

# Justification by Faith in Early Church: An Overview of Doctrinal Change from the Early Church to Medieval Time

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolution of the doctrine of justification from the early Church through the medieval period, focusing on shifts in theological understanding and philosophical influences. It aims to trace the development of justification doctrine and its implications for Christian theology. The study employs a comparative historical analysis, reviewing primary sources from early Church fathers such as Clement of Rome and Irenaeus of Lyons, through Augustine of Hippo's emphasis on justification by faith alone, to the medieval contributions of Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas. This analysis highlights how early Christian theologians integrated faith, works, and sacramental rites into their understanding of justification. It also explores Augustine's transformative impact, which centered on divine grace and predestination, contrasting with Pelagius's focus on human effort. The medieval period introduced significant shifts, influenced by the transition from Neo-Platonism to Aristotelian philosophy. The paper details how Anselm's satisfaction theory framed justification in terms of divine justice and Christ's atoning sacrifice, while Thomas Aquinas further developed this with a synthesis of Aristotelian logic and Christian doctrine, emphasizing a cooperative process between divine grace and human free will. The findings underscore the dynamic interplay between faith, reason, and ecclesiastical authority in shaping Christian theological perspectives. This comparative analysis provides valuable insights into the doctrinal shifts and philosophical underpinnings that have shaped the doctrine of justification, offering a comprehensive understanding of its historical development and theological significance.

Key Words: Justification, Theology, Historical Development, Philosophical Influence

## INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of justification by faith stands as a cornerstone of Christian theology, shaping the understanding of salvation and the believer's relationship with God. Throughout Christian history, this doctrine has been a focal point of theological reflection, debate, and development, particularly during the Early Church and Medieval periods. From the earliest days of Christianity, questions about how individuals are made right with God—whether through faith alone, works, or a combination of both—have profoundly influenced the church's teachings, liturgy, and community life (Erickson1985:955). This paper seeks to explore the historical development of the doctrine of justification by faith, tracing its evolution from the

Early Church to the Medieval era, highlighting the key doctrinal changes, theological debates, and influential figures that shaped its trajectory.

The doctrine of justification by faith primarily concerns how sinners are made righteous in the eyes of God. Rooted in the apostle Paul’s writings, particularly in the books of Romans and Galatians, justification by faith asserts that salvation is a gift from God received through faith in Jesus Christ, rather than through human works or merit (Preus, 2002). This belief challenged prevailing notions in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts of the Early Church, where adherence to the law and moral virtue were often seen as necessary for divine favor. The Early Church fathers grappled with interpreting Paul’s teachings, seeking to balance the relationship between faith, grace, and works in a way that was faithful to the apostolic message and the broader Christian tradition.

The significance of the doctrine of justification by faith extends beyond theological discourse; it touches upon the core of Christian identity and the nature of the gospel itself. In the Early Church, the debate over justification was not merely an abstract theological issue but was central to how the church understood its mission and message. It influenced how Christians viewed their relationship with God, the role of Christ’s sacrifice, and the assurance of salvation. As Christianity expanded and evolved, the doctrine of justification continued to be a subject of intense theological exploration, particularly during times of controversy and council deliberations. (McFadden, 2021)

In the Early Church, key figures such as Augustine of Hippo profoundly shaped the understanding of justification by faith through his emphasis on original sin, grace, and human inability to achieve righteousness apart from divine intervention (Howard, 2022). Augustine’s views, especially in his debates with Pelagius, set the foundation for much of Western Christian thought on justification, highlighting the necessity of grace and the limits of human effort (Teselle, 2002). However, this period was marked by significant diversity in thought, as different theologians and church leaders proposed varying interpretations of how faith, works, and grace interacted in the process of salvation.

Moving into the Medieval period, the doctrine of justification underwent further refinement and transformation. The rise of Scholasticism and the influence of theologians like Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas brought new philosophical rigor to the discussion, integrating elements of Aristotelian thought and attempting to systematize Christian doctrine (Rosenblatt, 1992). During this time, the relationship between justification, the sacraments, and the authority of the church became more pronounced. The church’s teachings increasingly emphasized the role of sacraments—particularly penance and the Eucharist—as means of imparting grace and contributing to the believer’s justification. This period also saw the development of doctrines related to merit, indulgences, and purgatory, which added complexity to the church’s understanding of how justification was achieved and maintained (Ibid).

The Medieval era was not without its challenges and dissenting voices. As the church’s teachings on justification became more elaborate and intertwined with ecclesiastical authority, there were growing concerns about the potential for abuses and misunderstandings, particularly regarding the sale of indulgences and the perceived commercialization of salvation. These issues would later contribute to the rise of pre-Reformation movements and critiques, setting the stage for the dramatic theological upheavals of the Reformation period (Horton, 2019). The development of the doctrine of justification by faith during the Medieval era thus not only reflects the church’s attempt to articulate and safeguard its teachings but also highlights the dynamic and often contentious nature of doctrinal evolution.

