

Chapter 3

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTIFICATION

C. K. Barrett

The subject before us is not one of my own choosing, though it meets my warm approval. It was suggested to me as one on which a student of the Bible might be able to make a contribution to the total Methodist theological enterprise, might give rise to profitable reflection on a number of practical topics, and might thus vindicate the claims of serious biblical study to be able to address the modern world in coherent, intelligible, critical, and creative terms. There are perhaps not very many new things to say about justification, but the old things that have many times been said are more worth hearing than some of the latest novelties.

More important in this context than my approval is the fact that the subject would have been welcomed by John Wesley. You will recall the beginning of his sermon on justification by faith.

How a sinner may be justified before God, the Lord and Judge of all, is a question of no common importance to every child of man. It contains the foundation of all our hope, inasmuch as while we are at enmity with God there can be no true peace, no solid joy, either in time or in eternity.¹

The first question addressed by the first Methodist Conference, in 1744, was, What to teach; and under this heading the first matter settled was the meaning of justification. We shall return to the Conference's substantially correct definition in due course; for the present, however, it is enough to note what was the beginning of their dogmatics.

It may of course be remarked that in their attitude Wesley and his preachers were merely following what was still dogmatic convention in the eighteenth century. Wesley professed great respect for the Homilies of the Church of England (and some of his followers might study them still to their advantage). In the first Church of England *Book of Homilies*,² the first part of the Sermon on the Salvation of Mankind begins with a clearer and fuller statement than the opening paragraph of Wesley's sermon.

Because all men be sinners and offenders against God, and breakers of his law and commandments, therefore can no man by his own acts, works, and deeds, seem they ever so good, be justified and made righteous before God; but every man of necessity is constrained to seek for another righteousness or justification, to be received at God's own hands, that is to say, the remission, pardon, and forgiveness of his sins and trespasses in such things as he hath offended. And this justification or righteousness, which we so receive by God's mercy and Christ's merits, embraced by faith, is taken, accepted, and allowed of God for our perfect and full justification.

The Homilies reflect in turn the strong Lutheran element in early Anglicanism, though justification is a matter on which we do not need to distinguish too nicely between Wittenberg and Geneva; that this stream tended to run dry in the Caroline Divines and the Cambridge Platonists did not greatly affect its official standing in Wesley's time, though how far it was personally apprehended is another matter. If it did no more, it served as a cardinal piece of anti-Roman propaganda.

But was John Wesley right to lay so much stress on justification? Was Charles Wesley right when he referred to it as the foundation on which our church was built? That the great exponent of justification in the New Testament is Paul goes without saying; but does it play a central part even in Paul's thought? Or is it a passing feature of a controversy between Paul and Jews (or Jewish Christians) which both flared and faded in the first century?

The centrality of justification in Paul's thought has been denied by some of the greatest New Testament scholars of our time. One of Albert Schweitzer's most famous sentences is:

The doctrine of righteousness by faith is therefore a subsidiary crater, which has formed within the rim of the main crater—the mystical doctrine of redemption through the being-in-Christ.³

It is impossible here to trace the complicated argument by which Schweitzer reaches this conclusion, but it is worthwhile to note two things which will return in the course of our discussion. One is that Schweitzer finds the roots of Paul's notion of a mystical being in Christ in that primitive eschatological worldview which he traces back to Jesus himself, and that this notion of righteousness is linked with a view of faith that rejects not only works done in obedience to Jewish law, but works in general. "He thus closes the pathway to a theory of ethics."⁴

W. Wrede, with whom in other matters Schweitzer could disagree sharply enough, writes in a similar vein:

The best known of Paul's ideas, the so-called doctrine of justification by faith, has not yet been mentioned. Our silence in itself implies a judgment. The

Reformation has accustomed us to look upon this as the central point of Pauline doctrine; but it is not so. In fact the whole Pauline religion can be expounded without a word being said about this doctrine, unless it be in the part devoted to the law.⁵

Justification is a *Kampfeslehre* and belongs with the rejection of Judaism; and it is a doctrine that must give rise to problems in the realm of ethics. Paul proclaims, "Christ is the end of the law" (Rom. 10:4), and when he does so he refers to the whole law:

Why are not the moral commands excepted? How can belief in Christ be opposed to them? Certainly Paul never dreams that the *content* of the moral precepts, such as, the commandments, is false. But he denies the right of the Law to *demand* their fulfillment; he declares that every "thou shalt" is done away. Even this is enigmatic enough.⁶

So far we may seem to have been dealing with ancient history in the interpretation of the New Testament, though the points Schweitzer and Wrede make have not been forgotten. Paul's doctrine was (a) the fruit of a controversy with which we are no longer concerned, and (b) impossible to reconcile with the ethical implications of the Gospel—indeed with Paul's own affirmation that even the justified must stand trial before God at the last judgment. More recent, however, and on different lines, is the work of Krister Stendahl, which was taken up in a fierce refutation by Ernst Käsemann, to which in turn Stendahl replied. I have to admit that I do not find it easy to understand exactly what these two are saying to each other. Stendahl thinks that Käsemann did not understand him correctly; I am not sure, however, that Stendahl understands Käsemann's criticism. Certainly, Stendahl does not seem to me to mean that Paul did not teach the doctrine of justification or that he taught it but considered it trivial and expendable. His title is "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,"⁷ and I take it that in this title he claims that Paul has been misunderstood because many generations have read him through the eyes of men like Augustine and Luther, for whom their starting point was provided by the desperate search, *Wie krieg ich einen gnädigen Gott?* or, as Johann von Paltz, anticipating Luther and showing that in this Luther was a representative Westerner, put it, *Quomodo inveniam deum placatum?* According to Stendahl, it is we Western human beings who conduct this search, who are concerned to look into our conscience and find it ill, it is we who know therefore that we must somehow get the forgiveness of our sins.

