

specialty of foundations, the theologian is furnished with a horizon that is required to grasp the meaning of doctrines.²⁸

Finally, there is the functional specialty of *communications*. With it, doctrines that have been understood by the theologian manifest themselves in his or her external relations with art, language, literature, other religions, the natural and human sciences, philosophy, history, and men and women of all cultures, classes, through the use of diverse media of communication.²⁹ The functional specialty of communications facilitates the relationship of the Churches by helping them to express their agreement in matters of constitutive and effective meaning of doctrine while they await common cognitive agreement.

GOD'S GRACE AND HUMAN COOPERATION IN THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

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Introduction

In Germany, October 31, Reformation Day, is a public holiday in the predominantly Protestant areas, while November 1, All Saints Day, is a public holiday in the predominantly Catholic areas. In the year 2004 both Protestants and Catholics commemorated the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Augsburg by which they express their common faith and removed condemnations that had separated them before.¹

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther published 95 theses in which he attacked abuses in the Church and in other writings he insisted very much that we are justified and saved by God's grace alone and not by fasting, vigils, gaining indulgences or other human work. He did not "nail" the theses at the door of the Church, but sent them to the competent bishops, hoping they would react against the abuses. As they did not, his friends had the theses printed and they spread like a bush fire.²

Since the first centuries of the Christian era, Catholics have admired the good works of the saints as example for their lives and they have venerated the saints as helpers on their way to salvation. Since the 8th century, the 1st of November has been celebrated, as the feast day of all the saints.

¹Informationsdienst, (Bonn:Kathol. Nachrichten Agentur, 3rd Nov. 2004), p. 2. Oekumene, Standortbestimmung am Jubiläumstag.

²Erwin Iserloh in Hubert Jedin, ed., *History of the Church*, vol.V, (London:Burns & Oates, 1980), pp. 47-48.

²⁸Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 130-132; 267-293.

²⁹See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 132-133.

The Problem

Here we touch the mystery of the coexistence and cooperation of God's grace and human freedom in the justification and sanctification of man. How are they related to each other? How can we combine the Lutheran emphasis on grace with the Catholic consideration of the good work of the saints? Is justification partly God's work and partly human work, a synergism, that is, God and man working together, with God doing half of the work and man the other half? That would mean salvation is grace plus the work and man the other half? That would mean salvation is grace plus freedom. Or, is it completely God's work or completely the work of human freedom, a monergism in which only one partner works, with God alone active and man merely passive? That would mean salvation is grace without or against freedom. Are God's works and man's work entirely joined to each other? That would mean salvation is freedom in grace. The good work is caused by God's action and by human action that are joined together in a dialogue of love, something similar to the operation of the divine and human nature in Christ.³

The History

In the Bible we see how much Paul insists on justification through faith and not by observance of law. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph 2; cf. Rom 1:16-17; 3:21-30; 1 Cor 1:30; Gal 2:15-20; Phil 3:7-9; Titus 3:4-7). St. James in his letter insists very much on the need for good works. "Faith without work is dead" (cf. Jas 2:26).

In his controversies with the Pelagians, Augustine taught that we can do nothing meritorious without God. In our merit God crowns his own gifts.⁴ Justification is pure grace given by God and received through

faith. This comes out especially in his treatises *On Nature and Grace* and *On Grace and Free Will*.⁵

The Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, wanted to find a "merciful God", but it seemed to him that all his ascetical efforts were without success. They did not make him holy. He was very much concerned about the sale of indulgences and about other external forms of piety in the Catholic Church of his time. Meditating on Rom 1:17: "justus autem ex fide vivit", and from the study of other passages in St. Paul and in the writing of St. Augustine he came to the personal conviction that human works cannot save us. Only God's grace alone that we receive through faith can justify us. In official Lutheran writings, Catholic practice and Catholic teaching on justification were rejected as "human works" and were condemned.⁶

The Catholic Church answered in 1954 in the 6th edition of the Council of Trent. She clarified her doctrine and tried to reform the lives of Christians. She agreed with Lutheran rejection of Pelagianism that attributes too much autonomy to man in his spiritual life, and she agreed also with the unique role attributed to Christ. But she rejected and condemned Lutheran teachings on the "total" corruption of human nature by sin, the one-sided role attributed to grace and limited view of human cooperation in the process of justification.⁷

There were controversies between Dominicans following Domingo Banez and Jesuits following Luis Dewey Molina about the role of God's grace and human freedom in the performance of good acts. These controversies, "De Auxiliis", about the help that God gives us for our good acts, lasted from 1582-1748. The Dominicans wanted to safeguard the supremacy of God with their theory of the "praemonitio". God's grace moves in advance towards a particular action. This theory endangers the value of human freedom and responsibility. Their opponents called them Calvinists in reference to the theory of double predestination. The Jesuits wanted to safeguard human freedom and responsibility. With the theory of

³ Augustine, *De natura et gratia* and *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, in *Opera de San Augustino* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1956), pp. 820-940 and 226-300.

