

Make the best use of February 25 to April 10, 2009 as a Reformed Catholic and Anglican

Lent and Justification by Faith or, better, Justification by Faith and Lent

Suggestions from the Revd Dr Peter Toon

Justification by faith alone by God's grace is clearly taught in detail by the apostle Paul in The Letters to Galatia and Rome, and it appears also in other Letters, as well as in embryo in the Book of Genesis and in the Psalter.

In substance this doctrine advances the view that a sinner is placed in a right relation with God, his Judge, through the merits of Jesus Christ, when he repents of sin and believes and trusts in the same Jesus as his Lord and Savior. The perfect righteousness that belongs to the exalted Christ Jesus is reckoned or accounted to the believing sinner so that the latter is declared righteous by the Father, through and in Christ the Righteous One.

The doctrine that it is primarily intended to exclude is the doctrine of justification or salvation by works, that is the notion that the good person can by doing good works gain entry into eternal life on the basis of merit from those works.

It is well known that the doctrine of justification by faith was recovered by (part of) the western Church in the sixteenth century, and the name of Martin Luther is very much associated with this recovery in Europe. In England, this doctrine was fundamental to the creation of The Anglican Way of Reformed Catholicism, which is set forth in the Formularies of the Church of England—the Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer and The Ordinal [ordination services).

No part of the life of the National Church or the parish church is untouched by the doctrine of justification by faith and its implications. The place and use of the Bible, the structure and content of liturgy, the meaning of the Sacraments, the pastoral vocation of the Bishop, Priest and Deacon, and other dimensions of church life are all deeply affected. The reason is that all claims upon God based on

personal good works, achievements, fervor, devotion, spirituality and so on are judged to be without everlasting substance: in contrast God is pleased when his people trust him and his word and rely only upon his grace and mercy for their salvation

The English Prayer Book of 1549, which replaced the medieval Latin books, retained the Christian Year, and with it the season of Lent, the period of forty days immediately before Easter Day. At one level this could be seen as opening the possibility of falling back into the acceptance of salvation by works—by making fasting, extra devotions, pilgrimages, and the like into the very essence of the Christian religion. However, a careful reading of the rubrics in the Prayer Book, along with the required Collects for Lent provided in the same Book, shows that the Christian life remains primarily of repentance for sin, faith and trust in God, and using external means like fasting to strengthen and intensify that relation of penitence, faith and obedience to God the Father through Jesus the Son in the power of the Holy Ghost—and in the life of the church.

Here is the prayer used throughout Lent in the Anglican Way:

Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Here there is no salvation by good works: there is the love of God the Creator of man, there is the call to repentance by God's creatures, there is the offer of full and free forgiveness; there is the recognition of the sinfulness of man's heart and its need for cleansing and renewal, and there is the recognition that all this is possible through the merits and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The authentic Anglican or Reformed Catholic keeping of Lent is one of profound and deep devotion which is based on trust in God the Father, believing in the promises of his Son, and living in the power of the Holy Ghost, even as the Church identifies with the same Son of God in his humanity as that was attacked by Satan

both in the wilderness and at Mount Calvary.

It is worthy of attention that the Homily of Fasting in The Book of Homilies insists that genuine fasting is a mark of authentic repentance and faith and not a good work to achieve merit. [The Book of Homilies is available from www.edgewaysbooks.com

The Revd Dr Peter Toon February 17, 2009

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