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‘The Article by which the Church stands or falls’

In this essay Dr McGrath, who teaches at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, discusses another Reformation topic in the shape of a reappraisal of the significance of the Christian article of justification.

The importance of the doctrine of justification to the emerging Churches of the Reformation is generally recognised.¹ Luther assigned it a normative role in a Christian dogmatics, thus: *articulus iustificationis est magister et princeps, dominus, rector et iudex: super omnia genera doctrinarum, qui conservet et gubernat omnem doctrinam ecclesiasticam et eriget conscientiam nostram coram Deo.*² For Luther, the *articulus iustificationis* was the Word of the Gospel, the starting point for the theology of the Church. Indeed, it seems clear that Luther’s ecclesiology is a direct consequence of his conviction that the church of his day had abandoned the touchstone of the Gospel: even as late as 1532, Luther was prepared to grant the Pope his authority and power, provided he acknowledged the forgiveness of sins in Christ.³ The importance of the doctrine of justification within a Lutheran dogmatics was emphasised by the Schmalkadic Articles of 1537: *in hoc articulo sita sunt et consistunt omnia, quae contra papam, diabolum et mundum in vita nostra docemus, testamur*


² WA XXXIX.1.205.2f.

³ WA XL.357.18–22 (On Galatians 3.5) Papa, ego volo tibi osculari pedes teque agnoscerem summum pontificem, si adoraveris Christum meum, et permiseris quod per ipsum mortem et resurrectionem habeamus remissionem peccatorum et vitam aeternam, non per observationem tuarum traditionum. Si hic cesseris, non adimam tibi coronam et potentiam tuam.
et agimus. This concern was reproduced in the dogmatic works of Philip Melanchthon, who saw the *Hauptsätze christlichen Glaubens* as being contained in the doctrine of justification. A close examination of his attitude to the Adiaphorist controversy indicates that Melanchthon was prepared to permit concessions, particularly in the area of church polity, wherever they posed no threat to the doctrine of justification.

This concern for the *articulus iustificationis* is also evident in the early Confessional material of the Reformed Church: *locus de iustificatione in theologia facile primarius nobisca maxime salutaris est; quo obscuro, adulterato vel everso fieri nequit, ut puritas doctrinae in aliis locis retinatur aut vera ecclesia consistat.* However, it must be conceded that, since the time of Beza, the *Centraldogma* of Reformed Orthodoxy is indisputably that of predestination. This view, which owes its most lucid expression to Alexander Schweizer, in his highly influential study *Die protestantischen Centraldogma in ihrer Entwicklung innerhalb der reformierten Kirche* (Zürich, 1854–6), can only be accepted as valid during the period of ‘protestant scholasticism’.

Whereas the earlier theologians of the Reformed Church, such as Calvin, had subsumed their discussion of matters such as predestination, reprobation and election under the general aegis of the *cognitio Dei redemptoris*, Orthodoxy tended to make the divine decrees themselves the starting point for theological speculation. All else, justification included, is therefore a consequence of the divine decrees, decrees actualised in time as the *ordo salutis: praedestinatio → vocatio → iustificatio → sanctificatio → glorificatio*. This inevitably results in justification becoming a purely incidental aspect of the actualisation of the divine decision to elect. However, it must be appreciated that this shift in emphasis in the *ordo salutis* from justification to predestination is itself a consequence of decisive change in theological methodology associated with the onset of ‘protestant scholasticism’. Whereas Calvin made the redemption of man in Christ the starting point for his discussion of more rarified matters such as election and reprobation, Orthodoxy extrapolated from the basic *datum* of redemption to the divine decision to redeem, and hence to the divine decrees. These decrees themselves then became the logical starting point for a characteristically synthetic and deductive methodology, which inevitably resulted in justification being assigned a low priority in the *ordo salutis*. The systematic exposition of the salvation of mankind would logically begin with the divine decision to redeem, proceeding thus from the intratrinitarian decision to the *opus trinitatis ad extra*—i.e. the actualisation of that decision in time. However, the existence or otherwise of these divine decrees was originally considered under the general aegis of man’s redemption—i.e. under justification. The preceding and succeeding elements of the *ordo salutis* themselves arose from speculation concerning the *articulus iustificationis*, using an analytic and inductive methodology. This leads to the important observation that the *logical* starting point of Orthodoxy is itself the consequence of the *soteriological* starting point characteristic of the first age of the Reformation. In an important study, Kickel showed that Beza may be regarded as having effected this decisive change in theological methodology within Reformed Orthodoxy. ‘The place of the doctrine of justification, as well as the doctrine of the Trinity, the two natures and the sacraments in theology is determined by the doctrine of predestination’. This same methodology led to predestination being considered under the doctrine of God (and not *salvation*), to the supra- and infra-lapsarian debate, and the concept of limited atonement within Reformed Orthodoxy. The mere shift of the *locus praedestinationis* from the context of the doctrine of salvation to that of the doctrine of God must be regarded as having the utmost significance in this respect, as it reflects a more philosophical approach to theology, characteristic of the rise in interest in Aristotelian metaphysics associated with Beza. Indeed, the fact that both Beza and Thomas Aquinas discuss predestination under the doctrine of God can be regarded as the consequence of the intrusion of Aristotelian metaphysics into theology.