Not so Paul; and when Paul does develop the doctrine of justification it is not for its own sake, nor in order to have ammunition to fire at the Jews, but in order to establish his mission to the Gentiles and to vindicate their place among the people of God. It follows (according to Stendahl)

that the chapters about *Heilsgeschichte*, Romans 9–11, are both the basic source of the doctrine and the core of the epistle, not an appendage to it. Now it is true that, though neither *δικαιος* nor *δικαιοῦν* occurs in Romans 9–11, *δικαιοσύνη* does occur ten times in a very important passage (9:30–10:6) in which Paul cites the religious history of Jews and Gentiles. It is also true that Augustine and Luther were of different national stock and lived in different ages from Paul's. But did not Paul share an introspective conscience with them? Is even Luther's desire for a God who would be gracious to his sin more poignant than "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom. 7:19)?

There is a distinction here which lies in an important point just under the surface. Paul did have a sensitive introspective conscience, but he got it with the gospel. It was as a Christian that he began to examine himself and to recognize that a good conscience would not justify him (1 Cor. 4:4). He did not become a Christian because he examined himself and his conscience, found the result unsatisfactory, and decided that something had to be done about it. Augustine, and to a greater extent Luther, started at a different point, created by a Christian upbringing; between them and Paul there was a difference but it is not the difference described by Stendahl. Justification and the introspective conscience belong together, but they will not always be related to each other in the same way.

I draw attention here to the fact, but do not develop it, that what I have just said about the conscience is related to the question of Paul's understanding of Torah, and the relation of his understanding to that most widely current in his day. There is a question here which it would take a long time to pursue; I need not say that I have in mind the work of E. P. Sanders and the discussions that have arisen out of it. I shall content myself with the observation, which I think few would dispute, that like his treatment of conscience Paul's treatment of Torah is a Christian product. "For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law . . ." (Rom. 3:20; cf. Gal. 2:16) is a Christian judgment, as the misquotation of Ps. 143:2 suggests.

The question is not how frequently Paul refers to justification but the contexts in which he speaks of it, and above all what he says about it. There is of course no doubt that the main source is Romans. If I ask, why did Paul write Romans? we shall be in some danger of never reaching the main theme, for this question is one that has attracted a good deal of recent discussion. But most of the answers to this disputed question are at one in the belief, or implication, that Paul, in this letter to a church he did not personally know, was summing up his understanding of the Christian faith. It matters little whether we describe the letter as Paul's testament or think of it as his introduction of himself to Rome, designed to win a base for his

mission to Spain in the far West; in either case he was setting out his understanding of the gospel, and in this the themes of righteousness and justification play a major part. The second source for his teaching on these themes is Galatians, and here too, though in a way more narrowly attached to specific circumstances (for Galatia he did know—too closely perhaps for comfort), Paul sets out the essence of his theology. Those who were making trouble were preaching what they presented as εὐαγγέλιον (1:6–9); it is no such thing, says Paul, and, he implies, I will tell you what the real gospel is. Here indeed we see the doctrine of justification as a *Kampfeslehre*; this in no way diminishes its importance, for the *Kampf* was for the integrity of Christian belief and the existence of the church. There is more in Philipians; there is little in the letters to the Corinthians and Thessalonians, partly or perhaps mainly, because in these letters Paul was concerned with other matters which did not involve doctrinal discussion of this topic (though there are a few verses of great importance in 1 and 2 Corinthians). Paul found it difficult to discuss the roots of Christian faith and life without righteousness and justification.

This is more than enough of what is hardly more than introductory matter. Whether the doctrine is regarded as central or peripheral in Paul's thought—and I have no doubt of its centrality—we are committed to a discussion of it. And the discussion is not easy.

The question is a linguistic one, in more senses than one. Everyone is familiar with Luther's discovery of the meaning of righteousness, which lay at the root of his teaching about justification. He read in the Psalms (31:1b), *In iustitia tua libera me*. But how could God, the judge of all the earth, who must do right, set free one who was undoubtedly guilty? Was it not precisely his *iustitia* that must compel him to incarcerate the guilty, and that in the flames of hell? How could the manifestation of righteousness be a gospel? Yet Paul had written that in the gospel, and constituting it as gospel, as good news, δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἀποκαλύπτεται. But behind Latin *iustitia* and Greek δικαιοσύνη was Hebrew צדק, צדקה; and, more importantly, a wealth of biblical usage waiting to be explored. The linguistic exploration goes on, from Luther to Ziesler, and there will be more of it in the present lecture, though of course I shall assume a great deal. There are, as I have said, other senses in which the question before us may be described as linguistic. The recent ARCIC document on justification comes, more or less, to the conclusion that the disputes of the sixteenth century can be happily left behind because they involved little more than disagreement, unnoticed disagreement, in the use of words. Catholic and Protestant in fact meant very much the same but their use of language was different, and they therefore received the impression that they meant different things. I should be glad, but somewhat surprised, to find myself persuaded that this

is not too easy a dodging of difficulties. Were our ancestors really such misguided bigots as to slaughter one another over divergent semantics? Or were they moved by serious, radical theological differences, which might justify, not indeed slaughter, but perhaps ecclesiastical separation? The real semantic problem exists, in fact, in and for both camps, for it consists in the way in which words of fundamental importance slither from one sense to another. It is impossible to attach the same meaning to the word **δικαιοσύνη** in every passage in which Paul uses the word. In yet another sense (but a related one) the question before us may be said to be a linguistic one, for it raises the problem of myth and of appropriate religious language; but we have far to go before we reach that point.

It is clear that to continue will involve the use of the biblical languages. I shall keep this to a minimum, but I shall not apologize for the method.