This study aims to provide an overview of the doctrinal changes in the understanding of justification by faith from the Early Church to the Medieval period. By examining key theological developments, influential figures, and significant controversies, the paper seeks to illuminate how this central Christian doctrine was shaped over time and the factors that influenced its evolution. Understanding the historical trajectory of justification by faith offers valuable insights into the broader narrative of Christian theology and the enduring questions that continue to shape Christian belief and practice. As the church navigated the challenges of defining its core teachings amidst diverse cultural, philosophical, and theological influences, the doctrine of justification by faith remained a vital and evolving element of its doctrinal heritage.

This paper focuses on the historical development of the doctrine of justification by faith within Christian history, specifically examining the Early Church (circa 30–500 AD) and the Medieval period (circa 500–1500 AD). The study will trace the doctrinal shifts and theological debates that shaped the understanding of justification by faith during these two significant eras, providing an overview of how early Christian thinkers and medieval theologians approached the concept of being made right with God.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a comparative historical-theological approach, combining primary and secondary source analysis to explore the doctrinal development of justification by faith. The primary sources include writings from key Church Fathers, theological treatises, and official church documents and councils that addressed issues related to justification. Texts such as Augustine’s “Confessions” and “On Grace and Free Will,” the writings of Anselm and Aquinas, and the proceedings of significant church councils will provide direct insight into how the doctrine was articulated and defended.

Secondary sources, including historical analyses, theological commentaries, and scholarly articles, will be used to provide context and interpretation of the primary sources. These secondary materials will help elucidate the broader historical and theological landscape, offering perspectives on how social, cultural, and philosophical factors influenced the development of the doctrine. By examining both primary and secondary sources, the study will provide a comprehensive overview of the doctrinal changes and theological nuances that characterized the understanding of justification by faith in the Early Church and Medieval periods.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Concept of Justification in the Early Church**

Justification issue was not the theological issue before Augustine (D.H. William,2006) and for the earlier period the intention of Christian thinkers was mostly put on the Christological and Trinitarian dogmas rather than justification, however, they used the term justification in relation to Paul’s teaching. In addition to this, “Patristic period is one the most exciting and creatives periods in the history of Christian thought” (McGrath 1998:17) as the landmark of the development of Christian doctrines which includes the doctrine of justification by faith.

Moreover, McGrath argues that their teaching was mostly accompanied by the exploitation of Hellenistic culture and pagan philosophy as vehicles for theological advancement as the key strategy for gospel proclamation among the pagan cultures such as predestination, grace, and free will, although all those things remain controversy in Christian theology (McGrath, 1989). Human's free will was the most discussed theme from all those things associated with the human's capacity and capability in achieving purity for their salvation. Accordingly, Greek Fathers interpreted the Scriptures mostly in Greek culture and philosophy that were influenced by Platonic tradition (Placer, 1983). Among the early church fathers, Augustine was the champion in teaching justification by faith, and provides a significant difference before him that tended to follow Pelagius' theory (McGrath, 1989).

Below are some of the views of the Church Fathers regarding the teaching on justification by faith. There are many church fathers who have expressed their views regarding how people are justified, however, due to the limitation of this study only some of them and their views are presented in this section.

### **Clement of Rome.**

Clement was the bishop of Rome from 92-100. He was a great theologian for the church after the Apostles as he sent the letter to the church of Corinth around 96-97 (Berardino 2013). As the bishop of Rome, his letter to the church in Corinth was focused on the harmony of the church. He was the third bishop in Rome after Peter and Paul, however, he had read some of the letters of Paul which perhaps related to the teaching justification (Mircea Eliade 1986).

He agreed with Paul about justification, however, he modified for the need of the church in Corinth. His first Epistle sent to Corinth portrayed his view on the concept of justification. He says:

Whosoever will candidly consider each particular, will recognize the greatness of the gift which was given by him. For him have sprung the priest and all the Levites who minister at the altar of God. For him also was descended our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh. From him arose kings, princes, and rulers of the race of Judah. Nor are his others tribes in small glory inasmuch as God has promised “thy seed shall be as the stars of heaven.” All these therefore, were highly honored, and made great, not for the own sake, or for their own work, or for the righteousness which they wrought, but through the operation of His will. And we to being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men to whom he is justified forever and ever. Amen (Clement of Rome, 1983. *ANF*, Vol. 1, Chapter 32).

Based on that statement, we know that Clement believed that through the atonement of Jesus Christ justification is possible. However, justification is not only through the work of Jesus Christ, but also by God's calling to awake the person to place his faith in Jesus.

