

Cardinal Gasparo Contarini
Letter on the Regensburg Agreement
May 3, 1541

In this paper, on which the Catholic theologians and the Protestants as appointed by His Imperial Majesty have agreed, there are two passages about which the reader must be advised. For the rest will be plain to all.

The first passage is the one which states that we ought not to rely on the justice inherent in us, by which we are made just and perform good works, but ought rather to rely on the justice of Christ, which is imputed to us on account of Christ and the merit of Christ; for in fact it is by this latter justice that we are justified before God, that is, considered and reputed just.

We think this conclusion is most true, catholic, and very pious. For in this way spoke Augustine against the Pelagians, who thought that man could in this life live without sin. So says the light of the Church, Augustine: O Pelagians, the universal Church prays in the Lord's Prayer, 'Forgive us our debts'. Thus everyone is aware that he has sin, which he prays to have forgiven. And it should not at all be said that this petition is made by any men, however holy, on account of humility, as though they were aware that they did not have sin but nevertheless asked to have it forgiven them out of humility. For before God this humility would be a thing feigned and insincere, not indeed humility. Wherefore the most holy doctor concluded, as it is in very truth, that every man has sins, which he asks to have forgiven him. It is for a reason quite similar to this that the entire Church declares, 'Lord, I am not worthy', and that Daniel says, 'Not in our righteousnesses, but in thy great mercies do we lay our prayers before thee'. Likewise speaks David in a psalm which the Church everywhere recites: 'Hear me, O Lord, in thy righteousness, and enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified'.

The entire Church therefore confesses that she is not worthy, and that no man has been justified in the sight of God by his own (I say) personal righteousness which inheres in himself. And so she prays to be heard in the righteousness of God. Thus she perceives that she needs the justice of God, in order to be justified in the sight of God. Moreover, the justice of God is Christ; and we are made, as the Apostle says, the righteousness of God in him. Behold how clearly the Holy Spirit says this in a psalm which is a prayer to God set down for us to use. And here, too, we cannot say that such things were spoken on account of humility, seeing that this humility would be a hypocritical fiction, and not indeed humility, as Augustine used to declare against the Pelagians. From this cause it appeared to the Catholic theologians that this conclusion is most true.

There is another passage which could perhaps be marked, viz., because men do not see the term *merit* in the place where good works are discussed. For the Catholic theologians thought it unnecessary to insist on this term, since the same meaning is there. They thought this especially considering that when Thomas speaks in I-II., the last question, the first article, concerning our merit with God, he says that there is no merit *simpliciter*, but only after a fashion, inasmuch as between God and us there can be no justice simply put, but only a certain manner of justice. Again, Scotus says in his third part on the *Sentences* that merit is not accepted by God because it is merit, but on the contrary, it is merit because it is accepted by God. These considerations lessen the reason for merit *absolutely* so called. Therefore the Protestants could have objected to us from the Scholastic doctors that we should not use the word merit absolutely. Consequently, the Catholic theologians decided not to insist on this word, since the same idea is expressed.

Notes:

1. For a critical contemporary response to this letter, see Sadoletto's *votum* which begins '*Quod in minore schedula*'. It can be found in Beccadelli, *Monumenti* (tom. 1, par. 2), p. 162.
2. Augustine regularly mentions the Lord's Prayer when writing against the Pelagians. Compare in this case *C. duas epp. Pelag.* 3.15, 4.17, and 4.27. See also the final three canons that the Council of Carthage adopted against the Pelagians in 418.
3. As printed, Contarini's letter cites Thomas from *2^a. 2^{ae} ult. q. art. p.^o*. It would appear the place intended is I-II, q. 114, art. 1.
4. The line from Scotus may be found in lib. 3, d. 19, q. 1, 7.