

# PROGRESS, STAGNATION, AND BREAKTHROUGH: JUSTIFICATION IN THE ANGLICAN, METHODIST, AND PLYMOUTH BRETHREN TRADITIONS

In 1533, while the Protestant Reformation was underway in continental Europe, King Henry VIII of England formally severed ties with the Roman Catholic Church and made himself the temporal and spiritual head of the Church of England. The break, precipitated by the pope's refusal to grant Henry an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, was at first felt more politically than religiously. But through reforming efforts led by Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer (d. 1556), Protestant doctrine slowly gained ground during Henry's reign and took firm hold under his successor, Edward VI. After Edward died at the age of fifteen, the newly crowned Mary Tudor abruptly brought England back under the authority of the pope for five tumultuous years until her death in 1558, when Elizabeth I began a forty-five-year reign and, in the interest of political stability, steered the country on a mediating course between Protestantism and Catholicism. This "Elizabethan Settlement," as it is known to history, established what some have identified as a *via media*, or middle way, that allowed for doctrinal ambiguity but also placed the Church of England on a long and uncertain course to more fully define its ecclesial and theological identity.

Since the Reformation three strands of Anglicans with distinct theological commitments have emerged within Anglicanism. Those who identify with the teaching and practice of the Reformed branch of Protestantism are designated Reformed Anglicans below. Those who are of a more Catholic persuasion are designated Anglo-Catholics. A third strand consists of liberal Anglicans, whose evolving theological positions we do not evaluate in this issue. One consequence of this diversity is that there has been no coherent, clearly identifiable theological tradition in Anglicanism. Anglicans of different theological positions are at liberty to interpret and apply the Church of England's foundational documents—the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the two Books of Homilies—according to their respective understandings of what constitutes true Anglicanism and faithful Anglican theology. The absence of an authoritative theological tradition thus allows for significant

doctrinal diversity under the broad label *Anglican* (Campbell et al. 2:185-188).

## Justification by Faith in the Anglican Tradition

This doctrinal diversity is readily apparent in the Anglican treatment of justification. While the Anglican formularies are Protestant on the matter of justification, there is nonetheless a variety of interpretations of justification in the Anglican tradition that seems sure to persist indefinitely. Rather than constructing a "consensus" Anglican understanding of justification, then, we will instead identify themes in the teaching of justification that emerge in the work of various Anglican theologians through the centuries. In what follows we will consider Anglican theologians' views on objective and subjective aspects of justification, the role of union with Christ in justification, the assurance and security of salvation, and the relationship between justification and the sacraments. Our final sections will consider the teaching of justification by faith in the Methodist and the Plymouth Brethren traditions—both of which had their origins in, but eventually departed from, the Anglican fold. We forgo consideration of the Pentecostal tradition—which emerged from Methodism—because its teaching on justification generally follows Methodist teaching (Campbell et al. 2:188). (See Campbell et al. 2:225-229 for an assessment of Pentecostal teaching on justification.)

## Objective and Subjective Aspects of Justification

At different periods in the history of the Church of England, prominent teachers have granted a fuller understanding of justification than either the Protestant view of imputed righteousness or the Roman Catholic view of infused righteousness allows by itself. While efforts to broaden the scope of justification did not produce a representative Anglican view, they nonetheless demonstrate a willingness among some Anglicans to recognize an objective aspect and a subjective aspect of justification. These more holistic perceptions are not consistent with one another in every detail, but our point