Moreover, concerning the morality that Clement observed in the Church of Corinth, justification is not only enough by faith in Jesus Christ without showing that justification is possible by faith in the work of and living in a righteous life (Clement of Rome, 1983, *ANF* 2:308). In other words, for Clement justification is not only by Christ's merit alone but also by the moral life of the receiver.

### **Justine the Martyr.**

Justin the Martyr was a Platonist before he converted to be a Christian. When he became a Christian, he was the first orthodox author who discussed so much of the role of philosophy in Christian teaching (W.H.C. Frend, 1964). Justin the Martyr was an apologist in the second century from the East and he was enthusiastic about justification where he agreed with the teaching of Ignatius of Antioch who said: “Let your baptism be ever your shield, your faith a helmet, your charity a spear, your patience is panoply. Let your works be deposits, so that you may receive the sum that is due to you.” (Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to Polycarp:6). Then, Justin makes it clear that justification is not only through faith alone in Christ Jesus, but also by doing the works that the Savior commanded, as he says “those who are found not living as he taught should know that they are not really Christians, even if his teaching is on their lips, for he said that not those who merely profess, but those who also do the works will be saved” (Justin Martyr, The First Apology of Justine Martyr, ch. 6).

However, in his *Dialogue with Trypo*, he believed that purification is only by the blood of Jesus Christ. It seems this contradicted to what he said before, however, this statement was the answer to the polemic in the Church regarding the teaching of Jewish Christians. Justin the Martyr never abandoned apostolic fathers’ teaching of the necessity of faith for justification, however, he combined works, not merely faith alone “each man goes to everlasting punishment and salvation according to the value of his action” (Frend, 1984:239-240). Additionally he says that “for Abraham was declared by God to be righteous, not on account of his circumcision, but on account of faith” (Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypo, ch. XCII). Therefore, Justin the Martyr was “semi-legalistic” (Pease, 1945) in his teaching about justification.

### **Irenaeus of Lyons.**

During the middle years of second-century Gnosticism was spread rapidly and dominated Christian intellectual life, therefore, their teaching flourished to Italy and Rome. For Gnosticism, salvation is by knowledge, because for them God was indeed a “God of knowledge” and the word *gnosis* is used to denote this that has only a limited place for Jews and in the early Christian scale of values (Frend, 1984). However, somehow Gnosticism granted salvation by faith and works can obtain it for the middle group (McGiffert, 1932). Irenaeus as a Western Father of the Church was one of the opponents of Gnostic teaching. Without placing so much his teaching in a philosophical way relied on the revelation, on tradition, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Bible is the final source for him for theological proofs (Frend, 1984). However, he accepted that salvation is the releasing from the flesh.

In his book *Against the Heresies I*, in order to receive eternal life Irenaeus of Lyons suggested the necessity of a life of love, holiness as well as keeping the Law of God. In addition to that Irenaeus says that repentance and righteousness are more to faith. He taught about the freedom of will, and he believed that righteousness demanded Christian’s obedience to the Law of God (McGiffert, 1932). Irenaeus compared first Adam and the second Adam, the first failed and the second fulfilled the demand of the law and became the cause of salvation (Irenaeus, 1989). Irenaeus upheld the teaching of salvation by faith in order to against against Judaism and righteousness by works of law was the answer to the teaching of Gnostics.

Sacrament is very important in obtaining salvation as he says “Henceforth it was everywhere recognized that the participation in the sacraments and obedience including both correct faith and right conduct ... were necessary to salvation, or in other words that there must

be divine grace and human merit” (Irenaeus1989:148). Through this understanding, his teaching was very important as the foundation of the Roman Catholic doctrine regarding salvation until now.

### **Origen.**

In the third century, the Church remains struggling with many of the teachings of Gnosticism. Origen as an Eastern Christian thinker highly defended Christian faith. However, he used Platonic philosophy in his arguments against the Gnostics (Frend, 1934). Although he was a great theologian in his time and many other theologians’ ideas were influenced by his thoughts, however some of his teachings were rejected and condemned by the church and many heresies after him were directly or indirectly based on his teachings (Olson, 1999).

Regarding the doctrine of salvation, Origen believed the role of divine revelation and faith, however, the values of its role are similar to the role of philosophy and reason. Reasoning about God and salvation are mutually related to one another in the commitment of faith, which also includes the acceptance of the truth of the church’s tradition and apostles’ teaching (Olson, 1999). The central theme of Origen’s theology is the necessity of human co-operation in salvation, cooperation that extends to all that pertains to salvation: election, interior transformation, and perseverance (C. Verfailie, 1926). Moreover, for Origen, faith and works are linked inextricably. He adds the Pauline thought with affirmation which both faith and works. Origen admitted that faith is the beginning of justification, but good works make it perfect, these two elements are rooted in each other. Justification by faith alone is the forgiveness of past sins, and works through the acceptance of the sacraments of the church such as Baptism and circumcision is for the future (Scheck, 2001). Therefore, justification by faith with a combination of good works was the teaching of Origen.