So we begin with a question that may at first seem secondary. How should one translate the Hebrew word **עָשָׂה**? Here I must forbear to provide at once an English translation, since translation is precisely the issue. The word was already giving trouble in antiquity. The Septuagint used a variety of Greek words in their attempt to find a satisfactory rendering; there are at least four that must be noticed: **ἄδικος**, **ἄρματωλός**, **ἄνομος**, and **ἀσεβής**. Two of these correspond reasonably well with the basic meaning of the Hebrew word, which signifies guilt; it denotes the party found guilty in court; this is precisely the meaning of **ἄδικος**, the person against whom judgment is given; we may call him or her **ἄνομος** when a law or legal system is involved. The guilty party is found to be in contravention of the **νόμος**, the legal basis on which the court is established, the law which the court is commissioned to uphold. Of the other two words, the former, **ἄρματωλός**, represents a moralizing tendency: the guilty person is not found guilty on a mere technicality; morally wrong, he or she has failed to do what he or she is under moral obligation to do. The latter, **ἀσεβής**, may be described as pietizing: the **ἀσεβής** is a person who does not **σέβασθαι**, worship, as he or she ought; such a person is wrong in religion. It would be easy to describe **ἄρματωλός** and **ἀσεβής** as mistranslations, or at least as misleading translations; this in principle they are not, though sometimes they fail to represent the sense of the original correctly. They are (sometimes at least) legitimate semantic developments. There has hardly ever been a court of law that did not claim that its verdicts were related more or less directly to moral judgments. Even hypocritically immoral courts have usually been careful to make the claim, however false it may have been. Thus there is an implication that the **ἄδικος** is **ἄρματωλός**: having done what he or she ought not—morally—to have done, or failing to do what he or she ought—morally—to have done. It is not every system of law that had or has a religious element, but the Old

Testament law certainly had one. The person who offends against the law has offended against the lawgiver; the lawgiver is God and one has therefore failed to give God God's due. Such a one is ἀσεβής, an impious, godless person. These semantic developments are to some extent fairly obvious, but it will be important to keep them in mind; to allow for them sufficiently but not too much.

Thus at Exodus 9:27 we meet both רשע and its opposite (denoting the party that wins its case in court), when, after the plague of hail, Pharaoh declares, the Lord is הצדיק, I and my people are הרשעים. Notice the articles: God is the winner, we Egyptians are the losers. But the Greek words are respectively δίκαιος and ἀσεβής. Here God is one of two legal, forensic contestants; in such circumstances God is sure to win (after all, God is also judge; but cf. Ps. 51). When God operates simply as judge, God can be depended upon to make the proper distinction between צדיק and רשע. This comes out with great clarity in the familiar story of Genesis 18, when God threatens to destroy the wicked city, Abraham intercedes for it. God is proposing the wholesale indiscriminate destruction of the entire city. But the population may not be uniform. Perhaps there will be found fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, ten innocent people in the city. It would be inconsistent with God's character as judge of the whole earth if these were wiped out along with the guilty. What must not happen is ויהיה כצדיק כרשע (18:25). A just court will always distinguish between the two; God will always distinguish between the two. It does not seem to occur to Abraham that he is asking God, and God is agreeing, to do precisely what God ought (on Abraham's own argument) not to do. Abraham objects to the treatment of ten innocent people as if they were guilty; he does not seem to mind if 10,000 guilty people are treated as if they were innocent. This is of course a significant inconsistency; considerations not only of evenhanded moral justice but of mercy cannot be kept out of the proceedings when God and a representative of God are involved.

Considerations of mercy, however, do not always appear. They are not in evidence in those famous passages in Isaiah and the Psalms where God's righteousness becomes tantamount to his acts of deliverance. When for example in Isa. 46:13 God declares, "I have brought near my righteousness (צדקתי, τὴν δικαιοσύνην μου, *iustitiam meam*), it shall not delay, and my salvation shall not tarry" (my translation), God is acting in justice as the judge of all the earth. When Israel was a relatively sinful nation God punished it; now that Israel is at least relatively righteous (in comparison with the Babylonians), God will restore it. This amounts to deliverance, salvation, but this is a secondary consequence. It is unfortunate that the New English Bible and other modern translations in passages such as this translate צדקה by *deliverance*, or some such word; this obscures the very

important truth that in delivering God's people God is acting as a righteous judge. The word **חסד**, usually understood to refer to God's faithful covenant-keeping love, occurs only four times in Deutero-Isaiah. Isa. 40:6 (**כָּל-חֶסֶדוֹ כַּצִּיץ**) is clearly irrelevant and only 54:8,10; 55:3 remain. These indeed are important enough, but it is also important to note the contexts in which they are set. 54:8 begins with the outpouring of God's wrath, which Israel undoubtedly deserved; it is when Israel repents and returns that the faithful mercies of David apply. The essential character of God in Deutero-Isaiah is righteousness; it is this that gives the prophet hope.

We have moved along the negative linguistic line, looking primarily at the role of the **רשע**, the guilty. This was partly to add a little interest to the linguistic investigation but mainly in order that we might meet the words righteousness (**δικαιοσύνη**) and justify (**δικαιοῦν**) in their proper forensic setting and hear the Old Testament at precisely the point at which Paul contradicts, or appears to contradict, it. At Exodus 23:7 God expressly declares **לֹא-אֶצְדִּיק רָשָׁע**, which interestingly enough the Septuagint turns into a command: **οὐ δικαιώσεις τὸν ἄσεβῆ** (adding **ἐνεκεν δώρων**. Isa. 5:23 and Proverbs 24:24 are similar, and Proverbs 17:15 is particularly significant: **מִצְדִּיק רָשָׁע וּמְרַשֵּׁעַ צְדִיק תּוֹעֵבַת יְהוָה שְׁנִיחָם**. Whenever there is a legal dispute one will turn out to be just, the other guilty; you must not justify the guilty or condemn the just. In Exod. 23.7; Isa. 5.23; Prov. 24.24 the unjustifiable person is the **ἄσεβής**; in Prov. 17.15 he or she is the **ἄδικος**. It is only against this background that one can understand the force of Paul's assertion that God will do what no just judge will do: he will justify the unjustifiable, the **ἄσεβής** (Rom. 4:5).

