THE GROUND OF JUSTIFICATION

(The second of a series in which members set out the questions which give rise to their present researches)

Vincent Taylor makes the observation about justification that "The central place of the doctrine in St. Paul's theology, and the crucial nature of the determination on which we receive God's justification, is as important an undertaking as the righteousness of Christ was his through his union to Christ; that being imparted (infused), is a necessary condition of salvation, is a travesty of justification throws a strong light upon the poverty of our soteriological beliefs, and reveals the need for a doctrine of the Cross which provides an adequate basis for man's reception of righteousness through faith."

In the nineteenth century N. H. Snaith goes so far as to deny to righteousness any place as a condition of salvation: "The fact of the matter is that God does not require righteousness at all, in any shape or shadow, as a condition of salvation. He requires faith, ... Righteousness is a result of salvation, and not a condition of it" (p. 171).

Thus Dodd writes: "God sees in us that which in Christ we are becoming, and acquires us" (p. 143). Does not such a statement tend to support the ecclesiastical belief that the ground of justification is the obedience, the death, the blood or work of Christ? In any case it leads some to the conclusion that justification is the work of Christ, we reach a stone of stumbling, and for some theologians, a rock of offence. ... Our investigation has shown that the inner meaning of justification throws a strong light upon the poverty of our soteriological beliefs, and reveals the need for a doctrine of the Cross which provides an adequate basis for man's reception of righteousness through faith.

In the first issue of the Bulletin (p. 8) it was mentioned that there were numerous unpublished hymns by Charles Wesley in five manuscript volumes of hymns on the Gospels and the Book of Acts. Investigation of another source has resulted in further discoveries.

In the possession of Richmond College, Surrey, two books containing a number of hymns in Charles Wesley's hand, one of these is apparently a notebook which accompanied the poet on his travels, containing several unfinished hymns, and the other consists of interleaved pages of manuscript and leaves from early printed Wesley hymn-books. (A particularly interesting feature of the latter is that it contains, in what is plainly Charles Wesley's hand, a version of Henry More's hymn on the coming of the Holy Spirit generally attributed to John Wesley). The two books contain sixty-eight hymns or fragments of hymns which do not appear in the Poetical Works, and some of them are of considerable merit. This is the first stanza of a hymn entitled "Epiphanies":

Praise to the Wonder, working GOD,
Proclaim his glorious Praise abroad,
Let Earth rejoice, the Lord is King !
Or 'e all his furious Foes He reigns,
And holds the Powers of Hell in Chains.

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**THE GROUND OF JUSTIFICATION**

(Second of a series in which members set out the questions which give rise to their present researches)

Vincent Taylor makes the observation about justification that "The central place of this doctrine in St. Paul's theology, and the crucial necessity required in modern teaching, and few things are needed more, is a renewed emphasis on the truths for which justification stands. ... So anxious have we been to exclude legal ideas from our thoughts of God that we have compromised the ethical foundations of our theology. We have created God in our own image and likeness." (pp. 79-80). There is little reason to believe that the situation has radically changed for the better since 1941, when these words were written.

Last century saw the production of a fair number of books on the subject of justification, but literature has been very scanty so far this century. In any case the emphasis today seems to be on what Christ does for sinners rather than on what God has already done in Christ for sinners. There is some discussion about man's exercise of faith, but little interest in Christ as the object of faith.

In 1897 James Buchanan wrote: "The great cardinal question on the subject of justification, and that on the right settlement of which the determination of every other mainly depends, relates to its immediate ground; and amounts in substance to this. ... What is the righteousness, on account of which a sinner is forgiven and accepted as righteous in the sight of God? or, What is the righteousness to which God has regard in bestowing and on which He is disposed to rely for obtaining, the forgiveness which all true sinners so urgently require in this way, it was in consequence imputed to him, or put down to his account, just as if it were truly and properly his own; and that this righteousness, being in itself fully satisfactory and meritorious, formed an adequate ground on which sinners might be forgiven and God's favour obtained" (W. Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, Vol. II, p. 49).

N. H. Snathi goes so far as to deny to righteousness any place as a condition of salvation: "The fact of the matter is that God does not require righteousness at all, in any shape or shadow, as a condition of salvation. He requires faith, ... Righteousness is a result of salvation, and not a condition of it." He further observes that "To assume that ethical righteousness whether actual, imputed, or imparted (infused), is a necessary condition of salvation, is a travesty of Paul's teaching" (pp.171).

On the other hand, Taylor sums up the position thus: "When, however, we come to the Pauline belief that justification is grounded in the atoning work of Christ, we reach a stone of stumbling, and for some theologians, a rock of offence. ... Our investigation has shown that the inner meaning of justification throws a strong light upon the poverty of our soteriological beliefs, and reveals the need for a doctrine of the Cross which provides an adequate basis for a doctrine of justification. In the nineteenth century Hodge asserted: "Whenever the ground of our justification is affirmedatively stated, it is declared to be the obedience, the death, the blood or work of Christ" (C. Hodge, *Romans*, New ed., Eerdmans, 1953, p. 89). Can such an assertion be maintained today? An answer to this question is being sought by an examination of the evidence in Galatians and Romans for the ground of justification.

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**MORE UNPUBLISHED HYMNS BY CHARLES WESLEY**

In the first issue of the Bulletin (p. 8) it was mentioned that there were numerous unpublished hymns by Charles Wesley in five manuscript volumes of hymns in his possession in thepossession of Richmond College, Surrey, two books contain a number of hymns in Charles Wesley's own hand, one of these is apparently a notebook which accompanied the poet on his travels, containing several unfinished hymns, and the other consists of interleaved pages of manuscript and leaves from early printed Wesley hymn-books. (A particularly interesting feature of the latter is that it contains, in what is plainly Charles Wesley's hand, a version of Henry More's I hymn on the coming of the Holy Ghost generally attributed to John Wesley). The book contains sixty-eight hymns or fragments of hymns which do not appear in the *Poetical Works*, and some of them are of considerable merit. This is the first stanza of a hymn entitled "Epiphanio":

> Praise to the Wonder, working GOD,
> Proclaim his glorious Praise abroad,
> Let Earth his Arm unshortned sing,
> Let Earth rejoice, the Lord is King!

But today the ground of justification is largely ignored. Many writers use the term 'ground' more loosely for one of the causes of justification. For example, Dodd can talk of "Paul's teaching, that God justifies the ungodly on the ground of faith" (Romans, Moffatt New Testament Commentary, p. 92).

Frequently a quality in man seems to be made the ground of justification.

Thus Dodd writes: "God sees in us that which in Christ we are becoming, and acquits us" (p. 143). Does not such a statement tend to support the error of the Catholic Church on this point? Is it possible consistently to hold such a view together with that of the Reformers? "The Reformers taught that, when God pardoned and accepted any sinner, the ground or basis of the divine act to which he referred was, not the man's own regard in performing it, or in passing a virtual sentence cancelling that man's sins, and admitting him into the enjoyment of His favour,—was this, that the righteousness of Christ was his through union to Christ; that being his in this way, it was in consequence imputed to him, or put down to his account, just as if it were truly and properly his own; and that this righteousness, being in itself fully satisfactory and meritorious, formed an adequate ground on which he might be forgiven and God's favour obtained" (W. Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, Vol. II, p. 49).

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