### **Tertullian.**

Tertullian was a lawyer before he became a Christian in 193. When he became a Catholic priest he belongs to the Apologetic Fathers for the Catholic Church (Jurgens, 1970). Regarding the teaching of justification, Tertullian also used the biblical verses as a biblical foundation for his understanding about justification - Hab 2:4 “the just shall live by faith” (Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 4.18, in *ANF* 3:376, 1885). However, Tertullian placed the discussion of justification by faith in the context of free will and self-determination due to the issues of *fatalism* (Allison, 2011). Tertullian comments: “This will be the power of the [grace](#) of [God](#), more potent indeed than nature, exercising its sway over the faculty that underlies itself within us — even the freedom of our [will](#), which is described as ἀντεξούσιος (of independent authority)” (Tertullian, *Treatise on the Soul*, 21, in *ANF*, 3:202, 1885).

As Tertullian believed in justification by faith in the context of free will and self-determination, he suggested that salvation is not enough by the death of Christ on the cross, however, penance and self-chastisement are needed for the removal of sin (Fisher, 1932). Moreover, Tertullian upheld the doctrine of original sin, in order to remove the original sin, another sacrament is needed, Baptism. He believed that no one has eternal life without the sacrament of Baptism (Jurgens, 1970). In other words, for Tertullian, justification takes place for the sinners by faith and the Church Sacraments.

### **Cyprian.**

In the middle of the third century, the Church faced many heretical doctrines, schisms and also Decian persecution. In order to protect the Church from the doctrines of the heretics, Cyprian wrote letters to the church in North Africa (Donna, 1964). As the bishop of Chartage, he also wrote about the authority of the Church, the power of the priest and the Bishop of Rome (Hartel, 1880). Based on his understanding of Deut17:12,13 Cyprian says “Let them not think that the way of life and salvation exist for them if they have refused to obey the bishops and the priests” (Donna 1964:13).

Regarding forgiveness, he introduces the teaching that there is no forgiveness outside the Church. Salvation is given to those who are members of the Church (Donna, 1964). Cyprian views the Church as the chanel of salvation in this world, and the authority of the church is applied in the power of the priest as it has begun from the Apostolic church. “The church was in the bishop and the bishop was in the church. There was an all-pervading unity in its theology, organization, and sacrament” (Frend, 1984:351). The means of remission of sin in the church itself is by Baptism. There is no remission of sins without Baptism in the Church of God because God is the one who builds the Church and ordained it for salvation. When the person was baptized in the church, he was also sanctified (Frend, 1984).

Cyprian did not refuse justification by faith in Christ, however, as the body of Christ, the Church is the place where people come to Christ by faith by accepting the sacraments of Church and Baptism by it and thus the sinners justified. Although, Tertulian and Cyprian are slightly similar in the justification understanding, however, in the eyes of Cyprian, the Church has authority and power in the remission of sins for eternal life (Frend, 1984).

## **Development of Justification Doctrine in the Patristic Period**

### **Augustine of Hippo.**

Augustine was the greatest theologian from the West in Christian history. He is considered the man who was the intermediary in the transition between the ancient age and medieval Christianity (Stumpf, 1971). He has continued to be a major in theology to both Roman Catholic Church regarding the authority of the church and sacraments, while for Protestants concerning grace and salvation (Ferguson, 2013). The Church Fathers before Augustine did not put so much of their intention systematically on the doctrine of justification by faith although they knew and received it. Instead, their focus was put vastly regarding the doctrine of God, the Trinity and ontology issues of the divine nature (Williams, 2006). Therefore according to McGrath he was a church father who concerned vividly of this particular doctrine and most of the Church Fathers before Augustine slightly tended to follow Pelagius on righteousness (McGrath, 1998). Augustine was interested in the Pauline teaching that made him discuss much concerning this issue, especially in response to the teachings of Pelagius (Ferguson, 1999).

The distinctive part of Augustine’s teaching regarding justification by faith is in relation to grace and sin or original sin. For him, sinful man cannot obtain salvation with their own works, with their own choice, however, only by the grace of God alone that is infused to him someone can operate their will (McGrath, 1998). Therefore, for Augustine, God’s promise of grace is the very basis of human justification (Mcgrath, 1998). Augustine defined the relationship between grace and justification as follows:

What is grace? That which is freely is given. What is freely given? Given not paid. If it was due, wages would be given, but grace would not be bestowed. But if it was really due, then you were good. But if, as is true, you were evil but believed in him who

justifies the ungodly (What is “who justifies the ungodly”? the ungodly is made righteous), consider what by right hungover you by the law and you have obtained by grace. But having obtained that grace by faith, you will be just by faith-”for the just lives by faith” (Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, NPNF, 7:21).

