

The Sixth Session

Celebrated on the thirteenth day of the month of January, 1547.

DECREE ON JUSTIFICATION

Proem.

Whereas there is, at this time, not without the shipwreck of many souls, and grievous detriment to the unity of the Church, a certain erroneous doctrine disseminated touching Justification; the sacred and holy, oecumenical and general Synod of Trent, lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the most reverend lords, Giammaria del Monte, bishop of Palaestrina, and Marcellus of the title of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, priest, cardinals of the holy Roman Church, and legates apostolic a latere, presiding therein, in the name of our most holy father and lord in Christ, Paul III., by the providence of God, Pope, -purposes, unto the praise and glory of Almighty God, the tranquillising of the Church, and the salvation of souls, to expound to all the faithful of Christ the true and sound doctrine touching the said Justification; which (doctrine) the sun of justice, Christ Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, taught, which the apostles transmitted, and which the Catholic Church, the Holy Ghost reminding her thereof, has always retained; most strictly forbidding that any henceforth presume to believe, preach, or teach, otherwise than as by this present decree is defined and declared.

CHAPTER I.

On the Inability of Nature and of the Law to justify man.

The holy Synod declares first, that, for the correct and sound understanding of the doctrine of Justification, it is necessary that each one recognise and confess, that, whereas all men had lost their innocence in the prevarication of Adam-having become unclean, and, as the apostle says, by nature children of wrath, as (this Synod) has set forth in the decree on original sin,-they were so far the servants of sin, and under the power of the devil and of death, that not the Gentiles only by the force of nature, but not even the Jews by the very letter itself of the law of Moses, were able to be liberated, or to arise, therefrom; although free will, attenuated as it was in its powers, and bent down, was by no means extinguished in them.

CHAPTER II.

On the dispensation and mystery of Christ's advent.

Whence it came to pass, that the heavenly Father, the father of mercies and the God of all comfort, when that blessed fulness of the time was come, sent unto men, Jesus Christ, His own Son-who had been, both before the Law, and during the time of the Law, to many of the holy fathers announced and promised-that He might both redeem the Jews who were under the Law, and that the Gentiles, who followed not after justice, might attain to justice, and that all men might receive the adoption of sons. Him God hath proposed as a propitiator, through faith in his blood, for our sins, and not for our sins only, but also for those of the whole world.

CHAPTER III.

Who are justified through Christ.

But, though He died for all, yet do not all receive the benefit of His death, but those only unto whom the merit of His passion is communicated. For as in truth men, if they were not born propagated of the seed of Adam, would not be born unjust,-seeing that, by that propagation, they contract through him, when they are conceived, injustice as their own,-so, if they were not born again in Christ, they never would be justified; seeing that, in that new birth, there is bestowed upon them, through the merit of His passion, the grace whereby they are made just. For this benefit the apostle exhorts us, evermore to give thanks to the Father, who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light, and hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have redemption, and remission of sins.

CHAPTER IV.

A description is introduced of the Justification of the impious, and of the Manner thereof under the law of grace.

By which words, a description of the Justification of the impious is indicated,-as being a translation, from that state wherein man is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace, and of the adoption of the sons of God, through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Saviour. And this translation, since the promulgation of the Gospel, cannot be effected, without the laver of regeneration, or the desire thereof, as it is written; unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER V.

On the necessity, in adults, of preparation for Justification, and whence it proceeds.

The Synod furthermore declares, that in adults, the beginning of the said Justification is to be derived from the prevenient grace of God, through Jesus Christ, that is to say, from His vocation, whereby, without any merits existing on their parts, they are called; that so they, who by sins were alienated from God, may be disposed through His quickening and assisting grace, to convert themselves to their own justification, by freely assenting to and co-operating with that said grace: in such sort that, while God touches the heart of man by the illumination of the Holy Ghost, neither is man himself utterly without doing anything while he receives that inspiration, forasmuch as he is also able to reject it; yet is he not able, by his own free will, without the grace of God, to move himself unto justice in His sight. Whence, when it is said in the sacred writings: Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you, we are admonished of our liberty; and when we answer; Convert us, O Lord, to thee, and we shall be converted, we confess that we are prevented by the grace of God.

CHAPTER VI.

The manner of Preparation.

