

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

Timothy Bradshaw

ARCIC 2: Salvation and the Church— Pastoral and Spiritual Implications

Dr. Tim Bradshaw, who is Lecturer in Christian Doctrine at Trinity College, Bristol, offers an examination of an important Anglican-Roman Catholic document.

Introduction

The second agreed statement produced by the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission *Salvation and the Church*¹ has met with far less theological criticism than *The Final Report* of ARCIC 1.² The evangelical constituency has not produced any telling critiques, and the *Observations* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith³ is broadly favourable. What follows has been prompted by deanery and diocesan seminars in Reading and Bristol on ARCIC 2, at which important pastoral implications of the document have emerged clearly. I will first consider some of the few criticisms levelled at ARCIC 2 before moving on to outline some of its pastoral and spiritual significance.

I. Criticisms of ARCIC 2

ARCIC 2 agrees that both justification and sanctification are necessary aspects of the Christian understanding of salvation. Drawing particularly on Augustine, it acknowledges the gift character of our relationship with God through Christ received through personal faith. With Reformation theology, justification is accepted as a forensic term with the connotation of being given the verdict, and this is taken as an aspect of salvation, although by no means the only one according to the range of words found in

¹ ARCIC 2 *Salvation and the Church*, Church House Publishing and Catholic Truth Society, London, 1987.

² ARCIC 1 *The Final Report*, SPCK/CTS, London, 1982.

³ *Observations on Salvation and the Church of ARCIC 2*, CTS, London.

the New Testament.⁴ Justification is that aspect of the one divine act in Christ which declares us in the right with God. The simple message of justification reverses the way of the world and in particular of Western society. Instead of focusing on what the individual has done to earn the prize, it proclaims the gift of status first and urges the recipient then to live it out in life. No mere cancelling of sin, a purely negative idea, justification speaks of positive gift and adoption as sons and daughters of God, co-heirs with Christ.

Sanctification is that aspect which imparts holiness to the people of God as they walk in the Spirit; God is not mocked: there can be no question of seeking to be justified on the grounds of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, without taking up the cross daily and following him. Romans 6 was Paul's reply to those suspecting him of antinomianism: if we were baptized into Christ we were baptized into his death and the sacrificial life. Good works therefore are important, but again are considered as the fruit of grace, Augustine being quoted, 'When God crowns our merits it is his own gifts that he crowns'.⁵ The church, the sign, steward, instrument and sacrament of the gospel and a foretaste of the kingdom, is no mere association of piety, but exists to further Christ's reign in the world publicly and visibly. Here the 'servant model' of the church gains a clear place.

One evangelical commentator perceives a weakness over the 'formal cause' of justification.⁶ The concern being voiced is over the precise reason for our acceptance by God. Is it a mixture of forensic justification and holy living aided by grace? Or is the theological ground that of Christ's righteousness? Here ARCIC 2 can be quoted in favour of this latter view: 'The term justification speaks of a divine declaration of acquittal, of the love of God manifested to an alienated and lost humanity prior to any entitlement on our part. Through the life death and resurrection of Christ, God declares that we are forgiven, accepted and reconciled to him. Instead of our own strivings to make ourselves acceptable to God, Christ's perfect righteousness is reckoned to our account'.⁷ Given that this is what justification means, and that it is this aspect of salvation in Christ, it seems perhaps an over suspicious interpretation to suggest that ARCIC 2 is opting for a view of 'double justification', a mixture of our contribution with

⁴ ARCIC 2, para. 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 23.

⁶ A. McGrath *ARCIC 2 and Justification*, Latimer House, Oxford, 1987, p. 44.

⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 18.

that of Good Friday and Easter to earn acceptance. ARCIC 2, like Calvin, insists on sanctification in the faithful, but not as the ground of our 'being given the verdict'.