Thus, according to Augustine, the gift of righteousness is received by faith. However, the faith of the receiver is not by exercise of the will, but the gift of God. Therefore the discussion of merit in salvation is over (Augustine, NPNF, 1983).

Moreover, Augustine believed that human’s effort is nothing for their salvation, therefore, everyone depended on God. Only through the grace of God from the eternal decree of justification is bestowed to the sinners. Freedom of choice cannot make any contribution at all for justification (Ramos, 2014). Then he arrived at the teaching that God predestined those who He justified from eternally, without human’s free will (Pease 1981).

Augustine presents the will of God in contrast to the will of man, only God’s predestinarian will determines who is to be saved and who is to be lost, God’s will alone is operative in salvation (Augustine, NPNF, 1983). Augustine’s belief in a sovereign God’s predestining the elect had a great influence on the Reformers, who added the decree of reprobation, which included everyone in God’s election, which means there is no change in the history to what was made in eternity. Through this view, Protestant theology was greatly influenced (Gulley, 2003).

Moreover, Augustine believed that human’s free will is incapable for doing good works, on the other hand, he also said good works could merit man’s justification based on the biblical text of James 2:24-26 that describes faith without works is dead. With this text, Augustine builds his theology of justification. It means, justification takes place from eternity in the sinners based on his faith that can be seen in his good works, but the good works operate not by his own effort but God already operates in their hearts by the grace of God, prompting him to act, strengthening the will, and empowering him to perform the good works (Gulley, 2003).

Furthermore, Augustine did not focus on the biblical text regarding the meaning of justification. He uses Latin word to define the meaning, *justificio* which means to make righteous (Anderson, Murphy, and Burgess, 1985). To Augustine, justification is not a declaration but internal justification as he says, “works in His saints” (Augustine 1987:113, 965). This understanding he uses in all his writings regarding the teaching on justification (Right, 2006). In other words, Augustine defined the meaning of justification from the Latin word and in the Latin worldviews that led him to the conclusion that justification is making the recipient righteous before God by infusing God’s grace in him through the faith of the recipient that operates by the grace without the human’s freedom of choice.

Although, Augustine totally believed only by the grace of God justice is given to the sinners, on the other hand, he did not deny the importance of Church sacraments such as Baptism and Lord’s Supper as a part of justification. Augustine says: “no one is justified unless he believes in Christ and cleanses by baptism” (Augustine, 2010).

### **Pelagius.**

From the first to the fourth century the main focus of the Church Fathers was on the topics about Trinity, however, at the beginning of the fifth century, there was a movement to the subject proposed by Pelagius (Gulley, 2003). The theological teaching of justification in Augustine resulted from Pelagius’ teaching regarding salvation and its relation to the human’s



free will and capability. As a moralist (Ferguson, 2013), Pelagius rejected the ideas that the persons are born in a sinful nature and he uplifted the human's free will. Through this teaching Pelagian controversy was the most controversial discussion in the fifth century in Christian history (Augustine, 1987).

Pelagius asserted that there is no relation to God's grace and the keeping the Law. Human beings can keep the law without the Grace of God. However, Augustine strongly believed that without the grace of God it is impossible for man to keep the law. Apparently, Pelagius did not sense the need for a Savior like Augustine did for his justification before the law (Gulley, 2003). The man's personality and experience are important in Pelagius's reflection. It means that man is able to do all the demands of what is right and he is able to obtain salvation their own works of righteousness (Warfield, 1887). Regarding the nature of man in relation to salvation, Pelagius tended to be personal, on the other hand, Augustine's is collective.

Moreover, Pelagius taught that everyone is born without sin or original sin. On the other hand, Augustine strongly supported that no one is born without original sin. Pelagius stated that humans are born sinless and can remain sinless by the strength of their will, and external legalism that knows no need for salvation (Gulley, 2003).

On one hand, Augustine asserted that only the wills of God and man determine if one is saved or lost, on the other hand, Pelagius believed that human will alone determines if one is saved or lost. Augustine believed that infants (there is no will or belief) can be baptized and saved, whereas Pelagius upheld that the humans can live without sins with their will (Augustine, 1983, *NPNF*, First Series, 5:15-78).

In reaction to the contrast views between Pelagius and Augustine, Semi-Pelagianism arose in the fifth century during the last years of Augustine's life. The leader of this view was Jhon Cassian (Ferguson, 2013). They rejected Pelagius' view of the sinlessness of human nature and corruption of the human nature from Augustine rejected the external grace of Pelagius and the irresistible grace of Augustine. However, semi-Pelagianism slightly tended closer to Palagius (Schaff, 1960).

