the one body (Rom. 8:1f, 9f; 1 Cor. 12:12). All this is from God alone, for Christ's sake, by grace, through faith in 'the gospel of God's Son' (Rom. 1:1-3).

Undoubtedly, this is a stirring recital of Bible verses, but hardly a description of what justification *is*. It is just another statement of the context in which justification finds its meaning – the context of salvation. While it is right to look at justification in its wider soteriological context, that should not mean that we skate over justification itself. For example, there is no attempt to show how the use of the word 'righteousness' in Matthew 5:10, 6:33 and 21:32 impacts on the doctrine of justification they are debating. The whole section fails adequately to note the nature of the metaphorical language being used, or that metaphors relating to salvation are more often than not used distinctively and creatively by the biblical writers to help us understand very specific aspects of the *ordo salutis*.

The metaphor concerning 'righteousness' and 'justification' is used much more tightly than paras 10 and 11 indicate, especially when we look, for example, at Romans. This is what the Reformers clearly discovered and much modern biblical scholarship has demonstrated. The forensic nature of the 'guilty/not guilty' verdict in Romans 3:21-6, so vital in Reformation discussions and subsequent Lutheran and Reformed theology, is not singled out at all for comment by the JD. Rather that passage is simply offered as proof that 'justification is the forgiveness of sins'.

While no one would deny that justification has to do with salvation, which has to do with forgiveness of sins, it is interesting that Paul does not mention forgiveness itself until Romans 4. In Romans 3 the emphasis is strongly upon the justice of God, the wrath of God, and the way in which a sinner can be 'justified' and yet God still remain 'just'.

The overall effect of this is that a section which ought to be foundational to the whole declaration, and which contains the greatest promise of genuine agreement among the various parties, is the most disappointing of all, because it fails to grapple with the issues raised by theological reflection on the texts quoted.

The second section, which consists of a single paragraph [para 13], argues that this common understanding of Scripture ought to be enough to reach a viable ecumenical agreement, thereby rendering the sixteenth-century condemnations obsolete. But the ‘common understanding’ thus far articulated in the JD is far from specific enough as we have seen. Even if the scholars who drew up the JD had themselves entered into all the discussions of the meanings of the verses quoted in their contexts, the document fails to give us anything like enough detail to be satisfied that consensus on the texts themselves and their meaning has in fact been reached.

## 5. A common understanding?

The third section [paras 14-18] gives a brief outline of what this common understanding of justification, based on Scripture, is. It is followed immediately by a lengthy fourth section [paras 19-391], subdivided into seven further sections, which expounds this common understanding in greater detail. These sections of the JD are its heart, because it is in them that we find what its authors understand as the common ground which can now unite Roman Catholics and Lutherans on justification. They now build on the first section on Scripture.

Sadly, there are relatively few references to the biblical text in these sections, and no attempt has been made to integrate what is now said with the long catena of quotes in the first section. More seriously, there is no sign that the dialogue partners have engaged in any way with the debates raging among New Testament scholars even today about the meaning of terms like ‘justification’ and ‘the righteousness of God’ as these are used by the apostle Paul, particularly in Galatians and Romans. The problem we faced with the earlier material, that it failed to engage with the particularity of different metaphors to do with salvation, is here seen even more clearly. The lack of precise definition or even precise analysis of previous definitions of terms leads to a superficiality throughout these sections. Vagueness seems to be the order of the day.

Although the primacy of Scripture is clearly stated, it is not seriously applied to the discussion, which is carried on along other lines. This comes across clearly in the statement that ‘justification is the work of the Triune God’ [para 15]. It is now very fashionable, almost *de rigueur*, to refer everything to the

Trinity, but although it is obvious that this can be supported theologically (since *everything* is ultimately the work of the Trinity), the context it provides is so broad that the word ‘justification’ loses the precise meaning which it has had since the sixteenth century debates. Consider the following:

The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord [*sic*] with the will of the Father.