Now they (adults) are disposed unto the said justice, when, excited and assisted by divine grace, conceiving faith by hearing, they are freely moved towards God, believing those things to be true which God has revealed and promised,-and this especially, that God justifies the impious by His

grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and when, understanding themselves to be sinners, they, by turning themselves, from the fear of divine justice whereby they are profitably agitated, to consider the mercy of God, are raised unto hope, confiding that God will be propitious to them for Christ's sake; and they begin to love Him as the fountain of all justice; and are therefore moved against sins by a certain hatred and detestation, to wit, by that penitence which must be performed before baptism: lastly, when they purpose to receive baptism, to begin a new life, and to keep the commandments of God. Concerning this disposition it is written; He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and is a rewarder to them that seek him; and, Be of good faith, son, thy sins are forgiven thee; and, The fear of the Lord driveth out sin; and, Do penance, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; and, Going, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; finally, Prepare your hearts unto the Lord.

CHAPTER VII.

What the justification of the impious is, and what are the causes thereof.

This disposition, or preparation, is followed by Justification itself, which is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just, and of an enemy a friend, that so he may be an heir according to hope of life everlasting.

Of this Justification the causes are these: the final cause indeed is the glory of God and of Jesus Christ, and life everlasting; while the efficient cause is a merciful God who washes and sanctifies gratuitously, signing, and anointing with the holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance; but the meritorious cause is His most beloved only-begotten, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when we were enemies, for the exceeding charity wherewith he loved us, merited Justification for us by His most holy Passion on the wood of the cross, and made satisfaction for us unto God the Father; the instrumental cause is the sacrament of baptism, which is the sacrament of faith, without which (faith) no man was ever justified; lastly, the alone formal cause is the justice of God, not that whereby He Himself is just, but that whereby He maketh us just, that, to wit, with which we being endowed by Him, are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and we are not only reputed, but are truly called, and are, just, receiving justice within us, each one according to his own measure, which the Holy Ghost distributes to every one as He wills, and according to each one's proper disposition and co-operation. For, although no one can be just, but he to whom the merits of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ are communicated, yet is this done in the said justification of the impious, when by the merit of that same most holy Passion, the charity of God is poured forth, by the Holy Spirit, in the hearts of those that are justified, and is inherent therein: whence, man, through Jesus Christ, in whom he is ingrafted, receives, in the said justification, together with the remission of sins, all these (gifts) infused at once, faith, hope, and charity. For faith, unless hope and charity be added thereto, neither unites man perfectly with Christ, nor makes him a living member of His body. For which reason it is most truly said, that Faith without works is dead and profitless; and, In Christ Jesus neither circumcision, availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by charity. This faith, Catechumen's beg of the Church-agreeably to a tradition of the apostles-previously to the sacrament of Baptism; when they beg for the faith which bestows life everlasting, which, without hope and charity, faith cannot bestow: whence also do they immediately hear that word of Christ; If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. Wherefore, when receiving true and Christian justice, they are

bidden, immediately on being born again, to preserve it pure and spotless, as the first robe given them through Jesus Christ in lieu of that which Adam, by his disobedience, lost for himself and for us, that so they may bear it before the judgment-seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, and may have life everlasting.

CHAPTER VIII.

In what manner it is to be understood, that the impious is justified by faith, and gratuitously.

And whereas the Apostle saith, that man is justified by faith and freely, those words are to be understood in that sense which the perpetual consent of the Catholic Church hath held and expressed; to wit, that we are therefore said to be justified by faith, because faith is the beginning of human salvation, the foundation, and the root of all Justification; without which it is impossible to please God, and to come unto the fellowship of His sons: but we are therefore said to be justified freely, because that none of those things which precede justification-whether faith or works-merit the grace itself of justification. For, if it be a grace, it is not now by works, otherwise, as the same Apostle says, grace is no more grace.

CHAPTER IX.

Against the vain confidence of Heretics.

But, although it is necessary to believe that sins neither are remitted, nor ever were remitted save gratuitously by the mercy of God for Christ's sake; yet is it not to be said, that sins are forgiven, or have been forgiven, to any one who boasts of his confidence and certainty of the remission of his sins, and rests on that alone; seeing that it may exist, yea does in our day exist, amongst heretics and schismatics; and with great vehemence is this vain confidence, and one alien from all godliness, preached up in opposition to the Catholic Church. But neither is this to be asserted,- that they who are truly justified must needs, without any doubting whatever, settle within themselves that they are justified, and that no one is absolved from sins and justified, but he that believes for certain that he is absolved and justified; and that absolution and justification are effected by this faith alone: as though whoso has not this belief, doubts of the promises of God, and of the efficacy of the death and resurrection of Christ. For even as no pious person ought to doubt of the mercy of God, of the merit of Christ, and of the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments, even so each one, when he regards himself, and his own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension touching his own grace; seeing that no one can know with a certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God.

CHAPTER X.