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4 Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (Göttingen, 1952), 416.23–4.
6 Leiden Synopsis XXXIX, 1.
9 The rationalising tendency so characteristic of Beza and Zanchius has been well documented in a number of important works. See: E. Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus* (Zürich, 1963); O. Gründler, *Die Gotteslehre Giralmo Zanchis* (Neukirchen, 1965); Kickel, op. cit., Gründler points to considerable affinity between Aquinas and Zanchius. An important early study is that of Paul Althaus, *Die Prinzipien der deutschen reformierten Dogmatik im Zeitalter der aristotelischen Scholistik* (Leipzig, 1914), who
The essential point is that the later Reformed emphasis upon the divine decrees is itself a direct consequence of an earlier concern for the articulus iustificationis. The change in theological methodology associated with the rise of 'protestant scholasticism' led to this secondary aspect of the articulus iustificationis assuming greater priority over the original starting point for theological speculation. This point may be confirmed by an examination of the Amyraut controversy, and the critique of the reformed doctrine of predestination associated with the Salmurian Academy.10 Amyraut's critique of the decretum absolutum is based upon his heilsgehsichtliche approach to the question—an approach which is itself the direct consequence of the remarkable emphasis he places upon the doctrine of justification.11 In effect, Amyraut's critique of Reformed Orthodoxy at this point represents a reassertion of the doctrine of salvation as the legitimate starting point for theological speculation—speculation which could not endorse the doctrine of predestination associated with Reformed Orthodoxy. If predestination is the Centraldogma of Reformed theology, it merely indicates how far that theological tradition departed from the paths marked out for it in the first ages of the Reformation.

The articulus iustificationis has come to have a meaning independent of whatever the concept of justification assumed in the Pauline corpus in the New Testament. In dogmatic theology, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, the concept of justification has come to mean the restoration of man's broken relationship with God—a meaning which is best illustrated from the brilliant Tridentine definition of the term: Quibus verbis justificationis impii descriptio insinuatur, ut sit translatio ab eo statu, in quo homo nascitur filius primae Adae, in statum gratiae, et ad adoptionis filiorum Dei, per secundum Adam Iesum Christum salvatorem nostrum. Thus stated, the Christian doctrine of justification constitutes the real centre of its theological system.12 There never was, and never can be, any true Christian Church without the doctrine of justification, for the Church cannot exist without witnessing, in Word and Sacrament, to the truth of what God has done for man in Christ—a truth which must be expressed in its life and doctrine, and supremely in the doctrine of justification. In the Christian doctrine of justification, we are dealing with the turning of the godless man against his godlessness; with his transformation from man without God to man with God, for God, and before God; with his transition from homo peccator to homo iustus; with his transition from nature to grace. All else in theology is either a presupposition or a consequence of this, the basic doctrine of the Christian faith. It is not clear that this is the Pauline understanding of justification. However, the concept has come to have a meaning within dogmatic theology which is essentially independent of the Pauline concept, so that even if it could be shown that it plays a minimal role in the context of Pauline soteriology, or that its origins lie in an anti-Judaizing polemic quite inappropriate to the theological circumstances of today, the significance of the articulus iustificationis within a Christian dogmatics would not be diminished thereby. The Church has chosen to subsume its discussion of soteriology under the aegis of justification, thereby giving an emphasis to the term which is quite absent from its Pauline context. That the concept of justification was selected results from historical circumstances, most notably the rise in Pauline scholarship in the twelfth century,13 the semantic relationship between iustitia and iustificatio14 which led the theologians of High Scholasticism to see in the concept of justification a means of rationalising the divine dispensation towards mankind in terms of justice, and the emphasis placed upon an already important

10 Thus A. Ritschl, Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung (Bonn, 1870) §1, p.1. An analysis of I. A. Dorner's theological system suggests that the doctrine of justification constituted its centre: see J. Rothermund, Personale Synthese: Isak August Dorners dogmatische Methode (Göttingen, 1968), 69. In his 1841 treatise, Das Prinzip unserer Kirche, Dorner had emphasised that the fundamental principles of Protestantism were the articulus iustificationis and the Schriftprinzip: K. Barth, Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert (Zürich, 1952), 529-30. Dorner himself appears to have employed the former more extensively than the latter.