But what is ‘justification’ according to this statement? The difficulty is not that the above lines are false, but that they are too vague. In what way is Christ ‘our righteousness’ and, even more critical to the main debate, ‘in what way does that righteousness become our righteousness?’ This is tackled briefly further on in the JD, but it is significant that there is no clear statement of the forensic base of this metaphor either here or later.

Surely it is significant that the JD does not tie things down by specifically saying that justification is the deliverance of the believer from God’s condemnation, a deliverance brought about by the application of Christ’s atoning sacrifice to his or her life. Why does it not state openly that justification means that when the believer stands before the judgement seat of God, he or she is pardoned because of Christ’s sacrifice? In that sacrifice he has paid the price for our sins and made us ‘righteous’, not by changing us into something better than what we were before, but by covering us with the ‘alien righteousness’ of Christ, which is imputed (or ‘reckoned’) to us as ours. The suspicion must be that clarity of this kind has been avoided because it would provoke disagreement between the parties concerned, and the rest of the document only makes that suspicion greater.

Further evidence of this vagueness can be found in para 16, which begins with the statement that ‘all people are called by God to salvation in Christ’. If this means that it is only in and through Christ that salvation is possible and that the church is called to preach this message to everyone, no-one will object to it. But if it means (as it more naturally suggests) that everybody is actually called by God, there will be disagreement. For in that case, either everyone is saved and ‘justification’ is hardly worth discussing, or people



have the option to reject God's gift. Such a view would hardly be acceptable to Evangelical Anglicans, most of whom would be much happier with the position so ably articulated in Luther's *Bondage of the Will*!

Evangelicals will rejoice at the clarity with which the JD clearly states that our new life in Christ 'is solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift and we receive in faith', adding for good measure that we cannot merit this in any way [para 17]. However, it is important to bear in mind that this was never the issue in dispute. Even in the sixteenth century, all sides understood that justification was by grace through faith and not of merit. Of course, some Protestants will wonder why, if there has always been substantial agreement on this point, there has been any dispute at all! The answer to that lies in the nature-grace framework which became typical of the late medieval church and which remains fundamental to Catholic theology today.

## 6. Nature and grace

This framework can best be expressed in the well-known formula: 'Grace builds on nature and perfects it'. In the context of justification, this means that God's grace works on the human mind and will, enabling them to 'co-operate' with him in receiving his gift of salvation. Catholics do not see this as a 'work' of man, independent of divine grace, but rather as the way in which God normally operates, a point which the JD makes explicit [para 20]. The Protestant view, on the other hand, is that grace subdues nature and replaces it, or to use the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, we must 'be born again' (John 3:7). The Reformers realised that this is not a trivial difference, nor is it merely another way of expressing the same thing. Where Catholics see a fundamental continuity between creation and redemption, the Lutheran and Reformed churches see an equally fundamental discontinuity, expressed in the Bible as dying with Christ in order to rise again with him. Thus, while both sides can say that we are justified by grace through faith, each one understands the word 'grace' in a different way.

This observation is crucial to understanding the fourth section of the JD where, after clearly stating that justification takes place 'solely by God's grace' [para 19], it goes on to develop this theme in a way which tries to

accommodate both views of what grace actually is (and what it does).

One of the more helpful features of the fourth section is that it is subdivided into seven different themes, each one of which contains three paragraphs – one giving the agreed formula, one expounding the Catholic position, and a third expounding the Lutheran one. [NB. In five of the seven subsections, the Lutheran position is stated before the Catholic one, which is given priority in the first and last subsections only.] Thus, interestingly, the statement explaining what Catholics mean by ‘co-operating’ with God’s grace in preparing for and accepting justification [para 20] is balanced by another which says flatly that, from the Lutheran standpoint, ‘human beings are incapable of co-operating in their salvation, because as sinners they actively oppose God and his saving action’. In this connection, Anglicans may remember that Article XIII, which proclaims the uselessness of good works done before justification, assumes the Lutheran, not the Catholic understanding of this, and here it can truly be said that the Lutheran position and the Anglican one are indistinguishable.

