

MADE RIGHTEOUS THROUGH THE INFUSION OF LOVE: JUSTIFICATION IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC TRADITION

On 15 June 1520 Pope Leo X (d. 1521) promulgated the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* condemning several of Luther's views after Luther refused to recant. Everyone was clear that Luther had explicitly contradicted Catholic teaching on many matters, but as odd as it may seem to us today, it was not initially clear whether justification was among those matters. *Exsurge Domine* condemns Luther's rejection of the sacrament of penance, his rejection of indulgences, his rejection of purgatory, his rejection of the infallibility of the pope or of an ecumenical council, his teaching that sin remains in the justified, and his teaching that faith suffices when doing penance and participating in the Lord's supper. While many of these issues are closely related to justification, Luther's teaching regarding justification itself is nowhere condemned or even mentioned. This was largely because the medieval Western church had no official teaching on justification. The late medieval church was home to a variety of understandings of justification, and this variety was part of the reason that the Lord raised up Martin Luther and the other Reformers of his generation to clear up much of the confusion that had been sown.

This article will primarily consider the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the most important early modern council of the Catholic Church, which promulgated by far the most important statement concerning justification in the entire Catholic tradition. Indeed, the Council of Trent introduced an important innovation in the conciliar history of the West. Before Trent, no council had ever set forth a definition of any doctrinal point; the councils had merely condemned various errors and promulgated brief creedal formulae. In contrast, Trent not only included various condemnations of what it saw as deviant teaching but also set forth a positive definition of several doctrines, justification being the most important. The Protestant Reformation, in other words, forced the Catholic Church to set forth its own official stance on justification and other matters so as "to put an end to the doctrinal uncertainty from which the Church had suffered

so long and to replace the preachers' instructions with which the faithful had had to be satisfied, by an official, systematic teaching supported by the authority of the General Council" (Jedin 2:240). Given the Catholic commitment to the infallibility of an ecumenical council, little historical evaluation will be required for the Catholic tradition after Trent. Once the Council had made its determinations, Catholic teaching on justification was more or less settled, since Catholic theologians, if they are to remain Catholic, are not allowed to dissent from its teaching.

As we will see, the Protestant view of justification, or at least certain of its features, found plenty of Catholic defenders both before and at the Council. In some cases, the defenders of the Protestant view prevailed, and Trent moved Catholic teaching regarding justification closer to the truth. In other cases, the defenders of the Protestant view were overpowered, and Trent moved Catholic teaching regarding justification further from the truth. While we can affirm that the Council genuinely reformed some of the most egregious errors of late medieval theology, we must ultimately conclude that the resultant Catholic understanding of justification still falls short, in various ways, of the truth as we understand it (Campbell et al. 2:125-128).

Justification and Merit

One of Luther's primary targets in late medieval theology was the prominent teaching that the believers can, should, and must merit the grace of justification by their own natural resources alone (see the Patristic through Luther article [18-33 in this issue]). Thankfully, the Council of Trent clearly and emphatically rejected this egregious error in late medieval theology. It did so, in part, due to the rediscovery of the decisions of the Second Council of Orange (529; henceforth Orange II), which strongly affirm the priority of grace in justification. In accordance with the decisions of Orange II, the Council of Trent agrees with Luther and the other Reformers that the believers can in no sense merit the grace