12 See Armstrong, op. cit., 222-40 for an excellent discussion.
The peculiar function of the doctrine of justification is that it is the regulative or normative principle of Christian dogmatics. The Christian doctrine which is generally referred to as 'the doctrine of the Atonement' has come to mean that area of Christian doctrine-i.e. it is an analytic definition both the centre and the limits of Christian theology.20 The leading doctrines of the Christian faith-i.e. the Christian doctrine of justification is indeed the fundamentNovi Testamenti, the index super omnia generaf doctrinarum, the articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae—and, once grasped and held, its consequences for Christian dogmatics, ethics and spirituality must be explored and articulated.19 The articulus iustificationis requires transformation about the dogmatic, ethical and spiritual axes in order that its dogmatic, ethical and spiritual components may be resolved, just as a vector \( V \) can be resolved into its components along the \( x \), \( y \) and \( z \) axes by a series of transformations \( V = V_x, V_y, V_z \).

The articulus iustificationis contains within itself the germs of the leading doctrines of the Christian faith-i.e. it is an analytic proposition, requiring analysis if its implications are to be understood. Covertly contained within the articulus iustificationis are particular concepts of God, Christ and man—concepts which assume a specifically Christian significance when properly interpreted. By declaring the articulus iustificationis to be the normative principle of Christian dogmatics, we are in effect defining both the centre and the limits of Christian theology.20 This has four consequences:

I. the saving action of God in Christ is declared to be at the heart of the Christian faith, and the priority of soteriological considerations in matters of theology, ethics and piety thereby asserted;

II. any necessary presuppositions or consequences of the article must be regarded as being de fide;

III. any doctrines which are necessarily excluded by the article must be regarded as non-Christian or anti-Christian;

IV. any matters on which the principle has no direct bearing must either be regarded as adiaphora, or as matters to be resolved by the application of other, secondary, criteria.

These four points will be discussed individually.

15 A similar situation has arisen within the theology of English-speaking Protestantism, which has isolated the concept of 'Atonement' as equivalent to 'the work of Christ'—again, through a historical accident, albeit an accident which has led to a much less felicitous choice than 'justification'. The term 'Atonement', or 'at-one-ment', probably deriving from the medieval Latin adunamentum,17 was coined by Tyndale to translate the Latin reconciliatio or the Greek Katallagē. The term originally referred to one particular concept within the Pauline soteriological repertoire—namely, 'reconciliation'. However, it rapidly acquired an absolute sense, meaning not 'reconciliation', but 'the propitiation of God by the expiation of sin' or 'the grounds on which reconciliation is possible'—a use which appears to date from the introduction of the Authorised Version of the Bible, and which is probably based on its unusual translation of Romans 5:11 in particular.18 This development meant, not only that one single Pauline soteriological metaphor became elevated above others, but that it acquired a meaning apparently quite independent of the term Katallagē on which it was originally based. If the doctrine of the Atonement has come to mean that area of Christian doctrine which is generally referred to as 'the work of Christ', there is no reason why 'the doctrine of justification' should not legitimately be allowed the same scope.

16 See Justitia Dei, Volume II for a discussion and references.


18 The German Versöhnung has the dual sense of 'reconcile' as well as 'appease'. This makes the translation of German works on the matter into English somewhat problematic: see the remark of the English translator of Dorner's System der christlichen Glaubenslehre (A system of Christian doctrine) (4 vols: Edinburgh, 1860–82) Volume 4 p.1. The unusual feature of the Authorised Version's translation of Romans 5:11 is its inclusion of the definite article, thus: '... through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the atonement'. This lends itself to the interpretation that the beneficia Christi may be conveniently labelled as 'The Atonement'. It is important to notice that the Revisers, whilst substituting 'reconciliation' for 'atonement', nevertheless retained the definite article. The astonishing inconsistency on the part of the Authorised Version may be illustrated by comparing the translation of katallagē at Romans 5:11; 11:15; 2 Corinthians 5:18–19.
I.

By affirming that God’s saving action in Christ lies at the heart of the Christian faith, we are defining the *articulus iustificationis* as the magister et princeps super omnia genera doctrinarum. Theological speculation must begin with, be based upon, and be governed by, God’s saving action in Christ. Every responsible Christian statement about God, about Christ and about man must have its focal point in the crucified Christ: *crux sola nostra theologia.*

The priority of soteriological considerations in the formulation of Christian doctrine can be illustrated from the history of its early development. Referring to this development, M. F. Wiles observed that ‘even in the most technically philosophical and dogmatic debates, issues of soteriological concern were always of paramount importance’. The early Church was emphatic in its assertion that Christianity was a way of salvation, a conviction central to its doctrine. The influence of the *lex orandi* on the *lex credendi* is fundamentally soteriological: the early Christians worshipped Christ as their Saviour, and left their bishops to work out the Christological and Trinitarian consequences of this basic conviction. The task of early Christian theology was basically to articulate the consequences of the *lex orandi* — the worship of Christ as Saviour. The belief that Christ was the redeemer of mankind rapidly achieved the status of an axiom—a proposition that was beyond dispute, the denial of which would have constituted a *scandalum oecumenicum* — whose ramifications required elaboration, both in terms of its presuppositions and its consequences. The introduction of secondary principles, such as *to gar aproslepton atherapeuton* enabled this basic soteriological conviction to be articulated in terms of Christology and anthropology—but it was always appreciated that these were secondary principles, subordinate to the greater truth of the redemption of mankind in Christ. The Arian and Apollinarian controversies provide an excellent illustration of this point. The history of doctrine provides no support for the thesis that the doctrine of the Trinity arises from an analysis of the subject, predicate and object of the proposition *Deus dixit,* or from an analysis of the dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. It cannot be emphasised enough that the historical origins of the doctrine of the Trinity are soteriological, not grammatical or dialectical.