## 7. The imputation and imparting of righteousness

The second subsection [paras 22-24] deals with the question of the forgiveness of sins, and what is meant by ‘making righteous’. The common statement actually employs the terms ‘impart’ and ‘impute’, though not in an oppositional way. The JD says that God imparts the gift of new life in Christ to forgiven sinners, to whom he no longer imputes their sin [para 22]. This is a clever use of words, and of course it is true enough in its way, but it nevertheless succeeds in obscuring, rather than in clarifying, the essential point.

God does not impute sin to sinners, because he does not have to. They *are* sinful! The only time God imputes sin to anyone is to Christ on the cross. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21 ‘For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin....’ (RSV). Rather, it is righteousness, not sin, which is imputed to sinners, because otherwise we would have no righteousness.

On the other hand, to say that God ‘imparts’ new life to believers may suggest that his righteousness is somehow infused into them, so that they become progressively less sinful. It does not have to mean this, of course, and

presumably most Protestant readers will simply gloss the word ‘imparts’ as ‘gives’, ignoring its technical theological meaning. But Catholics, with their understanding of grace, will read it differently. They will assume that this ‘new life’ is a renewal of our nature brought about by the saving work of God’s grace, not by a completely fresh start. The next two paragraphs outline the Lutheran [para 23] and the Catholic [para 24] ways of understanding this, and the difference between them will be quite obvious once the nature-grace framework is taken into account. Indeed, perhaps nowhere else in the JD is the difference between the two positions expressed as clearly as it is here (although there is a serious attempt to reconcile them by saying that the two sides ‘complement’, rather than contradict one another).<sup>2</sup>

Though stating the differences between the Lutheran and Catholic position, paragraphs 23 and 24 are worded in such a way that the original disagreement is all but glossed over. There is no attempt at this point to articulate the view of Luther and of modern Evangelical Anglicans that the formal cause of justification is the application by God of an extrinsic righteousness to an altogether sinful human being. Neither is there any attempt to articulate a clear biblical doctrine of sin. The Lutheran understanding of both of these vital matters needed far clearer explanation in the document. If this had been provided, then perhaps it would have become obvious just why the Reformers themselves never thought for a moment that the Roman Catholic teaching of an ‘inherent righteousness’ in the sinner, albeit provided by God, could ever be a formal cause for justification. Once again a clear statement on these differences would have revealed the basic division over the understanding of human ‘nature’ and thus of the type of ‘grace’ needed to effect justification.

We are back to saying that it is all very well that both sides accept that grace is a gift of God bringing new life to the believer, but does this new life renew a pre-existing nature or does it subdue it? To be technical, the whole Roman Catholic *ordo salutis* is at stake here. In the regeneration of baptism God’s grace is infused (*gratia infusa*). With this infused grace and the wiping out of original sin at baptism, the Christian is forgiven and once again enabled (by that grace) to perform good works which will merit justification. A pre-

---

2 This way of handling these particular issues was presaged in the American Roman Catholic/Lutheran dialogue of the early 1980s. (See “Justification by Faith” *Origins: NC Documentary Service* (1983).

existing nature is renewed. How different it is to say that God's judgement of 'not guilty' is founded upon the change in a person's life brought about by God's grace *in* the sinner (what we might call sanctification), and the view of Evangelical Anglicans that the judgement of 'not guilty' is a distinct declarative act based on Christ's work and the imputation of his righteousness to the sinner (which is then to be followed by the grace needed for sanctification).

It seems to us that the basic divide here remains untouched largely because the JD fails to do justice to the historic arguments.

## 8. Baptismal regeneration

The third subsection deals with the relationship of faith to grace, beginning with a joint statement which appears to commend a doctrine of baptismal regeneration:

By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they [believers] are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life. They place their trust in God's gracious promise by justifying faith... [para 25].