⁴ Smalcald Articles II, 1; Book of Concord, 292.

⁵ Denziger-Schoenmetzer, Nos. 1520-1583.

³ Georg Kraus in Wolfgang Beinert, ed., *Lexikon der Katholischen Dogmatik* (Freiburg-Basel: Herder, 1987), pp. 207-209.

⁴ Cf. Augustine, *Sermon* 298, 4-5; PL 38, 1367.

the "scientia media" they tried to explain God's overview over the unlimited possibility of human freedom. There is danger that God's supremacy over everything is not maintained. Their opponents called them Pelagians, referring to the exaggerated claim of Pelagians to human autonomy. Banezians and Molinists could not come to an agreement. In 1607, Pope Paul V told them they could continue to argue but they should stop condemning each other.⁸

Some Terms Explained⁹

Justification is an action of God by which he makes man "just", by forgiving his sins and renewing his interior life through faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁰ Grace is the manifestation of God's love and favor by a free and unmerited gift through which Jesus Christ operates in man to regenerate and strengthen him, to heal him from sin and to sanctify him.¹¹

Faith is man's answer to God's revelation. It is trusting in God and his promises by which man is justified and sanctified. It is a supernatural gift in as far as man is moved and assisted through the interior help of the Holy Spirit, and it is a free human act because "trusting in God is contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason" (CCC 154).¹²

"Protestant talk about justification by faith corresponds to Catholic talk about justification by grace". "Protestant doctrine (following 1 Cor 13:13) sums up in the triad of faith, hope, and love" (*Joint Declaration*, Appendix to 4.3).¹³ Between justification and renewal (sanctification) there is a distinction but no separation, both are joined in Jesus Christ who is present in faith. (*Joint Declaration*, 26)

⁸ Denziger-Schoenmetzer, No. 1997.

⁹ Explanations given only as far as they relate to the *Joint Declaration*.

¹⁰ Cf. Hamlyn p. 864, CCC 1987-1990, JD 115-16, 22.

¹¹ Cf. Hamlyn p. 690 CCC 1999-2003, JD 25.

¹² Cf. Hamlyn p. 574, CCC 153-154, 160-161, JD 25-27.

¹³ Cf. JD 25-27, JD Appendix To 4, 3, CCC 2000-2002.

The Joint Declaration

The barrier between the Lutheran and the Catholic world continued to exist for more than 400 years. After the Second Vatican Council many efforts were made to bring divided Christians together or nearer to each other. Lutheran and Catholic theologians and Church leaders came together in different meetings for 25 years to examine the biblical foundation of the message of justification and the relationship between faith and good works. They also compared the opposing interpretations and applications that had led to the division and condemnations between Catholics and Lutherans since the 16th century. The result was the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed by representatives of the Vatican Council for Promoting Christian Unity and of the Lutheran World Federation on the 31st October 1999 in Augsburg. The town of Augsburg was chosen because there at the Diets the efforts of keeping Christendom united failed and it was where the Augsburg Confession, a decisive document of Lutheran doctrine, was presented but not accepted.

The declaration contains 44 articles, most of them divided into three parts: together we confess Catholic emphases and fuller explanation, as well as Lutheran emphases and fuller explanation. After questions made by an Official Catholic Response further clarifications were made. Then, after an Official Common Statement together with an Annex were presented, the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church were able to declare that a consensus had indeed been reached in the Joint Declaration "in basic truths of the doctrine of justification":

In Faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the true God. 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 with the will of the Father. Together we confess by grace alone and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit,

who renews our heart while equipping us and calling us to good works.¹⁴

We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are granted the gifts of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life. They placed their trust in God's gracious promise by justifying faith, which includes hope in God and love for him. Such a faith is active in love and thus the Christian cannot and should not remain without works. But whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merit it.¹⁵

Consequences

The consensus refers to the basic truths of the doctrine of justification. The remaining difference of language, theological elaboration and emphasis are acceptable. Lutheran and Catholic explanations are in their differences open to one another and so do not destroy the consensus in the basic truths.¹⁶ "A so called 'differentiated consensus' was reached, that is a consensus in fundamental questions, while unresolved problems remain at issue, but no Church dividing difference any longer exists with regard to the question of justification. Prior existing contradictions were transformed and reconciled in complementary assertions, expressions, concerns and approaches".¹⁷

Some examples:

(a) The justified as sinner: both sides confess that in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ and truly renews the person. But the justified are continuously exposed to the power of sin still pressing its attacks and

¹⁴ Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (hereafter: JD) JD 15.