The characteristically Christian knowledge of God is the *cognitio Dei remittoris,* rather than the *cognitio Dei creatoris.* The insistence upon the priority of soteriological considerations associated with the *articulus iustificationis* points to the inadequacy of any other knowledge of God, a distinction also inherent in the related and vital distinction between natural and revealed theology. ‘God himself has endowed all men with some knowledge of his deity’ — and the distinction between a general, and a specifically Christian, knowledge of God lies in the *cognitio Dei remittoris.* It is this soteriological orientation of the Christian knowledge of God that underlies Melanchthon’s celebrated dictum: *hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia eius cognoscere, non... eius naturas, modos incarnationis intueri,* and Schleiermacher’s location of the ‘distinctive essence of Christianity’ in the fact that ‘in it all religious emotions are related to the redemption wrought by Jesus of Nazareth’. The object of faith is not primarily God the Creator, but God the Redeemer, the *divina erga nos benevolentia.* The twin poles of saving knowledge are of God as Redeemer and of ourselves as redeemed—a knowledge

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22 Gregory of Nazianzen, Ep. 101. Other secondary principles which may be noted include: ‘God alone can save’, ‘the deifier cannot himself be deified’. Cf Pollard’s celebrated remark, that the victory of Athanasius over Arius was a ‘victory of soteriology over cosmology’: T. E. Pollard, ‘Logos and Son in Origen, Arius and Athanasius’, *Studia Patristica* 2 (Texte und Untersuchungen 44), 282–7; p. 287; The background is best studied from W. Marcus, *Der...*
However, although Luther does not appear to have developed this theological anthropology, it is nevertheless clear that he understood man to be defined as a theological entity by the articulus iustificationis, and not by secular philosophical definitions, such as animal rationale, sensitivum, corporeum. A similar criticism can be made of the highly influential Boethian definition of 'person', persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia.

This point appears to have been realised during the period of High Scholasticism, and led to a fundamental shift towards a more theological definition of persona as the relationship between man and God. The tendency in the twentieth century to define persona in terms of an Ich-Du relationship readily lends itself to theological articulation as homo coram Deo. However, it must be pointed out that the nature of this relationship between God and man requires careful articulation in terms of the articulus iustificationis. A purely deistic definition of man is totally unacceptable to Christian theology—and such a definition inevitably results from the attempt to use Genesis 1.27 in this respect—i.e. to define man as 'created in the image of God'. As we shall see, the articulus iustificationis forces us to posit a radical dichotomy between homo peccator and homo iustus. A purely deistic definition of man—such as 'created in the image of God'—is quite inadequate to deal with the fact of human sin—and this is why Luther's definition of man, homo iustificari fide, is preferable, pointing to precisely this point. The attempt to define man sub loco dei creatoris will inevitably result in a definition of man which could be ascribed to any theology—be it deist, Judaist, or whatever—which accepts that God created man: as we have stressed, the characteristically Christian insight into human nature must arise through the cognitio Dei redemptoris—or i.e. man must be defined sub loco dei redemptoris, in terms of his redemption through Christ. Whilst man was created in God's image, he is re-created in Christ's. The articulus iustificationis points not merely to man's being created in God's image, but to the renewal of that divine image in his redemption in Christ.

II.