No Evangelical can be happy with this, even if it may be possible to interpret the words in some way which removes or reduces the impact of their literal sense. Those who practise infant baptism can hardly say that the newly baptised put their trust in God's promise by faith, justifying or otherwise, since the infants concerned are incapable of any such thing. The Catholic statement that 'persons are justified through baptism as hearers of the word and believers in it' [para 27] makes no sense where infants are concerned, and Evangelicals of all kinds reject it. We may readily grant that baptism is initiation into the Christian life, but unless and until a baptised person accepts this inheritance personally, it stands as a challenge to his or her sinful life, not as a guarantee that salvation has already been granted. Anglican Evangelicals, with their framework of covenant theology, understand infant baptism as analogous to circumcision, which also had to be received spiritually if it was to have any meaning (*cf.* Romans 4). The function of baptism is to proclaim the Gospel and call people to repent and believe in it. It is not in itself any guarantee that the latter has actually occurred. Here,

however, we must admit that most Evangelical Anglicans are much closer to the Reformed position on baptism than to the Lutheran, and that these paragraphs would be far more acceptable to Lutherans than they ever could be to us.

Somewhat surprisingly from an evangelical point of view, the JD spends little time on this subject, but moves directly to the question of works after justification. Article XII sets out the position that such works are both necessary and fruitful, but since they are still the work of sinful human beings they cannot count towards any receiving of ‘merit’ from God. Working from that base, Anglicans can and do accept both the Lutheran distinction between justification and sanctification and the Catholic insistence (which is also biblical) that faith without works is dead.

## 9. The Christian life

The fourth subsection touches on the question of the believer’s continuing sinfulness after justification. This subsection contains noticeably more references to Scripture than any of the others, and Anglicans will have no difficulty assenting to the Lutheran view that a believer is and always will be a justified sinner – *simul iustus et peccator* [para 29]. It is the Catholic view, expressed in paragraph [para 30], which comes across as alien to the Anglican way of thinking, though it fits very well into the medieval understanding of nature and grace, and is even stated in terms inherited from that era. Thus we are told that:

...the grace of Jesus Christ imparted in baptism takes away all that is sin *in the proper sense* and that is *worthy of damnation*. There does however, remain in the person an inclination (concupiscence) which comes from sin and presses towards sin. Since, according to Catholic conviction, human sins always involve a personal element and since this element is lacking in this inclination, Catholics do not see this inclination as sin in an authentic sense.

Here at last we find an attempt to make careful and subtle theological distinctions. However, the notion that some forms of sin are ‘authentic’, whereas others are not, is bound to strike outside observers as bizarre. After all, how can there be such a thing as inauthentic sin? It is also far from clear

how this inclination or concupiscence can get hold of a person's life if authentic sin has been cleansed in baptism. The statement says that concupiscence comes from 'sin', but where is that sin located, and is it authentic or inauthentic? Most Anglicans will be lost long before reaching this point, and will find it difficult to accept the notion that sin is anything other than what it is – perfectly 'authentic' disobedience to God. There is perhaps no other part of this JD where Anglicans of almost every shade will find themselves more at home with the Lutheran position.

## 10. Law and Gospel

The fifth subsection deals with the traditional Lutheran conception of the antithetical relationship between law and Gospel. The common statement says that 'Christ has fulfilled the law and by his death and resurrection has overcome it as a way to salvation' [para 31]. No Anglican would quarrel with that. Here in fact, most Anglicans will probably feel more at home with the Catholic statement than with the Lutheran one, because the latter creates too sharp a distinction between these two aspects of divine revelation. Anglicans agree with Catholics that 'the righteous are bound to observe God's commandments' and they also agree that this does not mean that they deny 'that through Jesus Christ God has mercifully promised to his children the grace of eternal life' [para 33]. With the Lutherans, Anglicans agree that believers are sinners all their lives and that they must 'turn unreservedly to the mercy of God in Christ, which alone justifies them', but they will probably be less happy with the statement which immediately precedes this, to the effect that the law is an 'accusation which uncovers their sin' [para 32]. Even if that is true in a sense, most Anglicans do not like to be so negative about the law, which they regard as complementary, not antithetical, to the Gospel.