Trevor Hart has written an interesting criticism from the angle of Barth and Torrance, suggesting that ARCIC 2 fails to be sufficiently Christological. Western in tendency, it has fallen into what Professor T. F. Torrance called 'the Latin heresy'.⁸ Hart insists that the person of Christ must remain the focus of salvation for the church. The person of Christ must not be marginalized by soteriological themes which somehow gain lives of their own. Western failure in this has led to a purely extrinsic notion of our relationship with Christ, without true participation. But it is hard to see how ARCIC 2 fails to agree with this point. In line with ARCIC 1, it starts with an assertion of *koinonia* with Christ as basic to salvation. The idea of participation with and in Christ remains strong, but Christ himself is the one who justifies and adopts his people into that participation.

Official Roman Catholic criticism so far complains of a lack of clarity in the agreement, and a failure sufficiently to stress sacramental grace in sanctification.⁹

Rejection of ARCIC 2 may well come from theologians for whom the notion of justification as being accorded the status of sonship is simply a quaint doctrinal antique, that is the more liberal wing of probably both the churches in dialogue. John Macquarrie, for example, regards talk of justification as 'even more archaic than the talk about election', and claims that 'the whole notion of justification has been vastly exaggerated in the attention that has been paid to it . . . it is neither indispensable nor specially illuminating'.¹⁰ Macquarrie has a theology which is 'creationist' rather than redemptionist, holding that Being, or 'letting be', (God), constantly accepts all 'beings' of creation, which flow from Being and tend back thither. The Spirit in the cosmos is the unitive Spirit, universally harmonizing the discordances of sin and suffering, gathering beings back into their source. This theology is primarily cosmological in its trinitarianism and articulates the process of differentiation and reunion after the tradition of Plato and Hegel, process being the dominating motif. For this family of theology the cross reveals the unitive process of reconciliation at work universally, and indeed beyond the grave.

⁸ 'Humankind in Christ', SJT vol. 42.1, 1989, p. 67.

⁹ *Observations on Salvation and the Church of ARCIC 2*, CTS, London, pp. 10, 16.

¹⁰ *Principles of Christian Theology* revised edition, SCM, London, 1977, p. 342.

Notions of forensic justification on the ground of the saving act of Christ's sacrifice do not fit into this type of theology, and such dogmas become illustrative of the overall cosmological process. Macquarrie holds that the idea of justification concerns the acceptance by Being of beings, but not linked to any forensically redemptive event. This functions to widen the scope of 'salvation' and also to narrow it. It widens salvation towards universalism; it narrows it in terms of both finality and assurance of salvation, since it leads to heaven, hell and purgatory being a 'continuum through which the soul may move', according to its progress in process.¹¹

II. The Pastoral Significance of Justification?

This commonly held rejection of the forensic dimension salvation, justification, leads to a consideration of its pastoral significance. The heart of the doctrine is that we are accepted by God because of Christ's perfect sacrifice. There is an absoluteness and security about this. It is the 'point' of status on which the 'process' of holy living stands; both, taking Hart's warning, are distinctions within saving act of Christ in the Spirit. But the theological distinction is crucially important pastorally and spiritually.

A major tension of Christian discipleship is that expressed in 1 John: 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us' (1:8), but 'We know that anyone born of God does not sin' (5:18). Perfectionism is not a teaching of the New Testament, but neither is the easy going compromise of accepting the ways of this imperfect world. Christian *koinonia* with Christ needs to uphold the holiness of God, recognizing that discipleship fails to meet this holiness, while retaining trust in the enduring security of Christ's *koinonia* despite that failure.

Pastorally, self acceptance remains an underlying personal problem for many dedicated Christians of all persuasions. If God's acceptance of us remains a matter of ongoing probation, depending on how well we develop, then our own self acceptance will have to be provisional. We are never quite good enough, and we tend to relapse even after great moral and spiritual efforts. Unfortunately it seems to be the more scrupulous consciences that are afflicted with this dark self doubt before God. Here one suspects a hidden form of British Aristotelian Arianism: the unknown God may not accept us, however much the warm and comforting Son identifies with us. A question mark hovers

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

between the Father and the Son, corresponding with that between Christ's sacrifice and our feeble efforts at walking the way of the cross.