That Paul was aware of the problem thus created appears very clearly in what is perhaps his most explicit and most important treatment of the theme of justification. It focuses somewhat more closely on righteousness (**δικαιοσύνη**) than on justification (**δικαιοῦν**), so as to indicate the ambiguity that is always found in this word. When he speaks of the righteousness of God, does he mean God's own righteousness in which God does always what is right, or a righteousness that God graciously confers on human beings, by which sinful human beings may have fellowship with the holy and righteous God? The problem of ambiguity is to a great extent dealt with when we remember the forensic setting to which the vocabulary of righteousness belongs. We may note in passing that no other proposed setting is able so successfully to deal with the ambiguity and with the problem with which we are concerned. There is a righteousness of the judge and a righteousness of the defendant. The same word is appropriately used of both, and though distinct they are related to each other; what matters is the satisfaction of the court, and this cannot be achieved unless (by what-

ever means) both judge and defendant are *δικαιος*. In Rom. 3:21-31 (cf. 1:16,17) Paul finds the root of the gospel in a manifestation of God's righteousness (the fact that so puzzled and distressed Luther). But God had to manifest his righteousness and uphold it precisely because it was liable to be impugned. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Abraham asked. But there was no sign that he was doing any such thing—a fact neatly illustrated by Genesis 18. From the Garden of Eden onwards people had been sinning and getting away with it. God had declared (Gen. 2:17), "for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." But Adam had lived to the good old age of 930. God had been passing over (the word is *πάρεσις*) human beings' sins, neither punishing them as they deserved nor granting them full remission and release (*ἄφεσις*). The observer might easily draw the conclusion: God does not care; God does not distinguish between right and wrong; the judge is not acting as the judge of all the earth should do; God is not *δικαιος*.

This was not all. The human race was not righteous. Paul states the matter baldly in the language of the Old Testament at Rom. 3:10: there is not even one righteous human being. If then the judge wakes up and begins to act as a good judge should, that will mean the end of humanity; and that will mean that God's objective in creation, of a family of human beings living in relation with Godself, has failed. God then must act (and here Ernst Käsemann and Peter Stuhlmacher have a contribution to make) in faithfulness to God's role as creator (as well as judge); God must find a way of justifying the unjustifiable, the *ἄδικος*, *ἁμαρτωλός*, *ἄνομος*, *ἄσεβής*. All this is to be found in Rom. 3:25,26.

But how is God to do it? Are we not going to be pushed into the problem that John Wesley was clearly aware of, the danger of turning justification into a fiction, in which God pretends that black is white? If this happens there is a lie at the heart of the Christian doctrine of salvation.

The key to the problem lies in the essentially forensic character of the whole vocabulary of justification—*δικαιοῦν*, *δικαιοσύνη*, and the other words. The matter has never been better stated than by Bultmann, whom I will quote before going on to develop the matter.

When it connotes the condition for (or essence of) salvation, *δικαιοσύνη* is a forensic term. It does not mean the ethical quality of a person. It does not mean any quality at all, but a relationship. That is, *δικαιοσύνη* is not something a person has as his own; rather it is something he has in the verdict of the "forum" . . . to which he is accountable. He has it in the opinion adjudicated to him by another. A man has "righteousness," or is "righteous," when he is acknowledged to be such, and that means, in case such acknowledgment of him is in dispute: when he is "right-wised," "pronounced righteous" . . .⁸

Justification is thus a pre-moral issue; it turns not upon an estimate of moral worth but upon the creation of a relation. This appears clearly in the close parallel between justification and reconciliation, and this is stated unmistakably in Rom. 5:9,10. In each of these verses there are three points; in v. 9, the death of Jesus (expressed in the reference to his blood), justification, and future salvation; in v. 10, the death of Jesus, reconciliation, and future salvation.

There is no essential difference between justification and reconciliation, as John Wesley recognized when he said, "The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins." We may recall the sermon,⁹ quoted above, and the conclusion of the 1744 Conference: "To be justified is to be pardoned."¹⁰ What Wesley missed is the distinctive representation of pardon, or reconciliation, in the forensic language of righteousness and justification. Reconciliation means the creation of a right relation between two conflicting parties; where there had been enmity and strife, peace prevails. Justification places the contention in a court of law, where the strife is between the judge (who will certainly do right) and the prisoner (who has certainly done wrong). In this strife there is no question on which side right lies. The law is there to accuse, the witnesses are there to prove. The judge will not say (for it would be a lie), You are after all a good person—even a potentially good person. By a creative moral act the judge brings about a good relation in place of the bad one.

We may pursue the parallel theme of reconciliation and that of the creative moral act as we consider one more passage, 2 Cor. 5:20b–21. There is reconciliation in the immediate context. God has committed to us the message of reconciliation. "We beseech you in behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." Then follows: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Here are two balanced clauses in which it is claimed first that the sinless Jesus came to occupy that relation of alienation from God most comprehensively defined by the term *ἀμαρτία* in order that we in him might come to occupy that positive relation with God defined by the term *δικαιοσύνη*. It is clear now that the focus of the creative moral act is to be found in Christ, and especially in Christ crucified, and we are sent back to the *locus classicus* in Romans 3. It was in Christ that God's righteousness was manifested, and that regardless whether *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* means the righteousness God has in Godself, God's outgoing saving righteousness, or the righteousness that God confers upon the believer. He was set forth by God in a bloody sacrificial death which can be described by the word *ἱλαστήριον*, which points to, takes up, and transcends the proceedings of the Old Testament Day of Atonement.

At this point, I suspect, Wesley would have been content to stop. Yet it is hardly open to us to do so. If we say either that the death of Christ was an atoning sacrifice, or that he has taken (and suffered for) our sins that we may receive his righteousness, we are using the language of myth, and (though we may in the end decide that the truth cannot be fully expressed without the use of myth) we cannot be content to leave it at that without further consideration. There are two ways in which we may turn; and I believe it to be correct to use both.