The articulus iustificationis is the index super omnia genera

30 Comm. in Gal 3.6; CR 50,205.
31 Tillich's method of correlation has 'no place for pragmatic man. It is built on the assumption that man by his very nature must ask these 'ultimate' or existential questions'. Harvey Cox, The secular city (New York, 1965), 79.
32 Text as established by G. Ebeling, Lutherstudien Band II: Disputatio de homine 1. Teil (Tübingen, 1977), 22. The 40 theses are divided as follows: Nos. 1–20 concern the philosophical definition of man, Nos. 21–40 the theological definition. On the problem of the dating of the Disputatio, see p. 6.
34 de Trinitate V, 3; MPL 64,1343C.
35 Duns Scotus appears to have been instrumental in effecting this change.
36 On this, see W. Pannenberg, Was ist der Mensch? Die Anthropologie der Gegenwart im Lichte der Theologie (Göttingen, 1962).
37 Barth makes a similar criticism, but for different reasons: CD III/2, 19–54, esp. 36–32.
doctrinarum, the yardstick by which the teaching of the Christian Church is to be compared. The Christian doctrine of justification forces us to posit a radical dichotomy between homo peccator and homo iustus. It is only on this basis that man's relationship to God and to himself and to others can be articulated. The negative presupposition of justification is therefore sin. The universalism implicit in the articulus iustificationis makes it necessary to insist that all men stand in need of reconciliation to God—i.e. that all men are alienated, and require reconciliation to God. In this sense, as the negative presupposition of reconciliation, sin is essentially dysteleological, standing at the opposite of the teleological good of the Kingdom of God. However, the more fundamental point is that sin is a theological concept, without any meaning outside the community of faith. Rather than characterise it as Werthsbegriff, with its moralist overtones, sin must be understood as a theological reflection on the nature of man which arises from reflection on the crucified Christ. By insisting that sin be understood theologically, rather than empirically or morally, we are in effect declining to identify sin with any specific element of human conduct. This has the important consequence of allowing the neglected concept of original sin to be defined as the natural human state, as revealed by the theologia crucis—the state of human alienation from God, which only assumes its full significance when the implications of God's saving action in Christ are grasped. One is forced to think about sin only in so far as one is forced to reflect upon the presuppositions implicit in the only acceptable datum for theological speculation—namely, the restoration of the sinner to fellowship with God in Christ. That sin has moral and empirical aspects will be evident—but at this point, it is important to emphasise that these aspects are secondary. Whether they are caused by sin, or related to it as epiphenomena, lies beyond this study. The theological definition of man begins with the fact that he is the object of justification. Where the actuality exists, there is also the corresponding possibility—and the question of the possibility of justification leads to the assertion of the actuality of original sin. The confusion surrounding the concept of original sin largely arises from a failure to appreciate that its dogmatic function relates to its being the negative presupposition of the articulus iustificationis. The articulus iustificationis also poses two fundamental questions: Who is the justifier? And who are the justified? The Christological and ecclesiological aspects of the soteriological canon now claim our attention.

The person of Christ is the central mystery of the Christian faith; however, the mystery of his person is bound up with his being the agent of God's reconciling of his alienated world to himself. The question 'Who is Christ?' must, on analysis, reduce to the more pertinent question 'Who is Christ for me?' If Christ is the agent of God's reconciling work, he cannot himself require reconciliation—i.e. he is outside the scope of the articulus iustificationis, and hence of its negative presupposition. The person of the Mediator—for such is the most appropriate term to describe his function—must be such that he is able to represent both the alienated and the party wishing to abolish that alienation. The essential point that emerges from such an analysis is this: the mediator must represent the alienated, except for their alienation; and he must represent God to the alienated. The consequent conclusion that Christ is sinless must be understood as a consequence of the articulus iustificationis, and the role assigned to the person of the Mediator, rather than as a consequence of the observation of the moral excellence of Christ's character. We do not propose to develop this point here. Rather, we wish to emphasise that the Christological question arises from the articulus iustificationis, and must be answered in the same framework. The early Church, by worshipping Christ as their Saviour, implicitly posed both the Christological and the Trinitarian questions—the question 'Who is Christ?' requires reference to God, and leads to the further question of 'Who is God?'. Furthermore, the need to define the Christian understanding of salvation in Christ, as opposed to the Gnostic interpretation of the same notion, led the theologians of the second century to introduce the idea of oikonomia,38 and hence of redemptive history. The Fathers declined to follow Aristotle, and see in history merely a collection of events, 'what Alcibiades did and had done to him', seeing instead the arena in which the great redemptive acts of God were performed. The heilsgeschichtlich approach to the articulus iustificationis recognises that the Christian proclamation stands or falls with redemptive history, in that it correlates the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The ecclesiological question posed by the articulus iustificationis may be regarded as arising from the question of how homo peccator becomes homo iustus. How does man appropriate the

38 The term is best studied from the (regrettably) unpublished doctoral thesis of M. Widman, Der Begriff oikonomia im Werk des Irenäus und seine Vorgeschichte (Tübingen, 1956); see also J. Lawson, The biblical theology of Saint Irenäus (London, 1948), 115-231. The heilsgeschichtlich approach of Amyraut should also be noted—see J. Moltmann, op. cit. On the whole question, see the intriguing study of Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time (London, 1962)
The question points to the receptive nature of faith, in that the offer of reconciliation is accepted, and further serves to emphasise the divine initiative in justification. However, we propose to consider instead the more practical question of Christian ethics within the community of faith, and more specifically the theological foundation on which Christian ethics should be based.