The teaching of ARCIC 2 here seems to be highly relevant in that it places our frail holiness in the context of the verdict of the Father on the Son's death by his resurrection. Acceptance rests on that decisive act of offering and acceptance. To allow this to become a part of our spirituality and pastoral care would surely help many towards self-acceptance in God. It means that the pilgrimage continues with its ups and downs, that the 'process' goes on, but the 'point' is firmly anchored in something, someone, of infinite moral and spiritual depth.

The Christian challenge to holiness is not surrendered because sanctification remains the imperative of life in Christ. There is no lowering of standards. The path, set out by the prize already given, remains rocky. But salvation is lived out in conditions of human history and perfection is never achieved. Is the alcoholic ever fully cured, the depressive ever wholly delivered, the temptation ever entirely without attraction, this side of heaven? Pastors know otherwise. But they also know that rejecting perfectionism does not mean compromise but rather to the distinction between sanctification and justification in Christ. Theologically and pastorally this is the counterweight to a slide from rejection of perfectionism into cynical indifferentism.

It may be strange to hear that the evangelicals are a group much in need of the message of justification by faith through grace. The perfectionist heresy has filtered through into the mind of woollier experience-based type of evangelical Anglicans, which often confirms the image of a sugary, smilingly serene spirituality alongside inner uncertainty, as if the omniscient facade masked a doubting self trust. Radical evangelicals, drinking from the well of liberation theology, often imbibe fair amounts of Pelagianism also. This reverses the authentic doctrine of justification, trust in Christ's sacrifice, not in our spiritual perfection, allowing us to be utterly real about our discipleship. Evangelicals need to remind themselves at the bottom of the heart as well as the top of the mind that we are not already perfect as Christians and can admit the fact, that we are secure in God not through our spiritual competence but through God's act in Christ. Perfectionist facades are therefore redundant.

God is in the business of truth and reality not falsity. This message could also be taken into the burgeoning schools of

¹² *God Was In Christ*, London, Faber and Faber, 1949, pp. 160ff.

spirituality where the temptation to talk of 'spiritual masters' seems all too great. Our discipleship involves the tension of being imperfect disciples of a perfect master, but of a realistic master who got his hands dirty, bloody and smashed so that we can begin to be true and real in the real historical world. We are not called to a higher life of enlightenment or asceticism outside the 'common' world but right in its midst. The distinction between justification and sanctification within the *koinonia* of Christ does not fit easily with the notion of a spiritual elite who are somehow higher up a continuum of grace, closer to God, since all stand together on the ground of the merits of Christ.

III. The Gospel for the Decade of Evangelism?

Justification as taught in ARCIC 2 frankly acknowledges the reality of sin and the need for forgiveness. As well as being necessary within the church, this message has much to say to secular humanity. D. M. Baillie's *God Was In Christ* has what is still a remarkably fresh discussion of the needs of modern secular man and in particular his 'moralistic substitute for the sense of sin', which Baillie describes as a kind of paralyzing moral inferiority complex, an inner dissatisfaction, Baillie in a sense turns the tables on Freudian analysis by his diagnosis that modern secular society represses the religious reality of sin instead of facing it and seeking the one remedy, divine forgiveness.¹²

In this case of moral failure, 'the malaise has a real foundation', not being simply a behavioural product of a prior event in the past, but a real wrong and betrayal of conscience. 'There is no solution so long as we remain on the level of mere morality. There is no solution until we allow the whole situation to be transformed by an orientation towards God. A moralist, as such, can never forgive himself'.¹³ Divine forgiveness brings the matter into the light and creates the possibility of a new beginning. 'Then', says Baillie, 'the consciousness of moral failure becomes something different: it becomes a sense of sin against God, a sense of having disobeyed the will of God, of having betrayed the love of God'.¹⁴ He concludes that forgiveness of sins 'instead of being morbid or unpractical, is the ultimate secret of wholesome living and far more conducive to it than the moralistic substitute which belongs to a secular age'.¹⁵ Here is another key reason why the

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 164

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 166

doctrine of ARCIC 2 could well be thought relevant to the church's mission in our society. Far from being a document concocted from outmoded, irrelevant debates, it actually penetrates to the heart of human need and points to the genuine ground of realistic hope.