One is to say that this myth has in fact been historicized. It is additionally worthwhile to note this because it will show that justification is not a mere Pauline eccentricity. In different ways those great but different New Testament scholars J. Jeremias and E. Käsemann have pointed out that the theme of justification is to be found in the Gospels. It is found in the picture of Jesus as the friend of publicans and sinners. This not only represents him as loving and caring for unlovable people who in themselves have nothing to commend them; he is actually creating a relation where none existed. As he eats with his disreputable guests (or hosts), the lost sheep is found, the lost coin is discovered, and the lost son comes home—to God (Luke 15). More explicitly, he forgives sins (Mark 2:5), thus creating a relation where the law had failed to preserve or make one. The same can be seen, in outline, in Jeremias. We may go further and note that by doing all this Jesus became, in the eyes of the law, sin. It would be absurd to claim that the food laws were rigidly observed every time Jesus ate with sinners; in any case, the Gospels explicitly record that the mealtime habits of his associates were matter of complaint (e.g. Mark 7:2). And on their own terms the scribes were right to accuse Jesus of blasphemy, when he claimed to forgive sins. Again, we may turn to the Beatitudes, in which Jesus declares, "Blessed are you poor," which Matthew turns into, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," trying, rather obscurely perhaps, to make it clear that poverty is not simply lack of cash. The poor are pronounced blessed not because it is a good thing to be penniless but because to those who have nothing—and nothing that can get in the way—God gives everything, God's Kingdom. Unlike the rich, who are tempted to think that they can buy anything, the poor can receive the Kingdom in the only way it can be received—as a gift. What thus happened over a brief period and a limited area in history was universalized and made eternal by the event of crucifixion and resurrection.

The other way of dealing with the myth is to see in it the representation of the true being of the human being as God's creation. It is the natural inclination of human beings to establish their own righteousness before God. Paul recognizes this as a feature of his own life before his encounter with Christ (Phil. 3:4–6,9); he had indeed a righteousness of his own, generated by his obedience to law. What he saw in the story of his own life

he saw also on a wider scale in the story of his people (Rom. 9:30–10:4). No fault could be found in their religious enthusiasm; they had a zeal for God but it was an uninformed zeal—οὐ κατ' ἐπίγνωσιν; they had got it wrong precisely in that they were seeking to establish their own righteousness, τῆν ἰδίαν δικαιοσύνην; as long as they were doing this they could not submit to the righteousness of God. In other words, in the courtroom scene they were dispossessing God of God's role as judge of all the earth: righteousness was to be not God's verdict but theirs. To this end they used, or abused, the law that God had given them, a process to which Christ has now put an end by doing what the law could not do (Rom. 8:3) and conferring righteousness on the believer (Rom. 10:2–4).

At this point we may briefly state two familiar inferences of primary importance: justification is of God's grace, and by faith—*sola gratia* and *sola fide*. It is *sola gratia* because it arises in a situation in which human beings can effectively do nothing and have no claim upon God. We may rebel; we may do nothing; we may seek to establish our own righteousness: none of these courses is effective, and unless God takes the initiative nothing will happen. And when God in grace does this, that is, creating righteousness as a relation, there is nothing we can do but accept or reject that which God has put in hand; and accepting it is faith. There is no question of deserving what comes as a free gift and comes into being in the creative mind of God.

It is for this reason that justification is *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*. It means that God is prepared to begin with us as we are; otherwise, even for God, there would be no beginning at all. Justification—and Wesley always emphasized this—is not the whole story, but it is the first chapter without which there would be no story at all. It is best looked at as the eschatological event that it immediately appears to be as soon as it is recalled that it implies God's judgment on human beings. If we think of this in simple futuristic terms we know that after the judgment there comes, for those approved by the Judge, the holiness and bliss of heaven. If the last judgment is anticipated in the verdict of acquittal that justification means, this will be followed by an anticipation of the holiness and bliss of heaven. This is pretty much what Wesley understood by sanctification. The point, however, at which Wesley's understanding of justification is seriously deficient comes into sight here. Justification is indeed the beginning of the Christian life, but it is not a beginning that can be experienced and left behind. Luther was wiser and knew that the Christian continues to be *simul iustus et peccator*. Justification is not merely a beginning of the Christian life but a dialectical definition of every point within it. This is not simply because Christians have a way of sinning and therefore need again and again to be forgiven; it is because their righteousness is always a *justitia*

aliena, not their own but a δικαιοσύνη ἐκ θεῶ, and Rom. 7:25b applies. At the same time, in accordance with the verbal ambiguity I have already mentioned, they must be at work—as the Holy Spirit certainly is at work—transforming relational δικαιοσύνη into ethical δικαιοσύνη, in a process that demands, but unfortunately cannot now receive, an exposition of Romans 6.

So much for the first part of this paper. God, of God's own gracious initiative, takes action through the life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of God's Son, to bring the human being, accused by the law and undoubtedly guilty, into a positive relation with Godself. If human beings are to accept this at all we must accept it in the only way open to us, as a free undeserved gift. The gift is made without qualification.

What are the consequences of this fact for Christian life, theology, and institutions? I had already determined to treat the subject in this way when my intention was confirmed by two letters which appeared side by side in *The Times* (London) on 29 January 1987. One was from Bishop P. C. Rodger. Part of it reads as follows:

Now that justification by grace alone, received in faith, has ceased (according to the theologians) to be a matter of contention between Anglican and Roman Catholic churches . . . may I express the hope that this theme will be widely preached and studied within these two communions and indeed elsewhere? For one thing, it would be good to have a question of our eternal destiny as high on the agenda as those of mainly professional-ecclesiastical interest, such as the papacy, episcopacy, or the ordination of women. For another, we need very much to bring to the attention of our society those categories of forgiveness, restoration and thankfulness, for want of which it is dying at present. . . .

Even more to my point is the other letter, from M. E. Burkill.

. . . It is sad that the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) has only now turned its attention to justification. If the New Testament understanding of this doctrine were applied to the rest of the work of the commission, then some startling results might ensue. It would certainly alter the documents on Eucharist and ministry. Luther was so convinced of the centrality of justification by faith within Christianity that he called it the mark of a standing or falling church. It is because justification is no longer regarded as being a central theological issue that the real cause of division at the Reformation is missed. . . .