However the Second Council of Orange in 529 condemned Semi-Pelagianism view, and agreed and followed Augustine's view regarding human nature and salvation. There are seven points that the Council of Orange decided concerning this issue: 1. Because of Adam's sin, his body and soul injured, then all his posterity facing the death penalty. 2. God's grace is granted to humans, by it they pray for salvation. 3. All good works and thoughts come from God. 4. Continually God's grace is present to regenerate and even the saints. 5. The restoration of the weakness of the will through Adam's sin is only by Baptism. 6. Unmerited grace precedes meritorious works. 7. Although there was no sin, a human would have needed God's grace for salvation (Schaff, 1960).

### **Justification by Faith in the Medieval Church**

Before the medieval period, the concept of justification by faith was Augustinian. There was no more a very influential theologian in the church from the 5<sup>th</sup> century until 9<sup>th</sup> as Augustine. However, from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries there was a movement from Neo-Platonism which was held by Augustine to Aristotelian, where the church tended to use Aristotle's theories rather than the Scripture (Luther, 1972). The teaching of justification in this period linked with the sacraments of Baptism and Penance instead of faith (McGrath, 1988). The important view

of medieval theology on justification is to act and it is the process in which the status and nature of humans are altered (McGrath, 1988).

Before Thomas Aquinas came as the leading Catholic theologian in the medieval period, the influence of Augustine's theology was very strong. There are some theologians in the medieval church who adopted Augustine's teaching that emphasized the grace received by faith alone, but in the same time insisted that the fruit of justification consists in the good works such as Venerable Bede, Ildefonsus, Julian of Toledo, Isidore of Seville, and Boniface (Allison, 2011).

There were great theologians in the medieval period whose theology and teaching influenced the church, Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas. Both of them were scholastic theologians. Anselm is counted in early scholastic period, while Aquinas belongs to late scholastic period (Ferguson, 2013).

### **Anselm.**

Anselm was the first great theologian in a medieval church that composed highly original works based on the rational argument. As the forerunner of scholasticism, he allowed philosophy a significant role in the formulation of theology and followed Augustine's method of faith seeking understanding (Olson, 1999). He truly believed in the revelation as the Christian faith, however, in order to understand the revelation reason is the instrument. By reason, rationality and inner coherence of Christian faith are shown (*Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, 2016).

In general, according to some church historians such as J.D. Douglas (1992), Arthur C. McGiffert (1933), and Frederick Copleston (1962), Anselm was the advocate of Augustine's theology. Regarding the issue of soteriology Anselm was criticized as a legalist. He argues that God's mercy is grounded in His justice. The redemption of mankind is necessary as a matter of justice. Man cannot redeem himself due to the frustrating original justice, only God can make satisfaction made through Christ's incarnation.

The redemption is effected by establishing moral ordering in this universe. God has no freedom to do anything which violates His own nature. God's character as *summa iustitia* is expressed in the moral order of creation, and the free forgiveness of sins through mercy alone would violate this ordering. Therefore, justification according to Anselm is based on satisfaction.

Satisfaction-merit model provided by the penitential system of the church is a suitable paradigm for divine remission of sin through the death of Christ, which his readers would accept as just (McGrath, 1988). Anselm argues “why God became a man”. Through this statement, Anselm needs to show that man has no capability and capacity to make satisfaction to God for even the smallest things.

### **Thomas Aquinas.**

Thomas Aquinas was the greatest theologian in the Catholic Church after Augustine. His thoughts and theology became the source of all doctrines and teachings of RCC (Roman Catholic Church). One of the RCC doctrines that was taken from Aquinas's theology is justification by faith (Olson, 1999). All his teachings and theology on this subject are written in the theological system *Summa Theologia* (Thomas Aquinas, 1911) and *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Daniel Patte, ed, 2010).

Thomas Aquinas as a scholastic theologian mixed his teaching between philosophy and theology. The philosophy of Aristotle was the main influence for Aquinas when he studied at the University of Paris ((Daniel Patte, 2010). For Aquinas, Aristotle's basic logic and metaphysics were correct and where helpful guides to Christian natural theology (Olson, 1999).

For Aristotelian philosophy, Aquinas envisioned justification as a movement or a change from the state of unrighteousness to the state of righteousness (Aquinas, 1911). Mover is the means for physical movement therefore justification is spiritual movement and it must be brought about spiritual resources from God (Allison, 2011). Aquinas believed that eternal life one cannot merit apart from the grace of God, as he says

Now eternal life is an exceeding the proportion of human nature ... Hence man, by his natural gifts, cannot produce meritorious works proportionate to eternal life; and for this higher force is needed, the force of grace. And thus, without grace man cannot merit eternal life; yet he can perform works conducting to a good which is natural to man” (Aquinas 1911:2)

There are two kinds of human nature according to Aquinas, the state of perfect human nature and state of fallen human nature. Both of these human natures need the grace of God. Perfect human nature is needing God’s grace in order to maintain the state and elevate the nature to do supernatural actions while the second state needs the grace of God not only to maintain and elevate but also to help man rise from sin (Aquinas, 1911). Therefore, for Aquinas, grace is not quantitative gift or physical, but a modification of disposition.