On the increase of Justification received.

Having, therefore, been thus justified, and made the friends and domestics of God, advancing from virtue to virtue, they are renewed, as the Apostle says, day by day; that is, by mortifying the members of their own flesh, and by presenting them as instruments of justice unto sanctification, they, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the Church, faith co-operating with good works, increase in that justice which they have received through the grace of Christ, and are still further justified, as it is written; He that is just, let him be justified still; and again, Be not afraid to be justified even to death; and also, Do you see that by works a man is justified, and

not by faith only. And this increase of justification holy Church begs, when she prays, "Give unto us, O Lord, increase of faith, hope, and charity."

CHAPTER XI.

On keeping the Commandments, and on the necessity and possibility thereof.

But no one, how much soever justified, ought to think himself exempt from the observance of the commandments; no one ought to make use of that rash saying, one prohibited by the Fathers under an anathema, -that the observance of the commandments of God is impossible for one that is justified. For God commands not impossibilities, but, by commanding, both admonishes thee to do what thou art able, and to pray for what thou art not able (to do), and aids thee that thou mayest be able; whose commandments are not heavy; whose yoke is sweet and whose burthen light. For, whoso are the sons of God, love Christ; but they who love him, keep his commandments, as Himself testifies; which, assuredly, with the divine help, they can do. For, although, during this mortal life, men, how holy and just soever, at times fall into at least light and daily sins, which are also called venial, not therefore do they cease to be just. For that cry of the just, Forgive us our trespasses, is both humble and true. And for this cause, the just themselves ought to feel themselves the more obligated to walk in the way of justice, in that, being already freed from sins, but made servants of God, they are able, living soberly, justly, and godly, to proceed onwards through Jesus Christ, by whom they have had access unto this grace. For God forsakes not those who have been once justified by His grace, unless he be first forsaken by them. Wherefore, no one ought to flatter himself up with faith alone, fancying that by faith alone he is made an heir, and will obtain the inheritance, even though he suffer not with Christ, that so he may be also glorified with him. For even Christ Himself, as the Apostle saith, Whereas he was the son of God, learned obedience by the things which he suffered, and being consummated, he became, to all who obey him, the cause of eternal salvation. For which cause the same Apostle admonishes the justified, saying; Know you not that they that run in the race, all run indeed, but one receiveth the prize? So run that you may obtain. I therefore so run, not as at an uncertainty: I so fight, not as one beating the air, but I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection; lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a cast-away. So also the prince of the apostles, Peter; Labour the more that by good works you may make sure your calling and election. For doing those things, you shall not sin at any time. From which it is plain, that those are opposed to the orthodox doctrine of religion, who assert that the just man sins, venially at least, in every good work; or, which is yet more insupportable, that he merits eternal punishments; as also those who state, that the just sin in all their works, if, in those works, they, together with this aim principally that God may be gloried, have in view also the eternal reward, in order to excite their sloth, and to encourage themselves to run in the course: whereas it is written, I have inclined my heart to do all thy justifications for the reward: and, concerning Moses, the Apostle saith, that he looked unto the reward.

CHAPTER XII.

That a rash presumptuousness in the matter of Predestination is to be avoided.

No one, moreover, so long as he is in this mortal life, ought so far to presume as regards the secret mystery of divine predestination, as to determine for certain that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate; as if it were true, that he that is justified, either cannot sin any more, or, if he do

sin, that he ought to promise himself an assured repentance; for except by special revelation, it cannot be known whom God hath chosen unto Himself.

CHAPTER XIII.

On the gift of Perseverance.

So also as regards the gift of perseverance, of which it is written, He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved:-which gift cannot be derived from any other but Him, who is able to establish him who standeth that he stand perseveringly, and to restore him who falleth:-let no one herein promise himself any thing as certain with an absolute certainty; though all ought to place and repose a most firm hope in God's help. For God, unless men be themselves wanting to His grace, as he has begun the good work, so will he perfect it, working (in them) to will and to accomplish. Nevertheless, let those who think themselves to stand, take heed lest they fall, and, with fear and trembling work out their salvation, in labours, in watchings, in almsdeeds, in prayers and oblations, in fastings and chastity: for, knowing that they are born again unto a hope of glory, but not as yet unto glory, they ought to fear for the combat which yet remains with the flesh, with the world, with the devil, wherein they cannot be victorious, unless they be with God's grace, obedient to the Apostle, who says; We are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh; for if you live according to the flesh, you shall die; but if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live.

CHAPTER XIV.

On the fallen, and their restoration.