A further point to make in this context is that society abhors a spiritual vacuum, and that many spiritualities flood into such even in the most materialistic eras. Today there is no lack of interest in religious ideas; but has the church a cogent message about knowing God and the life of the kingdom? Is the church tempted to settle for presenting itself as offering the same general spirituality as other faiths and movements, regarding the classical soteriological themes as embarrassingly distinctive? The notion that a general spirituality, which somehow heightens human potential by plugging in to the universally available energy of the cosmos, is the real meaning behind the Christian message must be resisted. Hendrikus Berkhof offers the opinion that 'The attractiveness of Hinduism and Buddhism to so many younger people in the "Christian" West is symptomatic of a large vacuum in reflection upon those realities which used to be called rebirth, conversion, surrender, justification and sanctification'.¹⁶

The gospel acknowledging sin and declaring forgiveness in Christ cannot settle for a mystical and cosmological reinterpretation of salvation, if for no other reason than that it fails to reach to the heart of human experience. 'A theology which stops short at creation', said Austin Farrer, 'and disinterests itself in the conflict of evil with divine goodness, handles a one-sided abstraction, which is not even the diagram of an actual belief'.¹⁷ Secular humanity needs the challenge and promise of the gospel addressing these issues of sin, guilt and pardon, and therefore ARCIC 2 must be considered a thoroughly contemporary document and one that could provide ecumenical common ground for evangelism.

IV. Ecclesiology

God's holy and loving character lies behind the theology of justification and sanctification. This character is reflected in the anti-qualification required for membership of the church, and in

¹⁶ *Introduction to the Study of Dogmatics*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1985, p. 112.

¹⁷ *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, London, Collins, 1962, Fontana edition, 1966, p. 13.

the life of the church. The ecclesiological significance of the distinction between justification and sanctification is important ecclesologically. The category of adoption expresses the same idea with ecclesiological connotations, as has been pointed out by Packer,¹⁸ Adoption is into the family by the free act of God in Christ; the community therefore depends on the reverse of qualifications, 'to exclude boasting', adoption is not earned, but freely given. The adoptive family remain 'family'. Although there will be misbehaviour and much imperfection in living out this privilege, nevertheless the status of being a child of the family remains. These are God's terms for membership of the church, applying no prior tests of holiness as a qualification. The qualifications remain those of Christ. Newbigin brought out this ecclesiological significance of justification, as working against judgemental attitudes within the church, powerfully in his *Household of God*.¹⁹

At the same time, adoption into the church is adoption into the kingdom in the making, hence commits us to kingdom values both personal and public, giving place to all the socio-political concerns of current ecclesiology while basing these on ground which exclude the Pelagianism of so much liberation theology. The church is the foretaste of the kingdom, according to ARCIC 2, and an instrument for it.

One very interesting point which will need discussion in some depth, is that of the relationship of the teaching of ARCIC 2 to that of the ARCIC 1 on the church's character. The principles set out by ARCIC 2 alone would not lead to the church structures required by ARCIC 1. The teaching of justification by faith through grace was precisely the solvent of the Roman Catholic Church at the Reformation, going to the heart of the priestly sacramental system. Can the same teaching of forensic justification before God on the grounds of Christ's sacrifice really hold together with the necessary sacramental and ministerial structures agreed in ARCIC 1? Is not a church polity more on the lines set out by Hooker far more appropriate given these doctrines of salvation of grace and faith?