Moreover, the movement of justification for Aquinas divides into four sections: first is the infusion of grace; second is the movement of human’s free will toward God by faith; third is the movement of the free will from sin; fourth is remission of sin (man justified). All entire process absolutely is by the grace of God. Infusion of grace to the sinner is the first step to prepare justification and this infusion of grace is called operative habitual grace to give the capacity in a person to have faith (Aquinas, 1911).

However, although Aquinas emphasized the role of grace he also prescribed the importance of the role of human cooperation in obtaining justification; God moves the grace in the person’s life and by the faith, the person moves toward God, moves away from sins then in resulting forgiveness. Therefore, for him, there is a synergy or cooperative effort between God and man in justification.

Moreover, justification is beyond imputation, but the person who is justified is declared righteous before God and through the infusion of grace of God the nature of the receiver is righteous. Aquinas says: “ As [God's](#) love consists not merely in the act of the Divine will but also implies a certain effect of [grace](#), so likewise, when [God](#) does not impute [sin](#) to a man, there is implied a certain effect in him to whom the [sin](#) is not imputed; for it proceeds from the Divine love, that [sin](#) is not imputed to a man by [God](#).” (Aquinas, 1911, 1<sup>st</sup> part, of pt 2, q.113. art 2). Accordingly, he says that “grace is given to us that we may do good and keep from sin” (Aquinas, 1911, 1<sup>st</sup> part, q.109, art 9). Therefore, with this ability, Christians carry out their responsibility to cooperate with God.

Aquinas believed that good deed that is moved by the grace of God is accumulating as merits. According to Allison There are two kinds of merits according to him *condign merit* and *congruous merit*, the first means real merits that is accomplished by a person through divine grace, and the second means human works reckoned as merits. People who accomplished the second kind with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, resulting in eternal life as reckoned condign merit (Allison, 1999). Aquinas also proposed the third solution for the merit not resulting in

eternal life with *purgatory*. Purgatory is a place where there is only temporal punishment by which the stain of venial sin is purged. During the purgatory, the living may offer prayers, masses, and alms on behalf of the souls in purgatory. Therefore, through this alternative, it can be considered that for Aquinas justification is not only instantaneous but could be completed after death (Allison, 1999).

During the medieval period, justification would not be finally and definitely effected until the day of judgment. Justification is earned through man's cooperation such as Penance, Mass, Baptism, Confession, and participation in all church sacraments.

### **Comparative Analysis of Doctrinal Changes**

The doctrine of justification underwent significant transformations from the early Church (2nd to 5th century) to the medieval period (9th to 14th century). The shifts in theological thought reflect broader changes in philosophical influences, ecclesiastical authority, and doctrinal developments.

#### ***Early Church Doctrine***

Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus of Lyons are emphasized a combination of faith, works, and sacraments in the justification process. Justification was seen as a blend of divine grace and human effort, with an emphasis on moral conduct and sacramental participation. Origen integrated Platonic philosophy, viewing justification as a cooperative process involving both divine grace and human effort. He also focused on the interplay between faith and works, influenced by his philosophical background. Moreover, Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage highlighted the Church's sacramental role in justification. For him, justification was closely tied to the institutional Church's authority, emphasizing the importance of sacraments like Baptism and Penance.

Patristics Augustine of Hippo advanced the doctrine of justification by faith alone, emphasizing the sovereignty of divine grace. He introduced the concept of predestination, asserting that justification is solely a result of God's grace, independent of human merit. On the other hand, Pelagius contrasted with Augustine by arguing that humans could achieve justification through their own efforts, minimizing the role of divine grace. His views were later deemed heretical, reinforcing the Augustinian emphasis on grace.

#### ***Medieval Church Doctrine***

Neo-Platonism to Aristotelian Influence transitioned from Augustine's Neo-Platonic framework to an Aristotelian approach, where Aristotle's theories began to influence theological thought more significantly than Scripture. The medieval period saw a focus on justification as a process involving sacraments and acts rather than solely faith.

Early Medieval Theologians such as Venerable Bede, Ildefonsus, Julian of Toledo, Isidore of Seville, and Boniface maintained elements of Augustine's theology but emphasized that justification also required good works, reflecting a shift towards a more works-oriented view within a framework still grounded in grace.