## 11. Assurance

The sixth subsection deals with the thorny subject of assurance of salvation. Here Evangelical Anglicans will immediately perceive a difference between themselves and the Roman position. Paragraph 36 says this:

Catholics can share the concern of the Reformers to ground faith in the objective reality of Christ's promise, to look away from one's own

experience, and to trust Christ's forgiving word alone. ....one cannot believe in God and at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy. No-one may doubt God's mercy and Christ's merit. Every person, however, may be concerned about his salvation when he looks upon his own weaknesses and shortcomings. Recognising his own failures, however, the believer may yet be certain that God intends his salvation.

This is a remarkable attempt to meet the Protestant position more than half way, and it must be applauded as such, but it still falls short of what Evangelicals believe. Evangelicals do not make the same distinction between objective certainty and subjective uncertainty. No-one will doubt the sufficiency of Christ in the objective sense, but that is not what assurance is about. Assurance, as Evangelicals understand it, is the believer's conscious awareness that he or she is saved, and that no power in heaven or on earth can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38-9). Such assurance goes hand in hand with understanding justification as a declarative act involving the application to the believer of extrinsic righteousness. But to state it that way can draw us away from the fact that here we are dealing with deeply important practical pastoral issues that face most believers at some time in their life. For example, Evangelical pastors will seek to encourage those Christian brothers and sisters who are feeling 'far from God', at some crisis point in their life, to trust in the promises of God and in his past *action*. Thus, since the declaration of righteousness is not dependent upon our continued sanctification or lack of it, or upon how near or far we *feel* God is, but rather upon God and his work of grace *alone*, it is possible to have full assurance. Indeed, this assurance must be based on the obedience of submission to his word.

This is not the same thing as trusting in Christ and hoping for the best, as if something less than that were possible. The words 'intends his salvation' cover a multitude of Catholic ideas and doctrines which are not brought into the open. Many are reflected again in direct pastoral matters for normal Christians. Of what can we be certain after death and why? Roman Catholic theology has undoubtedly changed its attitude to some of these things since Vatican II. Nevertheless, we must ask about the place of purgatory, of penance, of indulgences and so on. All of these teachings have been carefully and systematically reaffirmed in recent years by Roman Catholic theologians. All are directly related to the way in which justification is understood and

particularly to our understanding of its formal cause.

The JD should not be criticised on the basis of what it does not say, but observers must be alerted to the potential minefield here, and the reluctance of Catholics engaged in ecumenical dialogue to touch on these matters in any great detail.

## 12. Good works

The seventh and final subsection deals with the question of good works performed by the justified. This, as we have already noted, is the theme of Article XIII, some of which is echoed in paragraph 37 as follows:

When the justified live in Christ and act in the grace they receive, they bring forth, in Biblical terms, good fruit. Since Christians struggle against sin their entire lives, this consequence of justification is also for them an obligation they must fulfil.

The juxtaposition of good works and continuing sinfulness is one which Anglicans must heartily endorse, but it has to be added that Article XIII expresses the relationship between them somewhat differently. Rather than see good works as an obligation imposed on Christians by their struggle against sin, the Article understands good works as the natural fruit of justification, and regards our ongoing sinfulness as the reason why such works can never be meritorious.

The next paragraph [38] makes a statement that demonstrates very clearly once again that when the formal cause of justification is stated to involve *intrinsic* righteousness, then retaining the state of being justified is inevitably linked to a believer's own works. Evangelicals would have no quarrel with the first half of this sentence:

According to Catholic understanding, good works, made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace....

However, what follows links this directly back into the *way* in which a person remains *justified* or in receipt of the righteousness from God:



...contribute to growth in grace, so that *the righteousness that comes from God is preserved...* [our italics].