If justification is a cardinal New Testament doctrine it must be allowed a decisive role in our theological thinking and in our institutions. We may see here (though for myself I lack the specialist historical knowledge to work the matter out in detail and with confidence) a major difference between the revolutionary movement that emanated in the sixteenth cen-

tury from Germany and Switzerland and the comparatively muddled and in some ways ineffective movement that originated in the eighteenth century in England. Luther recognized justification *sola gratia* and *sola fide* as the core of the New Testament and proceeded to apply it to everything: to philosophic and dogmatic theology, to theological education, to preaching, to monastic vows, to sacraments, to church order, to ethics. Wesley equally recognized justification *sola gratia* and *sola fide* as essential to the New Testament and preached it indefatigably; but he failed, perhaps because he simply was not the theological heavyweight that Luther was, to apply it systematically and consistently. The result was that the revolutionary explosive, which caused the Big Bang of the sixteenth century, went off here and there. I am not decrying this as necessarily a bad thing; it is possible to have too many major explosions; one in a millennium may be enough, and for the rest a few controlled detonations may be more effective. But I suspect that with Wesley chance—or providence?—played a greater part than control. It may even be that providence is waiting for us, 250 years on, to supply a greater measure of control.

In what remains of this paper I propose to mention rather than to discuss a number of areas in which the doctrine of justification has been or may be applied. In fact justification is, or at least is one way of formulating, the final critical and structural element in the Christian faith.

First and fundamentally we will consider the structure of the Christian life itself. I quoted earlier the old quest, *Wie krieg ich einen gnädigen Gott?* I am aware of the modern substitutes for this, and I am not unsympathetic to the human quest for a merciful fellow human, or unmindful of my obligation to be merciful to my neighbor. These valid concerns in no way antiquate or replace the old search, the old need. To anyone who believes in the existence of God no inquiry is more vital than that which asks whether this transcendent and omnipotent being is merciful. If God is not, we, who sin against God, may well say, God help us!—but God won't, for *ex hypothesi* God is not merciful and only a merciful God will deal mercifully with these rebels.

Inevitably, and rightly, we remind ourselves of 24 May 1738:

I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.¹¹

With this we may put the following (IV. 2 in the sermon):

Justifying faith implies, not only a divine evidence or conviction that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself,” but a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for *my* sins, that He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*.¹²

This twofold experience (of ordinariness and temptation) corresponds more or less with what Luther had written in the "Preface to the Epistle to the Romans," which provided the immediate occasion of Wesley's conversion. A passage commonly quoted is:

Faith, however, is a divine work in us. It changes us and makes us to be born anew of God (John 1:13); it kills the old Adam and makes altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers, and it brings with it the Holy Ghost. O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith; and it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do, but before the question arises, it has already done them, and is always at the doing of them. He who does not these works is a faithless man.¹³

This is sufficient to show Luther and Wesley standing on the same platform. But Luther (still in the same Preface) has more to say; for example, this:

In this sense, then, you understand [chapter] vii, in which St. Paul still calls himself a sinner, and yet says, in chapter viii, that there is nothing condemnable in those that are in Christ on account of the incompleteness of the gifts and of the Spirit. Because the flesh is not yet slain, we still are sinners; but because we believe and have a beginning of the Spirit, God is so favorable and gracious to us that He will not count the sin against us or judge us for it, but will deal with us according to our faith in Christ, until sin is slain.¹⁴

In comparison with Luther, Wesley has not, I think, fully grasped the meaning of justification and its relation to the overthrow of sin. On Luther's understanding of righteousness I will allow myself one more quotation (and you may observe where Bultmann obtained some of the material I quoted earlier):

Scripture uses the terms "righteousness" and "unrighteousness" very differently from the philosophers and lawyers. This is obvious, because they consider these things as a quality of the soul. But the "righteousness" of Scripture depends upon the imputation of God more than on the essence of a thing itself. For he does not have righteousness who only has a quality, indeed, he is altogether a sinner and an unrighteous man; but he alone has righteousness whom God mercifully regards as righteous because of his confession of his own unrighteousness. Therefore we are all born in iniquity, that is unrighteousness, and we die in it, and we are righteous only by the imputation of a merciful God through faith in His word.¹⁵

On this issue, however, Wesley does not come off badly, for he has seen (for example, at the end of the sermon) how faith cuts at the root of pride (though he has not seen, or does not show, how pride is the root of all sin). The fact is that it is by no means easy to state the relation between justification and assurance, and between justification and liberation from

actual sin, in the sense of moral evil (though the latter distinction is by no means impossible, as Schweitzer and Wrede thought). Beyond their agreement in fundamentals is the fact that Wesley was a man with a tidy mind, Luther a man with a profound mind; and behind them both I should be inclined to say that Paul comes out on the side of profundity rather than tidiness. Romans 7 is in itself sufficient to show that he understood the meaning of what Luther called *Anfechtungen* (and, I would add, of what Stendahl calls an introspective conscience), and 2 Corinthians 4 and 6 underline the point in vivid language. Wesley is inclined to say that either you have faith or you do not; and if you have you know you have. If you are justified, you are on the way to sanctification and perfect love; and again these are observable and determinable matters. It is arguable, and probably true, that Christian England in the eighteenth century needed precisely this confident and clear-cut statement of a triumphant faith; but Pauline faith is not quite the same thing as Wesleyan assurance; and the connection between righteousness as a word of relation and righteousness as a moral achievement has to be worked out more delicately. The primacy of the former meaning must never be lost in the triumph of the latter. Justification is not simply the way in, but (as I have said) a definition of every point in the life of a Christian, who is never anything other than *simul iustus et peccator*. In the conversion passage quoted above the two terms that need a good deal of commentary are *assurance* and *taken away*.