In the concept of justification lies an implicit appeal to justice—the conviction that the Judge of all the earth will do right (Genesis 18:25). However, what concept of justice is appropriate to describe God’s dealings with men? And what relevance does this concept of justice have to man’s dealings with his fellows in the political community? Within the political community, justice is generally taken to mean a set of rules or principles for regulating social conduct, these rules or principles themselves being grounded in some higher principle. However, whilst men understand the need for, and are prepared to affirm, a characteristic set of principles for assigning basic duties and rights, and for determining the proper distribution of social benefits and burdens, there is nevertheless no general agreement as to precisely what these principles might be. In other words, men recognise the need for justice, but cannot define it. This conceptual difficulty will evidently be reduced if we distinguish the concept of justice itself from the various interpretations of justice which have existed and now exist. In other words, justice can be defined by the rôle it plays, rather than its content. The question posed to the Christian is this: what set of principles should be regarded as underlying justice in the light of the Christian doctrine of justification, either in the political or ecclesiastical community?

The articleus iustificationis forces us to posit a dichotomy between homo peccator and homo iustus, as emphasised above. That man is made in the image and likeness of God is a theological foundation for a deist ethics—but is quite inadequate to undergird a specifically Christian ethics. God, having created man in his own image, subsequently and more wonderfully acts to redeem him from the sin which latterly characterises him. A Christian ethical system must firstly recognise this tension between homo peccator and homo iustus, and secondly attempt to articulate its consequences. The essential point arising from a theological definition of man is that he is a sinner—made in God’s image, but still a sinner. A tension must be posited between iustitia fidei and iustitia civilis, analogous to the distinction between homo iustus and homo peccator. This dichotomy arises precisely because the divine imperative is addressed to the Christian community, to homo iustus, who must realise that the basis of his ethical system will find no legitimation outside the community of faith. Just as the justified sinner is simul iustus et peccator, so he finds himself in a tension between iustitia fidei and iustitia civilis, between the Christengemeinde and the Bürgergemeinde. This tension has been articulated in terms of two models—the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms, and the Reformed doctrine of the kingly rule of Christ. Again, it must be stressed that both models are a theological response to the tension between homo peccator and homo iustus insisted upon by the articleus iustificationis.

The classic Lutheran reply to the relation between iustitia fidei and civilis is the doctrine of the two kingdoms, the regnum Christi and regnum mundi. In Thielicke’s reinterpretation of this concept, the tension is conceived eschatologically: in the redeeming act of Jesus Christ, the eschatological crisis of history has taken place, and the old and the new aeons run parallel to each other. Christian ethics is therefore set in the context of the interim period between the two aeons. This eschatological reinterpretation of the two kingdoms removes many of the
difficulties associated with the older Lutheran teaching, which many regarded as leading to the German church crisis of the 1930’s. The most important development of Thielicke in this respect is the emphatic rejection of any form of harmony between the two kingdoms—that they coexist is merely a consequence of the present age seeing the passing of the old aeon, and the ushering in of the new, so that they temporarily overlap. However, it is not clear that Thielicke has solved the basic problem, although his restatement of the theological grounds upon which a possible solution might emerge must be regarded as exemplary. The ethical edifice which Thielicke erects appears to amount to a compromise with the forces and institutions of the old aeon, and fails to direct the Christian towards the coming of the new aeon.

The beginnings of the characteristic Reformed model may be seen in the political writings of Martin Bucer. Bucer expresses the tension posited by the articulus iustificationis in the concept of the regnum Christi, understood as an aspect of the regnum Dei but in hoc seculo or in mundo. It is appropriate that Christ should have a regnum et civitatem sanctam in terris—and this Bucer identifies with the Church. The eschatological tension that underlies Thielicke’s doctrine of the two kingdoms is also evident in Bucer’s ecclesiology, although the tension is here between the regnum Christi and the regnum Dei—the former being an aspect of the kingdom of God in the present order, an order which will ultimately pass away, thereby resolving the tension. This basic theme is developed in the theology of Karl Barth, particularly in his short work Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde. The two communities may be compared to two concentric circles, the Christian community being the inner and smaller—but both centre on the Kingdom of God. The purpose of the Christian community is to remind the civil community of the existence of the Kingdom of God, so that the State may itself become more like that kingdom. Thus the State has a place in the ordained plan of salvation, in that it protects man against chaos and thus gives them ‘time for repentence and amendment of life’, so to speak. Whilst the State lies outside the Church, it does not lie outside the kingly rule of Christ. Again, Barth has laid a sound theological foundation for Christian ethics which incorporates the basic tension necessitated by the articulus iustificationis: however, it is far from obvious that the ethical system—if it can be called that—which he develops on the basis of this foundation has any compelling conviction. In particular, Barth’s rather benevolent attitude to the State appears to reflect the Swiss state as a model: it is far from obvious that Barth’s ethics would have prevented the German church crisis of the pre-war years.