Unless these works are done, works that God helps us to do by his grace, then our justification will not be preserved. This is indeed classic Roman Catholic teaching and is precisely why assurance is not as definitive in their theology as it would be in Evangelical Anglican theology. The Evangelical will argue that we must distinguish between that righteousness which is justifying and which needs no 'preserving', in the sense that it is based on the once and for all declaration over the sinner and the perfect crediting of Christ's work for all time to the sinner's account, and that righteousness which we are to live out day by day with God's help. This is the righteousness that is indeed ours as we seek to become Christ-like in our sanctification. This is indeed an obligation but is the *fruit* of the presence of the Spirit in our lives.

### 13. Conclusion

The last five paragraphs of the JD [paras 40-44] sum it up and attempt to describe its significance in the overall context of ecumenical discussion generally. The main conclusion is that Lutherans and Catholics have now reached substantial agreement on the issue of justification, and that 'the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration and emphasis in the understanding of justification ... are acceptable' [para 40]. This is a conclusion which this review of the Declaration has challenged at certain key points. It is not for outsiders to determine what Catholics and Lutherans believe, but if it is really true that Lutherans now find the Catholic positions stated here 'acceptable', then Evangelical Anglicans must beg to differ from them. We may not be as far apart as some people have imagined, but neither are we as close together as this Declaration would have us believe.

Paragraph 41 is an attempt to nullify the condemnations which Lutherans and Catholics levelled at one another in the sixteenth century, and the statement is made that they no longer apply. How this can be squared with what is said about their seriousness in the Preamble [para 1] and restated in the very next paragraph [para 42] is unclear, but it may at least be suggested that there is a certain amount of confusion here, born of the desire to achieve a reconciliation which is hindered by the existence of these historic statements, which the JD has no power to overrule. The final two paragraphs

layout the agenda which remains to be discussed (mainly matters relating to the church, the ministry and the sacraments). It need only be noted here that neither the concept of grace nor the question of purgatory figures in the list, even though it was the attempt to sell God's grace of indulgence (which basically means time off from purgatory) which sparked off Luther's revolt in the first place.

To sum up then, it must be said that much of the agreement which the JD has reached is vague and ambiguous, and that disagreements which might stand in the way have either been related to the status of secondary (and therefore tolerable) matters, or else simply ignored. Anglican Evangelicals cannot be happy with this, anymore than they were happy with the even vaguer statements of ARCIC II. We will continue to press for an honest consideration of the real differences between us, whether these can be resolved or not. We need to penetrate to the level of theological principle and examine, more closely than the JD has done, the extent to which differences at that level have determined the kinds of disagreements alluded to here. Above all, Evangelical Anglicans must insist that the use of Scripture should be more than simply decorative or rhetorical. The Bible must function, and must be seen to function, as the only source of our theological reasoning, and we must not be allowed to stray from its witness. Only when we achieve this will there be a real hope of overcoming the disagreements of centuries and of bringing about reconciliation in a unity based in truth and love.<sup>3</sup>

GERALD BRAY is Anglican Professor of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University and PAUL D. GARDNER is Vicar of Hartford, Cheshire and Chairman of the Church of England Evangelical Council.

---

3 Many other Evangelical writings have interacted with the Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue over the years, and a number of deeper analyses of the doctrine of justification have been written. For those concerned to understand how evangelicals understand the doctrine today and how they look at the biblical and theological material, we would like to recommend, *Right with God. Justification in the Bible and the World Evangelical Fellowship* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1992 ed. D.A. Carson); *Roman Catholicism. Evangelical Protestants Analyse what Divides and Unites Us*; J. Armstrong (ed.), (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1994); See specially the article by A.E. McGrath "What shall we make of ecumenism?" which takes Justification as a case study; *Here we stand. Justification by faith today* (J.I. Packer and others, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986); John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1986); Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1993).