Anselm of Canterbury developed a satisfaction theory of atonement, arguing that Christ's death satisfied the demands of divine justice. Justification was framed in terms of God's justice and satisfaction, with an emphasis on the necessity of Christ's sacrifice to restore

moral order. Anselm's approach integrated reason with faith, viewing justification as grounded in a legalistic model of divine justice and satisfaction rather than solely grace.

Moreover, Thomas Aquinas synthesized Aristotelian philosophy with Christian doctrine, influencing the Church's understanding of justification. He defined justification as a spiritual movement from unrighteousness to righteousness, emphasizing both the infusion of grace and human cooperation. Aquinas maintained that grace is necessary for justification, but also emphasized human cooperation, distinguishing between *condign* (true merits through divine grace) and *congruous* (human works recognized as merits) merits. He introduced the concept of purgatory, where the justification process could continue after death, reflecting a more complex understanding of merit and grace.

Anselm and Aquinas both influenced medieval theology significantly, with Anselm emphasizing the legalistic satisfaction model and Aquinas focusing on a cooperative synergy between divine grace and human effort. Aquinas's justification involved multiple stages: infusion of grace, movement of free will towards God, movement away from sin, and remission of sin, combining elements of Augustinian grace with a more nuanced understanding of human cooperation and merit.

### Comparative Analysis

There is a change of the understanding of justification by faith from the early church to Medieval period. *From Faith Alone to Faith and Works*. Early Church Fathers like Clement and Irenaeus integrated faith with works and sacraments for justification. By the medieval period, the emphasis shifted towards a more sacramental and works-oriented approach, particularly under the influence of theologians like Anselm and Aquinas.

The change of the view influences by several reason the first is Philosophical Influences. The early Church was influenced by Platonic thought, which gradually gave way to Aristotelian philosophy in the medieval period. This shift impacted the theological understanding of justification, moving from a focus on divine grace and moral conduct to a more systematic and legalistic framework.

Moreover, the role of the Church. The early Church saw justification closely tied to the Church's sacraments. In the medieval period, the Church's role became even more central, with justification being mediated through the sacraments and church authority. Furthermore, legalistic and satisfaction models. Anselm introduced a legalistic view of justification centered on divine justice and satisfaction, which contrasted with earlier more holistic and grace-centered approaches. Aquinas continued this with a nuanced view of justification involving grace, human cooperation, and merit. The last is Evolving Doctrine. The transition from Augustine's grace-focused doctrine to the medieval emphasis on sacramental participation and cooperative merit reflects broader changes in theological and philosophical perspectives. The medieval period's complex interplay between grace, works, and the Church's authority represents a significant evolution in the doctrine of justification.

This analysis highlights the doctrinal development from a combination of faith, works, and sacramental participation in the early Church to a more intricate and legalistic understanding in the medieval period, influenced by shifting philosophical frameworks and theological debates.

### CONCLUSION

In the early Church, figures like Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus of Lyons articulated a view of justification that integrated faith, works, and sacramental participation. This period was marked by a dynamic interplay between divine grace and human effort, with early theologians emphasizing moral conduct and ecclesiastical authority in the justification process. The influence of Origen and later Tertullian and Cyprian highlighted the importance of both grace and sacramental rites, setting a foundation for future developments.

Augustine of Hippo marked a pivotal shift with his doctrine of justification by faith alone, emphasizing the sovereignty of divine grace and introducing the concept of predestination. Augustine's views contrasted sharply with those of Pelagius, who argued for human capacity to achieve justification through effort. Augustine's framework laid the groundwork for subsequent theological debates and was instrumental in shaping medieval thought.

The medieval period witnessed a significant doctrinal evolution influenced by philosophical transitions from Neo-Platonism to Aristotelianism. Early medieval theologians such as Bede and Isidore of Seville continued elements of Augustine's theology but began to emphasize the necessity of good works alongside grace. This shift was further developed by scholastic theologians like Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas.

Anselm's satisfaction theory of atonement introduced a legalistic perspective on justification, focusing on the necessity of Christ's sacrifice to satisfy divine justice. His approach integrated reason with faith and emphasized the legal and moral dimensions of justification. Thomas Aquinas built on this foundation, combining Aristotelian philosophy with Christian doctrine to present a more systematic understanding of justification. Aquinas's view of justification as a cooperative process involving both divine grace and human effort, along with his concepts of merit and purgatory, marked a significant departure from earlier views.

In conclusion, the evolution of the doctrine of justification from the early Church to the medieval period reflects a complex interplay of theological, philosophical, and ecclesiastical influences. The early Church's emphasis on faith, works, and sacraments gradually transformed into a more sophisticated and legalistic understanding in the medieval period, driven by the integration of Aristotelian philosophy and the development of scholastic theology. This historical trajectory highlights the dynamic nature of doctrinal development and the ongoing interplay between faith, reason, and ecclesiastical authority in shaping Christian theology.

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