The essential point emerging from both these theological foundations for Christian ethics is that they recognise the tension necessitated by the articulus iustificationis. This tension is not recognised by any ethical theory which bases itself merely on the datum of man having been created in the divine image, a datum quite inadequate as the starting point for either a specifically Christian definition of man or for a specifically Christian ethics. Indeed, by failing to recognise the dichotomy between homo peccator and homo iustus, such an approach is likely to lead to a form of Utopianism, precisely because the limitations placed upon man’s spiritual and moral abilities, both as an individual and collectively, by original sin are not recognised. The Christian understanding of man is of man as a sinner, and this must lead to a realistic approach to political theorizing: precisely because man is a sinner, an ‘ideal society’ is a chimera—the most that can be done is to minimise the effects of sin as an interim measure before the eschatological consummation. Furthermore, the equation of piety and culture, such as occurred in Kulturprotestantismus, is excluded on account of the gulf that is seen to separate them. However, it is far from clear what particular political system is to be advocated as specifically Christian in the light of the articulus iustificationis: Barth’s case for democracy as the Christian political system is tenuous in the extreme. At most, all that can be said is that the Christian understanding of salvation leads us to enter a firm nolle prosequi against certain theories of the State which are in apparent contradiction with it.

III.

As iudex super omnia genera doctrinarum, the articulus iustificationis defines the limits of the Christian faith. The problem of defining heresy has confronted the Church from the
earliest times. The use of the *regula fidei* is as much concerned with defining what lies outside the Christian faith as with what lies within it. If the distinctive essence of Christianity consists in the fact that God has redeemed mankind through Jesus Christ, it must follow that the Christian understanding of God, Christ and man be such that this redemption is possible. The actuality necessarily implies the possibility. The Christian understanding of the Redeemer must be such that God can effect redemption through him; the Christian understanding of man must be such that redemption can be accomplished; and the Christian understanding of God must be such that he can effect the redemption of man through Christ. As responsible Christian discussion of God, Christ and man is regulated by the *articulus iustificationis*, it will be evident that the denial or rejection of this principle may be assumed to be alien to Christianity. To assert that redemption is impossible, or that redemption is possible apart from Christ, or that mankind does not require redemption, contradicts the *articulus iustificationis* and must therefore be regarded as non-Christian or anti-Christian, as *error et venenum in theologia*. The denial of the article of justification must be regarded as radically altering the concept of Christian belief to the point at which the epithet 'Christian' is inappropriate and improper. At every level of tradition and authority, the Church has always proclaimed the reconciliation of man to God through Christ, along with its presuppositions and consequences, whether implicit or explicit. However, it will be evident that, once the *articulus iustificationis* is granted, the question of its proper interpretation arises. The distinction between what is Christian and what is not lies in whether the *articulus iustificationis* is admitted; the distinction between Orthodoxy and heresy lies in how this principle, once granted, is understood.

Heresy can arise in two basic manners, each relating to the two crucial questions noted above—i.e. Who is the Redeemer? Who are the Redeemed? The *articulus iustificationis* may be admitted, and yet—

(a). it is interpreted in such a way that Christ cannot effect man’s justification; or
(b). it is interpreted in such a way that man—the object of justification—cannot be justified, properly speaking.

The answer to the question, Who is the Redeemer?, must be able to account for the uniqueness of his office, and also for his ability to mediate between God and man. If Christ is the agent of reconciliation between God and man, his relation to both must be such that his work of reconciliation be possible. Therefore it is necessary that, whilst there must be an essential similarity between Christ and man, there must also be an essential dissimilarity, in that otherwise the uniqueness of his office is called into question. All men are not the agents of reconciliation. Heresy can therefore arise by a failure to maintain the tension between these two pre-requisites, so that a statement of the one amounts to a rejection of the other. In other words, a tension must be maintained between Christ’s divinity and humanity. If the superiority of the Redeemer be stressed, without the concomitant assertion of his equality with man, his ability to reconcile is dissipated; he no longer having any point of contact with those he was supposed to redeem. On the other hand, if his common humanity be emphasised, without reference to his essential superiority, the Redeemer himself comes to require redemption, along with those he came to redeem, he being in this respect not better off than any other man. Therefore *either* the Redeemer cannot redeem, or the Redeemer can redeem only to the same extent as all other men, so that all men are the agents of God’s reconciliation of the world to himself. In essence, these amount to the Docetic and the Arian heresies, although their points of reference are somewhat different.

The answer to the question, Who are the redeemed?, must be capable of explaining why redemption is necessary from outside humanity itself—i.e. why all men cannot be Redeemers. The object of redemption—i.e. man—must both require redeeming, and also be capable of accepting or receiving that redemption when it is offered. These two aspects of the matter must both be maintained simultaneously, in a manner akin to the humanity and deity of the Redeemer. If man’s need for reconciliation be granted, yet his own impotence to provide it be denied, the conclusion must be granted that man himself could be the agent of his own redemption. That is not to say that a particular individual could redeem himself, but rather that some other man could redeem him, and he another. Reconciliation could then be effected, if not by all men, then at least by some, to varying degrees. This immediately calls into question the uniqueness of the person of the Redeemer. If man’s impotence to redeem himself be granted, and yet his ability to accept that redemption—if offered—be denied, reconciliation becomes impossible, save by imposition from outside; and imposed or enforced reconciliation is no reconciliation. Broadly speaking, these two positions may be regarded as representing the Pelagian and the Manichaean heresies, although it is obvious that the actual natures of these
heresies are not quite identical with the positions described above.