I intended these observations about the Christian life to be practical and to bear upon the twin activities of preaching and pastoral care; so indeed they do, but I must leave some inferences to be drawn by others. With this we have already moved into my second point: the role of justification as a critical, structural, determining element in theology. It is all these things because it bears upon the being and nature of God. *Wie krieg ich einen gnädigen Gott?* If the Christian story is true, there is no other God than one, and mercy is the heart of God's being. "God has shut up all unto disobedience that he may have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11.32, my translation). Wesley is faithful not only to the text he is translating but to the New Testament—and above all to Paul—in the couplets that end every stanza of "Now I have found the ground."

Whose mercy shall unshaken stay,
When heaven and earth are fled away.

Returning sinners to receive,
That mercy they may taste and live.

While Jesu's blood through earth and skies,
'Mercy, free, boundless mercy,' cries.

Away, sad doubt and anxious fear!
 Mercy is all that's written there.

On this my steadfast soul relies,
 Father, Thy mercy never dies!

Mercy's full power I then shall prove,
 Loved with an everlasting love.

Wesley lacks the syllables to follow Rothe in making one whole line out of

Barmherzigkeit, Barmherzigkeit!

but in every other respect he does full justice to the Lutheran pietist.

The doctrine of God and the doctrine of justification coinhere. This means that there is no access to God but in the witness of Scripture to Jesus Christ, and in the witness of his crucifixion and resurrection to God. Let me here briefly allude to, but not develop, another theological issue on which this observation bears. It is very nearly possible (but not quite) to set out Paul's understanding of the gospel in terms that are not theological but anthropological. In our own time we have Bultmann's existentialist understanding of Paul and John, and of this there is a kind of anticipation in a traditional Methodist understanding of the New Testament in terms of conversion and Christian experience, sometimes regarded as in themselves adequate to account for and establish Christian truth. I have certain exegetical qualifications to make (but there is not time to make them in this essay) of both these positions, but on the whole I am prepared to accept both provided that the coinherence of justification (which is the root of both Christian experience and Christian existentialism) and the doctrine of God is borne in mind. Whether we prefer to speak of anthropological theology or of theological anthropology is perhaps a matter of taste; yet it is not a matter of taste but of obligation that adjective and substantive should be held together. For Paul, and for the New Testament at large, salvation has both an existential and a cosmic dimension.

Another way of dealing with this truth will take us to the questions of canon and of hermeneutics. It may make for desirable brevity and clarity if I set out the matter with reference to Luther's treatment of the Epistle of James—so familiar that few people take the trouble to verify the facts and find out what Luther said. We must begin with what most people forget:

Though this Epistle of St. James was rejected by the ancients, I praise it and hold it as a good book, because it sets up no doctrine of men and lays great stress upon God's law.¹⁶

Yet, though he thinks it good, Luther cannot believe that the epistle was written by an apostle, for two reasons:

First: Flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scriptures it ascribes righteousness to works, and says that Abraham was justified by his works, in that he offered his son Isaac. . . .¹⁷

That is, James is out of line on justification by faith:

Second: Its purpose is to teach Christians, and in all this long teaching it does not once mention the Passion, the Resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ.¹⁸

Here are the two foci on which for Luther—and I do not think Wesley would have disagreed—the message of the New Testament turns: *justificatio impiorum sola gratia sola fide*; and *solus Christus*. If we think of these as the two foci of an ellipse, they are so close together that the ellipse becomes practically a circle. This fact serves Luther as a test of apostolicity and thus of canonicity. This is perhaps not so important as it is sometimes made to appear. Luther did print James in his New Testament (though in an appendix), and those who defend the canonicity of the epistle usually do so by pointing out, on the one hand, that James uses the words justify, faith, and works in different senses from Paul (which is true), and, on the other, by pointing out concealed (and in my opinion very problematic) references to Christ. It is more important that the same criteria serve for the control of hermeneutics—not in the sense that passages in James (or elsewhere) have to be conformed willy nilly to the approved standard, and made to mean what they manifestly do not mean, but in the sense (which I have discussed in the *Festschrift* for Markus Barth)¹⁹ that the New Testament at large is to be interpreted in terms of its center.

Finally, the biblical doctrine of justification will serve, and must be allowed to serve, as a critical and constructive element in regard to church order. It is, for example, the foundation of the doctrine of universal priesthood. There is, there can be, only one order of Christians, that of justified sinners, and in consequence there is no room for a hierarchy. If I am justified, set in a true relation with God Godself, and that by God's own decree and act, there is no higher status available to me. I need not add that this does not mean that all justified sinners will exercise the same functions, but if some are marked out to preach or to exercise pastoral care this does not constitute them a special spiritual or priestly caste to be distinguished from their fellows whose functions are different. Again, since justification is of sinners, and since we continue to need justification as long as we live, the only disqualification that excludes from the Lord's Table is the sinfulness that refuses justification and is intent upon maintaining the attitudes and practices that exclude from a true and positive relation with God. All

this is familiar to us in our Methodist practices and structures; therefore the obligation is much greater to maintain them—the open table, the spiritual functions of the laity, the absence of the great cleric—and to do so not by a rigorous traditionalism but by maintaining the doctrines on which they rest, remembering that these doctrines are the charter not of legalistic conservatism but of Christian liberty.

noted often enough that its substance reappears elsewhere throughout the corpus: in the "John Wesley-John Smith Correspondence," *Letters*, 26:138-294 (May 1745-48) and in the two "discourses" on "The Witness of the Spirit," Sermons 10 and 11, *Sermons*, 1:285-98 and Sermon 12, "The Witness of Our Own Spirit," *Sermons*, 1:299-313—and many times thereafter.

28. And, later wrote a sermon about it, Sermon 19, "Heaviness through Manifold Temptations," *Sermons*, 2:222-35.

29. Cf. *Memoirs of James Hutton* (Daniel Bonham, ed. 1856) p. 10; note that Benjamin Ingham was welcomed at the same eucharist from which John Wesley was excluded.

