

A BRIEF COMMENT ON DR CHADWICK'S PAPER

I offer the following observations on Dr Chadwick's comprehensive and sensitive paper, not because I would venture to make any corrections in it, but simply because I was asked to append a note.

The central point at which the Fathers of Trent saw themselves in disagreement with Luther, as they understood him, was the doctrine of what is often called gratia gratum faciens (grace which makes one pleasing to God, also called sanctifying or habitual grace), as opposed to merely forensic or imputed justification. The Tridentine decrees do not, I believe, include the term gratia gratum faciens, preferring synonymous expressions. Thus it is said that justification consists not only of the remission of sins, but also "sanctification and the renewal of the inner man"; that by the merit of Christ's passion through the Holy Spirit the charity of God is poured out into the hearts of the justified and inheres in them; that we are "renewed in the spirit of our mind"; that we each "receive our own justice" ("iustitiam in nobis recipientes unusquisque suam" (sess. VI, ch. 7; DS 1528-1530).

The distinction between mortal and venial sin (ibid. ch. 11; DS 1537) should be seen within the context of this central doctrine. Though Trent did not, I think, define mortal sin, it defined venial sins as the "at least light and daily sins" into which "the most holy and just men" fall without ceasing to be just. At bottom the distinction is not between sins involving serious matter and those involving

less serious matter, but between sins which extinguish the charity inhering in the soul so that one ceases to be pleasing to God, and those which do not. Some modern theologians explain this difference between mortal and venial sin in terms of a fundamental option. Mortal sin would then be the turning of the will away from God at such a deep level, that one's less basic moral choices are made as the realisation of this fundamental sinful disposition; venial sin is committed when a particular moral choice is inconsistent with one's fundamental option for God, but does not involve the personality at so deep a level as to turn the basic direction of the will away from him.

Another doctrine which is connected with the notion of inherent justification is that of merit. That merit follows but does not precede grace was taught by St Augustine before Trent: "Grace is not anticipated by any merits. A reward is owing (debetur) to good deeds, if they are performed; but the grace to perform them, which is not owed, comes first" (Op. imperf. c. Iul., i.133, quoted in the Second Council of Orange, can. 18, A.D. 529; DS 388). Scotus and his school had insisted that even after justification good works are meritorious only by virtue of God's free "acceptance". This conception had formed one strand in Aquinas' understanding of merit. If man's works are considered in themselves (secundum substantiam), there can be no equality between the works and the reward, because of the inequality between man and God; therefore "man can only merit before God on the presupposition of a divine ordination, of such a kind that by his work and action man is to obtain from God as a sort of reward (quasi mercedem) that for which God has allotted him a

power of action. In this sense man can be said to merit eternal life by virtue of "fitness" (congruitas); "for it seems fit that God should make return, in proportion to the excellence of his power, to a man who works in the degree of his own power." But there is a second strand to Aquinas' thought. "If we consider the meritorious work so far as it proceeds from the grace of the Holy Spirit, then it is meritorious of divine life by equivalence (ex condigno)", because, as Jn 4.14 implies, "the value of the merit is assessed by the power of the Holy Spirit moving us to eternal life" (ST 1a 2ae 114, arts. 1 and 3). The decrees of Trent avoid the term ex condigno, preferring to speak of "true merit" (vere promeruisse, vere mereri; sess. VI, ch. 16 and canon 32; DS 1546 and 1582). Otherwise Trent follows Aquinas closely, seeing eternal life to be "as it were a reward" (tamquam merces, quoting Augustine, De gratia et libero arbitrio, 8.20), and to be the result of the virtus that flows from Christ the Vine to his branches. The council also comes close to the idea of God's acceptance or ordination when it speaks of eternal life as a "grace" which had been "mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus" (DS 1545-1546; Jn 4.14 is quoted again).

The doctrine of inhering justification also perhaps explains canon 10 (DS 1560), which denies that men become "formally just" by Christ's own justice (see Chadwick, p. 19). The canon presumably refers back to ch. 7, where (adapting St Augustine, De Trin. xiv.12.15) the Council affirms that there is a single formal cause of justification, namely the justice of God by which he makes us just, not the justice by which he is himself just (DS 1529). The point is

that justice is not merely imputed to man, but becomes by God's gift a formal principle in him, part of his living and dynamic personality. This justice inhering in man is also God's, because it comes from him; but it is not the same as the justice of God by which he rewards good works (ch.. 16; DS 1545, 1547).

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