

Essay 1: topic 3
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A+ 0/24
you have narrowed the topic
State it in the title.

For almost five hundred years, the debate has raged among Christians over the nature of spiritual salvation. Ever since Martin Luther made his stand that salvation comes only from faith, and that human works cannot restore the relationship to God shattered by sin, and the Catholic church re-emphasized its stance that salvation is through faith alive in works, and that works can bring us closer to God, the controversy has shattered the once unified body of believers. While it is true that the differences between the two stances are substantial, I maintain that Luther's stance is not nearly so different from that of the Council of Trent as many believe. However I also hope to show that where the two positions differ the Catholic position is the closer position to scripture. First the definition of justification and the effect it has on the relationship between God and man, second on the state of those who have been justified and the nature of their works, and finally the nature of faith itself. While it is certainly not possible to completely overthrow a point of view that has existed and thrived for five centuries, I do hope to cast some doubt on its correctness. *which one?*

Probably most central to the whole dispute is the different view Protestants and Catholics take on the definition of Justification. Two parties can certainly not be expected to agree on the nature of something if they can not agree on its definition. The Council of Trent states that "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" (32 Trent, ses. 6, ch. 4) and also "...by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is conferred in baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted...the whole of that which has

interesting ✓
the true and proper nature of sin is ... taken away" (23 Trent ses. 5 par. 5). This differs from Luther's position that even after baptism man is still inherently corrupt and displeasing to God, but God chooses to overlook our shortcomings provided we have faith (49 Bainton). The sin is still within us, but God will overlook it for the sake of Christ's passion. ✓

✓
what are
practical
consequences?

Both sides have some scriptural support. Luther's position can be found in Romans 7:15-12, in which Paul recounts a story of how he was conscious of a conflict within himself that kept him from doing the good things he wanted to do, and forced him to do the bad things (sin) he wanted to avoid. This indicates that he was in fact enslaved to sin and incapable of doing what was truly good and pleasing to God. In fact, when he would try to do good, evil comes up immediately and is done instead. Also in Romans 3:10 where Paul quotes a passage from Psalm 14 stating that no one is just. On the Catholic side is Romans 6:4, which states that in baptism we were died to sin with Christ, and by his resurrection we rose to new life, free from sin. He continues to state that we are no longer slaves to sin, and that sin is to have no more power over us. This clearly supports the Catholic doctrine. The scripture passages for the Lutheran position are much less applicable though – in both cases he was talking about people *prior* to justification. He talked about himself in the past tense, before he was converted. When quoting the Psalm, he was also talking about people who have not yet converted. The Council of Trent agrees that prior to justification man is a slave to sin, but maintains that afterwards man becomes free and may please God: "...none of those things which precede

justification – whether faith or works – merit the grace itself of justification” (36 Trent ses. 6 Ch. 8).

Based on these differing views of justification it is not surprising that the two sides have differing views on the nature and role of works after justification. The Council of Trent holds that after Justification good works do have merit that increases the aspect of God’s justice within the believer: “If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema” (47 Trent Canon XXIV). Also, the Council maintained that even if the works were done with an eye towards eternal rewards or avoiding eternal punishments they are still good. “If any one saith, that the just ought not to, for their good works done in God, to expect and hope for eternal recompense from God, through His mercy and the merit of Jesus Christ...let him be anathema” (47 Trent Cannon XXVI). This differs from the Lutheran position that to expect a reward for your actions is sinful because it is boastful and impinges upon God’s sovereignty by attempting to force God to do something, and impinges on the merit of Christ’s passion because it provides a separate offering from Christ’s offering for merit.

Again both sides have scripture to back them up. The Lutherans use Romans 4:27, in which Paul says that there is no room for boasting, especially by works. They also point to the numerous and consistent passages which state that it is the merit of Christ’s suffering that paid our debt to sin, and that therefore our works can have no

merit. The Catholic position is supported by Romans 2:5-10, in which Paul states that everyone will be rewarded according to his works, with "eternal life to those who seek glory, honor, and immortality through perseverance in good works" (Rom 2:7), by 2 Corinthians 5:10, in which he states that all will "receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil", and numerous examples from the teachings of Christ in the Gospel, including a passage familiar to Luther in which Christ is portrayed separating people according to their actions: people who have visited the sick and imprisoned, clothed the naked, fed the hungry, and gave drink to the thirsty on one side and those who did not on the other. *ut 25.*

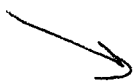
Regarding thoughts to reward, there is little scriptural evidence for the Protestant side that also contradicts the Catholic side. Romans 4:27 indicates that it is wrong to boast of your works for their own sake – which the Catholic Church agrees with. The Council of Trent states: "For, whereas Jesus Christ Himself continually infuses his virtue into the said justified, ... 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..."

Good! (43 Trent ses. 6 Ch. 16). This clearly shows agreement that the good works do not themselves have merit which we can boast of, but that the virtue of Christ which fills us and becomes a part of us through Justification provides them with merit. Thus we cannot boast of our good deeds, but we can hope for a reward for them because Christ's merit fills them, Christ's merit deserves reward, and God is just and therefore will reward what deserves rewarding.

something amiss with faith." (259 Bainton). This matches with James because it indicates that works are a sign of faith, rather than a source of salvation. A much better citation would be 1 Corinthians 13:2, which states that even having enough faith to move mountains, but lacking love, is useless. Later in 1 Corinthians he states that after the current age faith itself will pass away, and only love will remain. This ties in with Christ's command that we love one another, and with Paul's continued emphasis on love when Christians deal with other Christians. Also, in Mathiew 19:16, Jesus tells a rich young man that if he wants to enter into (eternal) life, he should keep the commandments, and in John 14:15 Jesus states that anyone who loves him must keep his commandments.

✓ These all add up to a conclusion that it is faith alive in love that saves, and combined with ✓
✓ the above definition of justification, works done in faith for the sake of love by one who
is justified has sanctifying merit.

After all this it should be clear that there is a great deal of biblical support for the ✓
position of the Catholic Church on the doctrines of justification. The Protestant position ✓
tends to focus on a few key points in scripture rather than taking into account the whole ✓
of scripture, and isolates a few aspects of God in favor of others. That being said, ✓
Luther's original stance is also clearly not so different from the Catholic position as that ✓
of other Protestant thinkers of the time, and especially today. This goes to explain the
recent Catholic-Lutheran accord on the doctrine of justification, in which the Lutherans
dropped the word "alone" from their stance of justification by faith, and the Catholics put
more emphasis on faith and the merit of Christ, even though the emphasis was already
heavy in the doctrinal stance laid out in the Council of Trent, session 6.



Works Cited

1. Bainton, Roland H. Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther
New York: Meridian 1995

2. Council of Trent Trans. By J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848),
scanned by Hanover College Students in 1995,
<http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent.htm>

you are saying
that Luther is closer to
the Catholic than he is to
many (most?) modern Protestants.
— your essay is very searching and challenging.
you focus essentially only on the subject of faith & works,
which is ok, but you need to state that up front.
I will enjoy rereading this paper.
— I essentially agree with you.
I always thought Trent's statement of justification was sensible.
A+