An issue not dealt with by ARCIC 2 is that of regeneration, a strange omission for a document dealing with salvation. Perhaps the agreement implies a doctrine of baptismal regeneration, although personal faith does seem to be called for as the way we know God. ARCIC's 'yes and yes' theological method generally

¹⁸ *Knowing God*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1973, p. 249.

¹⁹ London, SCM, 1953.

seems to work, affirming both sides of the old theological debates. But it can sometimes fail to convince as for example in ARCIC 1's insistence on real presence in the eucharist along with faithful reception, where the issue of the reserved sacrament poses the question which opens up the stitching. Is a person regenerated by the act of being baptized, or by a personal response of faith to God's saving grace? How are the two events related? Such are vital issues which will need open discussion, particularly in preparation for common evangelism.

ARCIC 2 contains one difficult paragraph for the average Anglican in paragraph 22. This sounds especially odd to the evangelical, talking of the church's place in assisting sanctification by penitential disciplines and amends. There are currently many parallels with disciplines and pastoral control exercised in 'shepherding' by house church pastors, so there are evangelical equivalents. The Anglican evangelical however is not used to such ideas and would suspect clericalism, whereas 'tell it to the church' is the apostolic world, not to the ordained clergy only, over matters of discipline, ARCIC 2 does not necessarily entail clerical discipline alone, but again its relationship to ARCIC 1 seems crucial in interpreting precisely what it does imply.

V. Purgatory

This leads us deeper into the area of the relationship of the structures of the church visible with the spiritual destinies of the faithful and notably the idea of purgatory. ARCIC 2 does not speak of purgatory, and the doctrines of justification and sanctification set out there would not encourage the reader to suppose that much room were left for it. If we are accepted on the basis of the righteousness of Christ, then can there possibly be any scope for a purgatorial refining as a qualification for heaven? How would such refining relate to the sufferings of Christ, on whose merits ARCIC 2 argues that we depend.

But discussions on the document with eminent Roman Catholics involved with the document's production indicate that the silence over purgatory does not mean its abolition. Purgatory exists only for the church, the saved, it is argued, as against its use as valve for universalism, and is not strictly a qualificatory process. Its pain stems from the fact of our sinful nature still needing radical transformation for the presence of God.

In terms of evangelical theology, and indeed of ARCIC 2 theology, such an idea of purgatory defended by Roman Catholic interpreters, must be seen only in the line of sanctification, not of

justification or status. Alec Motyer in his Reformed Anglican treatment of the subject argues against any notion of penal discipline after death, but says 'The possibility of the growth of moral and spiritual character in the world to come is certainly not to be dismissed'.²⁰ But the great question must then be why should such moral improvement after death be painful, why not utterly pleasurable, akin to taking a hot bath after a grimy week without one? Purgatory as painful discipline, albeit non-qualificatory, has to be questioned in the light of the longing of the Christian to see face to face.

Moreover the hope of resurrection to a mode of life suited to knowing God without the pull of sin, the resurrection body, seems to be a hope which looks forward to sudden, rather than gradual, fulfillment. If purgatory is to be a round of pain, how will our responses further our holiness, and how will the *koinonia* with Christ in the Spirit relate to these sufferings? Such questions point to a possibility of recognizing the room for moral growth after death, but as a pleasant experience, God wiping away the tears of the faithful, evil being done away entirely as sordes in the bath water.

Conclusion

The document provides not only an ecumenical advance, but a fresh reminder of a core doctrine of the Christian gospel, relevant and vital to humanity's deep need. It may cut wholly against the grain of an acquisitive society to proclaim the free gift of acceptance and adoption outside any credits we have earned for it. But that is close to the heart of our faith, and fosters our self acceptance under, and with, God. It is no doctrine of cheap grace; it asks for no rusty swords, but gives the privilege and challenge of living out the way of the cross in the light of Christ's gift. It turns out that we can in fact trust Christ for all aspects of salvation, including that of our acceptability within the family.

²⁰ *After Death*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1965, p. 54.