¹⁵ JD 25.

¹⁶ JD 40.

¹⁷ Walter Kasper, in a conference for Ecumenical Studies, at St. Albans UK, on 17th March 2003.

they are not exempt from a life-long struggle against the selfish desires of the old Adam. The justified must also pray daily to God for forgiveness. Lutherans understand this condition as "simul iustus et peccator", but they do not deny that despite this sin they are not separated from God. This sin does not rule them, but it is ruled (*peccatum regnaturum*) by their union with Christ. For Catholics this inclination to sin, concupiscence, is no longer sin in the real sense, but they do not deny that this inclination is against God's original plan (Cf. 1 John 1:8).¹⁸

(b) The good works of the justified: both sides confess that good works—a Christian life lived in faith, hope and love—follow justification and are its fruits. According to Catholic understanding, good works are made possible by grace and contribute to the growth of grace so that the righteousness that comes from God (sanctifying grace) is preserved and the communion with Christ is deepened. When Catholics affirm the meritorious character of good works, they wish to say that according to biblical witness a reward in heaven is promised to these works and they intend to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions. But they do not contest the character of these works as gifts and do not deny that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace. Lutherans also hold the concept of preservation of grace and of a growth in grace. Sharing in the righteousness of Christ is always complete. There can be growth in its effects in Christian living. Good works are seen as fruits and signs of justification and not as one's own merits. Eternal life is seen as an unmerited reward in fulfillment of God's promise to the believer.¹⁹

(c) The doctrine of justification is seen as a measure or touchstone of Christian faith and it is related to all other truths of faith. This point was discussed and criticized very much. For Luther it was the "article with which the Church stands or falls". It should orient constantly all the teaching and practice of the Church to Christ. When Lutherans emphasize the unique significance of this criterion they do not deny the interrelation and significance of all the other truths of faith. When Catholics feel

¹⁸ Cf. JD 28-30 and Annex 2 A+B.

¹⁹ Cf. JD 37-39 and Annex 2 C+D.

themselves bound to several criteria they do not deny the special function of the message of justification. It has its truth and specific meaning in the overall context of the Church's fundamental Trinitarian confession of faith.²⁰ Christ is the one mediator for all (cf. 1 Tim 2:8:1ff).

The condemnations of the 16th century relating to the doctrine of justification do not apply anymore. The teaching of the Lutheran Churches presented in this declaration does not fall under the condemnations of the Council of Trent. The condemnations of the Lutheran confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration.²¹ The consensus reached can offer a solid basis for further clarifications and researches in open questions that still exist. The Lutheran Churches and the Roman Catholic Church will continue to strive together to deepen this common understanding of justification. It is an encouragement to further theological research and dialogue, e.g., on the relationship between the word of God and Church doctrine, on ecclesiology, ministry and sacraments.²²

On the very day of the signing ceremony and on other occasions Pope John Paul II expressed his joy and satisfaction with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and called it a great step forward in ecumenism and an encouragement on the way to fuller union between Christians.²³

Difficulties

The difficulty some Catholics have in comparing certain texts of St. Paul cf. e.g. Rom 3:28 "we hold that a person is justified by faith, apart from works", with texts of St. James, cf. e.g. 2:24 "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone", can find an answer when we remember that

²⁰ Cf. JD 18 and Annex 3.

²¹ JD 41.

²² JD 43.