As regards those who, by sin, have fallen from the received grace of Justification, they may be again justified, when, God exciting them, through the sacrament of Penance they shall have attained to the recovery, by the merit of Christ, of the grace lost: for this manner of Justification is of the fallen the reparation: which the holy Fathers have aptly called a second plank after the shipwreck of grace lost. For, on behalf of those who fall into sins after baptism, Christ Jesus instituted the sacrament of Penance, when He said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained. Whence it is to be taught, that the penitence of a Christian, after his fall, is very different from that at (his) baptism; and that therein are included not only a cessation from sins, and a detestation thereof, or, a contrite and humble heart, but also the sacramental confession of the said sins,-at least in desire, and to be made in its season,-and sacerdotal absolution; and likewise satisfaction by fasts, alms, prayers, and the other pious exercises of a spiritual life; not indeed for the eternal punishment,-which is, together with the guilt, remitted, either by the sacrament, or by the desire of the sacrament,-but for the temporal punishment, which, as the sacred writings teach, is not always wholly remitted, as is done in baptism, to those who, ungrateful to the grace of God which they have received, have grieved the Holy Spirit, and have not feared to violate the temple of God. Concerning which penitence it is written; Be mindful whence thou art fallen; do penance, and do the first works. And again; The sorrow that is according to God worketh penance steadfast unto salvation. And again; Do penance, and bring forth fruits worthy of penance.

CHAPTER XV.

That, by every mortal sin, grace is lost, but not faith.

In opposition also to the subtle wits of certain men, who, by pleasing speeches and good words, seduce the hearts of the innocent, it is to be maintained, that the received grace of Justification is lost, not only by infidelity whereby even faith itself is lost, but also by any other mortal sin whatever, though faith be not lost; thus defending the doctrine of the divine law, which excludes from the kingdom of God not only the unbelieving, but the faithful also (who are) fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, liars with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, railers, extortioners, and all others who commit deadly sins; from which, with the help of divine grace, they can refrain, and on account of which they are separated from the grace of Christ.

CHAPTER XVI.

On the fruit of Justification, that is, on the merit of good works, and on the nature of that merit.

Before men, therefore, who have been justified in this manner,-whether they have preserved uninterruptedly the grace received, or whether they have recovered it when lost,-are to be set the words of the Apostle: Abound in every good work, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord; for God is not unjust, that he should forget your work, and the love which you have shown in his name; and, do not lose your confidence, which hath a great reward. And, for this cause, life eternal is to be proposed to those working well unto the end, and hoping in God, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Jesus Christ, and as a reward which is according to the promise of God Himself, to be faithfully rendered to their good works and merits. For this is that crown of justice which the Apostle declared was, after his fight and course, laid up for him, to be rendered to him by the just judge, and not only to him, but also to all that love his coming. For, whereas Jesus Christ Himself continually infuses his virtue into the said justified,-as the head into the members, and the vine into the branches,-and this virtue always precedes and accompanies and follows their good works, which without it could not in any wise be pleasing and meritorious before God,-we must believe that nothing further is wanting to the justified, to prevent their being accounted to have, by those very works which have been done in God, fully satisfied the divine law according to the state of this life, and to have truly merited eternal life, to be obtained also in its (due) time, if so be, however, that they depart in grace: seeing that Christ, our Saviour, saith: If any one shall drink of the water that I will give him, he shall not thirst for ever; but it shall become in him a fountain of water springing up unto life everlasting. Thus, neither is our own justice established as our own as from ourselves; nor is the justice of God ignored or repudiated: for that justice which is called ours, because that we are justified from its being inherent in us, that same is (the justice) of God, because that it is infused into us of God, through the merit of Christ. Neither is this to be omitted,-that although, in the sacred writings, so much is attributed to good works, that Christ promises, that even he that shall give a drink of cold water to one of his least ones, shall not lose his reward; and the Apostle testifies that, That which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; nevertheless God forbid that a Christian should either trust or glory in himself, and not in the Lord, whose bounty towards all men is so great, that He will have the things which are His own gifts be their merits. And forasmuch as in many things we all offend, each one ought to have before his eyes, as well the severity and judgment, as the mercy and goodness (of God); neither ought any one to judge himself, even though he be not conscious to himself of anything; because the whole life of man is to be examined and judged, not by the judgment of man, but of God, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then shall every man have praise from God, who, as it is written, will render to every man according to his works. After this Catholic doctrine on Justification, which whoso receiveth not faithfully and firmly cannot be justified, it hath seemed

good to the holy Synod to subjoin these canons, that all may know not only what they ought to hold and follow, but also what to avoid and shun.

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