30. Cf. Ephesians 2:8; why is this text so easily turned on its head, as if it read "saved by faith through grace?"

31. Cf. my "Revelation and Reflection: A Comment in Favor of an Apophatic Theology," *Perkins Journal*, (Winter, 1973); see also *The Cambridge Platonists*, ed. Gerald R. Cragg, "A Library of Protestant Thought" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

32. Cf. Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. x, 97ff., and 153-61.

33. Sermon 19, "The Great Privilege of Being Born of God," *Sermons* 1:434-5, paragraph 1:8, but see also 1:7-10. For still another nuancing of the striking phrase, "spiritual respiration," see Sermon 45, "The New Birth," *Sermons*, 2:192-94, paragraph II:4-5, and *A Farther Appeal*, Pt. III, ch. III, paragraph 22, *Appeals*, pp. 305-6, *et passim*. For a safeguard against obscurantism, cf. *ibid.*, paragraph 9. For pneumatology in "the elder Wesley," cf. Sermon 117, "On the Discoveries of Faith," *Sermons*, 4:31-2, paragraph 7; 118, "On the Omnipresence of God," *Ibid.* 4:42; 47, paragraphs, I.2., III.6; Sermon 120, "On the Unity of the Divine Being," *Ibid.* 4:66-7, paragraphs 16-17.

34. Cf. Sermon 11, "The Witness of the Spirit, II," *Sermons*, 1:288-93, paragraphs III, 1-9, and paragraph 5 especially.

35. *Ibid.*; the fullest statement of this *perichoresis*, of God at work in us and we in God is in the late, great Sermon 85 (1785), "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," *Sermons*, 3:199-nk1

209.

36. a. Sermon 117, "On the Discoveries of Faith" (June 11, 1788), *Sermons*, 4:29-38.

b. Sermon, 118, "On the Omnipresence of God" (Aug. 12, 1788), *Sermons*, 4:39-47.

c. Sermon 119, "Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith" (Dec. 30, 1788), *Sermons*, 4:49-59.

d. Sermon 120, "The Unity of the Divine Being" (April 9, 1789), *Sermons*, 4:61-74.

e. Sermon 130, "On Living Without God" (July 6, 1790), *Sermons*, 4:169-76.

They are interesting for two reasons at least: one, they express Wesley's mature pneumatology; two, fragmentary as they are, they share a tone and tenor of a serenity still vital and alert. They have helped me greatly in the bewilderments of my own senescence, but they could be edifying at any stage on life's way. They represent a folk-theology that is carefully critical and unselfconsciously reverent, *coram Deo et hominibus*.

37. "On the Unity of the Divine Being," *op. cit.*, paragraphs 16-17.

38. Cf. Sermon 37, "The Nature of Enthusiasm," *Sermons*, 2:46-60.

39. Note the *pairing* of the two, in his fateful letter to "Our Brethren in America," *Letters* (Telford), 7:237-9, September 11, 1784.

Chapter 3: Righteousness and Justification

1. Sermon 5, "Justification by Faith," *Sermons*, 1:182.

2. *Certain Sermons or Homilies, Appointed to Be Read in Churches* (Oxford, 1638, first published in 1547); a reprint was edited by J. Griffiths (1859).

3. Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (New York: Henry Holt, 1931). p. 225.

4. Ibid.
 5. William Wrede, *Paul*, trans. Edward Lummis (London: Philip Green, 1907), pp. 122–3.
 6. Ibid., pp. 125–6.
 7. In Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 78–96.
 8. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 271–2.
 9. See note 1.
 10. L. Tyerman, *Life and Times of John Wesley*, vol. 1 (London, 1872), p. 443.
 11. *Journal and Diaries*, 1:250 (May 24, 1738).
 12. Sermon 5, “Justification by Faith,” paragraph 4.2, *Sermons* 1:194.
- How far may these statements be regarded as providing a universal pattern of what Christian experience ought to be? It is worthwhile to quote a sentence or two of what follows in the Journal. “It was not long before the enemy suggested, ‘This cannot be faith; for where is thy joy?’... After my return home, I was much buffeted with temptations.” *Journals and Diaries*, 1:250 (May 24, 1738, paragraph 16).
13. Martin Luther, “Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, 1522,” *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 6 (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg Press, 1932), pp. 451–2.
 14. Ibid., p. 451.
 15. *Luther's Works*, vol. 25 *Lectures on Romans*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), pp. 274–5. “‘Iustitia’ et ‘iniustitia’ multum aliter, quam philosophi et iuriste accipiunt, in Scriptura accipitur. Patet, quia illi qualitatem asserunt anime etc. Sed ‘iustitia’ Scripture magis pendet ab imputatione Dei quam ab esse rei. Ille enim habet iustitiam, non qui qualitatem solam habet, immo ille peccator est omnino et iniustus, sed quem Deus propter confessionem iniustitie sue et implorationem iustitie Dei misericorditer reputat et voluit iustum apud se haberi. Ideo omnes in iniquitate i.e. iniustitia nascimur, morimur, sola autem reputatione miserentis Dei per fidem verbi eius iusti sumus” (Third Corollarium to Rom. 4:7, W.A. 56.287).
 16. “Preface to the Epistle to St. James,” *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 6 (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg Press, 1932), p. 477.
 17. Ibid., p. 478.
 18. Ibid.
 19. “What is New Testament Theology? Some Reflections,” in *Intergerini parietis septum (Eph. 2:14): Essays Presented to Markus Barth on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Dikran Y. Hadidian (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1981), pp. 1–22.

Chapter 4: Reflections on the Church’s Authoritative Teaching on Social Questions

1. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. 1, ed. Günther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 54–56.
2. Published with the signature of John and Charles Wesley in 1743 as “Rules of the Society of the People Called Methodists,” *Works*, 8:270–1.
3. On the origins and modifications of “the Social Creed,” see Walter C. Muelder, *Methodism and Society in the Twentieth Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961), chapters 2–5.
4. The United Methodist Council of Bishops, *In Defense of Creation* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1986).
5. Ibid., Introduction.
6. Ibid.
7. *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington, D.C.: National Conference of Bishops, 1986).