The four positions outlined above are to be rejected as inadequate, rather than false; in that, whilst maintaining the articulus iustificationis (which we consider to represent the essence of the Christian proclamation), they place obstacles in its path by an inadequate interpretation of its terms. It is in this sense that the article of justification defines both the centre and the limits of the Christian faith: the focus is the redeeming work of God in Christ, around which a number of interpretations can be developed. To give a geometrical analogy, the area of authentically Christian teaching on man and Christ can be likened to a square, whose diagonals intersect on the saving work of God in Christ. The limits of the Christian faith are defined by the four corners of the square, representing the Docetic and Arian teachings at the ends of one diagonal, and the Manichaean and Pelagian at the ends of the other diagonal. The area encompassed within that square may be regarded as authentically Christian, in that redemption is both asserted to be necessary and possible in the terms stated.

It is clear that it is this limitation of the scope of Christian doctrine that causes us to speak of the articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae. Where the articulus is denied, there is no Christian Church. There never has been, and never can be a truly Christian Church where there is no articulus iustificationis. The question of the proper interpretation of the article then arises, and leads us to define heresy in terms of the soteriological canon—i.e. that is heretical which cannot simultaneously maintain both the article of justification and the concept of Christ or man associated with the heresy. As we have pointed out above, the essence of heresy thus conceived lies in its basic inadequacy to do justice to the central doctrine of the Christian faith—that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Any opinion which denies the articulus iustificationis must be regarded as non-Christian or anti-Christian, as it denies the specifically Christian interpretation of both God and the Christ-event. In her liturgy and worship, the Church continually reminds the faithful of God's redeeming work in Christ; to reject this is to place oneself outside the Church and the consensus fidelium.

It will be evident that certain matters, most notably relating to Church polity, fall outside the scope of the soteriological canon. These matters must either be recognised as adiaphora, matters of indifference, or else settled by the application of other, secondary criteria. Such matters are adiaphora precisely because they pose no threat to the articulus iustificationis, either in regard to its existence or its interpretation. The discussion of adiaphora will evidently depend upon agreement being reached concerning the nature of the secondary criteria to be employed in their discussion. However, on the basis of the soteriological canon, the existence of adiaphora in the theological, and not merely the ethical, realm must be acknowledged.48

In his study, we have argued that the articulus iustificationis provides the best point of departure for theological speculation concerning God, Christ and man. Such a starting point can be justified from the study of the development of Christian doctrine, and provides an important empirical link between the Christian experience of justification and the concept of justification itself. In her worship, in Word and Sacrament, the liturgy of the Church continually proclaims Christ's saving passion as being at the heart of the Christian faith, as evidenced in her worship of her Saviour. The Church does not worship Christ merely as her Lord—she worships him as her Saviour, whose rights over her are a consequence of his saving passion and death. The belief that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself lies at the heart of the Church's piety and worship—and hence must also lie at the centre of her theological system. Christian theology, as the ancilla ecclesiae, must attempt to articulate the consequences of this fundamental belief for Christian thinking about God, Christ and man; if Christian theology allows itself to become detached from the worshipping life of the Church, it will lose whatever sense of perspective it may have: its task is to assist the Church in her proclamation of 'the word of the Cross', and to define its consequences for Christian piety and practice. The theologian is continually reminded, in the anamnesis of Christ's saving passion, that the liturgy of the Church provides him with the starting point for his speculation: the lex orandi has, in effect, pre-empted him. This starting point is itself firmly grounded at every level of authority—Scripture, Tradition, the Creeds of Christendom, the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the witness of the saints, and the consensus fidelium. The claims of Tradition in determining the starting point for theological speculation cannot be ignored—and Tradition, which formulated the lex orandi, points to the saving death of Christ as that starting point.

It is our contention that the analysis of the germs of concepts

48 Contra Schleiermacher, Rothe, and, to a lesser extent, Martensen: see J. Schiller, Probleme der christlichen Ethik (Berlin, 1888).
contained within the articulus iustificationis provides, if not a systematic theology, then at least the foundations of one.\textsuperscript{49} The theologian who makes this his starting point will derive a theology grounded in both the Christian experience and the Word of God. A theologian of the Word cannot ignore the fact that one aspect of the Christian proclamation stands out as the Word of the Gospel,\textsuperscript{50} from which all else proceeds, the magister et princeps, dominus, rector et iudex super omnia genera doctrinarum. A 'theologian of the Word' must be a 'theologian of the Word', the Word by which the church stands or falls, the articulus iustificationis.