²³ Cf. Osservatore Romano (English ed.), November 3rd and 17th, December 22nd 1999 and January 5th 2000.

justification and sanctification proceed in two steps.²⁴ It is first of all the saving action of God where only his grace is active and this we can receive only through faith. Then, as soon as God has initiated the justification that brings about forgiveness of sins and gives us the new life that makes us children of God, we receive from Christ faith, hope and love and are equipped and called to do good works, for which a reward, even in heaven, is promised in Holy Scripture. Certain texts of St. Paul refer to the first step of his saving action; texts of St. James refer to the regeneration that follows this step. But grace is given and needed also for all our good works: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:8:1ff). According to St. Thomas Aquinas, "Grace creates faith not only when faith begins in a person but as long as faith lasts."²⁵

The Joint Declaration on Justification is in agreement with the Catechism of the Catholic Church even though some verbal variations still exist.²⁶

Spiritual Aspects

God in his infinite freedom and love created man in his image as a free person with intellect and free will. The possibility that man can use or abuse his freedom to do something good or something bad is a weakness of our human condition. The fullest realization of our freedom is to do freely what is good. Jesus acted always in this way, to do always the will of his Father (cf. John 8:28ff). In his Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius of Loyola gives us an example of how we can answer God's love with our

²⁴ Cf. e.g. Sam Madugha, "Between Grace, Faith and Justification" in *NACATHS Journal of African Theology* 10 (2000) 89-92.

²⁵ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 4, a. 4, ad. 3.

²⁶ Cf. the sections on Justification, Grace Merit and Holiness. E.g. about merit: "the charity of Christ is the source of all our merits before God. Grace, by uniting us to Christ in active love, ensures the supreme quality of our acts and consequently their merit before God and before men. The Saints have always had a lively awareness that their merits were pure grace" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2011).

love: the contemplation to attain the love of God, by seeking and finding God in all things and thanking him for all his gifts.²⁷ "Take and receive Lord all my freedom, my memory, my intellect and all my will. All that I have and possess you have given me, I give it all back to you, and they are yours. Guide and dispose them according to your will. Give me your grace and your love, for that is enough for me."²⁸

God is Love: He loves us first before we can do anything; he enables us to love him and to love our brothers and sisters cf. 1 John 4:7-17; 21; 5:2. The Angelus is a common Catholic prayer. In a simple form it shows the structure of the cooperation between God and man. God sends the messenger, he takes the initiative. Mary answers with her "fiat", yes, I agree. The result of this cooperation is: "the Word was made flesh". In a similar way God deals with us: He sends a message, he calls us. We are free to answer yes or no. When we answer yes, the fruit of this cooperation is a "good work".

Conclusion

The Joint Declaration brought unity about fundamental truths of the doctrine of justification. It is first of all God who justifies us in and through Christ alone, who saves us only with his grace that we receive only through faith. This saving action of God forgives the sins and imparts the new life, which is sharing in the life of God. This new life enables us and obliges us to do good works, which we can perform with faith, hope and love, given to us by Christ. They are not a diminution of unity in our Christian life, but they are an expression and a genuine enrichment of it. Faith alone justifies; but it must become active in works of love (cf. Gal 5:6); the Last Judgment will be based on works of love (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10; Mt 25:31-46).²⁹

Lutheran emphasis on grace should be a warning against any human attempt to usurp divine power and rights. It reminds us that all we

²⁷ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, transl. by L. J. Puhl, (Mumbai: St Pauls, 1997), Nos. 230-237.

²⁸ *Ibid.* No. 234.

²⁹ Cf. George Kraus, I. C., p. 553

have, we have received (1 Cor 4:7) and that we need God's grace for all good works.³⁰ It can help us to remain humble before God and be tolerant towards other people.

The Catholic consideration of the saints and their good works should help us to remember that in everything God works for good with those who love to do good works. God has freely chosen us to cooperate with him. The saints in heaven are united with us in the Mystical Body of Christ, we belong to one and the same family of God's people. The good works they performed during their lives on earth are examples for us to imitate; and with the power they receive from Christ, they can help us from heaven. The greater the love is that God gives us, the greater is also our freedom to answer his love and to love him also in our brothers and sisters. Our good works should be an expression of this love and of our apostolic zeal.

With regard to the precise form of the cooperation between grace and freedom it is difficult to develop a logical system. The monergism of the Banezians and the synergism of the Molinists can lead to the danger of extreme Calvinism or Pelagianism. With an existential realism, the system of energism takes into account that texts on the role of grace and on the role of human freedom stand next to each other in Holy Scripture. It acknowledges the supreme freedom of God and the God-given freedom of man. They do not exclude each other, but they work with one another in a dialogue of love.³¹

The final statement by the representatives of the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church reads: "We give thanks to the Lord for this decisive step forward to overcoming the division of the Church. We ask the Holy Spirit to lead us further toward that visible unity which is Christ's will."³²

³⁰ Cf. 16th Council of Carthage (AD 418), DS 225-227 Cf. Council of Trent, (AD 1547), DS 1525, 1541

³¹ Cf. George Kraus, I. C., pp. 208-209, 553-555.

³² JD 44.