

REFLECTIONS ON SALVATION AND JUSTIFICATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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I. INTRODUCTION

This subject is impossibly vast for a brief paper. To make sense of the treatment that follows, three assumptions must be appreciated, for they determine the focus.

1. *This is not an attempt at a comprehensive and representative treatment of salvation and of justification in the NT* prepared for, say, a catechizing class in one of our churches, or for a class of seminary students. It has been prepared specifically for this Catholic/evangelical dialogue.¹ That means the points of historical difference between Catholicism and evangelicalism, in the light of what the Bible says, receive more attention than they might in some contexts.²

2. *We live and think within a particular historical setting.* We can no more return to the patristic period and ignore the disputes of the Reformation than we can ignore the Enlightenment. This does not mean we should not listen to the early-Church fathers (or, for that matter, to Thomas or Calvin). It does mean we must frankly recognize our historical location. We cannot retreat to an earlier period and pretend later disagreements have not occurred. They must be either resolved or dismissed as unimportant (which of course implies that it was a mistake to fight over them at the time). That is part of the responsibility of speaking from our own place in history. Similarly we must eschew formulations that mask honest divisions (e.g. formulations in which different parties quite knowingly mean opposing things, which is of course no genuine agreement at all). For evangelicals the return to Scripture, however much we recognize that all interpretation of Scripture cannot entirely escape the historical contingency of the interpreter (as some wag has put it, “There is no immaculate perception”), is foundational.

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¹ This paper was first prepared for an informal meeting of Catholic and evangelical scholars held in New York on May 2–3. It is here slightly revised and expanded in the light of that discussion.

² Among the entailments of this preliminary point is that the paper says very little, for example, about the Holy Spirit and his work, or about the deity of Christ, or about a host of other matters that are essential to a Biblically faithful view of salvation. Doubtless if evangelicals were in dialogue with Arians (whether ancient or modern, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses) the focus of this paper would change drastically.

3. *As there is considerable diversity of opinion among evangelicals, so is there considerable diversity of opinion among Catholics*—a fact sometimes overlooked because of Catholicism's institutional oneness. The views of, say, Billy Graham are not the same as those of R. C. Sproul. The views of the current pope are not isomorphic with those of Edward Schillebeeckx. I enter this observation not to stir up strife but to acknowledge that dialogue is more difficult where the partners are shifting. As erstwhile confessional Protestantism has produced many scholars who have drunk deeply at the wellsprings of naturalism, so Catholicism now follows a similar course. In what follows I try to stick with evangelical opinion widely regarded as near the center of the movement and extend the same courtesy to dialogue partners by citing, for the most part, Catholic sources with which few Catholics would take umbrage.

In the following sections I first draw brief attention to substantive common ground in Catholic and evangelical conceptions of salvation and then outline four problem areas that we should not trip over. The succeeding section is the longest and most substantive and attempts to summarize some of what the Bible says about salvation, drawing attention not only to points of convergence but to the most important points of divergence in the respective understandings of Scripture by Catholics and evangelicals. The concluding section attempts to indicate, rather hesitantly, that the issues that divide us are tied to broader doctrinal structures: Candor compels us to recognize that disputes over, say, justification are themselves tied to larger structures of thought, and the attempt to resolve divergences of interpretation in the one area are probably somewhat naive unless they are frankly acknowledged to belong to a broader framework.

II. SOME COMMON GROUND

That brings us to two huge areas of common ground between Catholics and evangelicals so far as our respective understandings of salvation are concerned.

1. *We share the Bible's story line.* Fifty years ago, even thirty years ago, that would not have been saying much. But in a nation as religiously pluralistic as this one, it is an important observation. We are theists—that is, those who believe in a personal, transcendent God, who is not to be identified with the created order but who is the Creator of all. Further, we are trinitarian in our understanding of God. Human beings have been made *imago Dei*. History does not simply turn in circles but pulses onward under the hand of our providential God, toward the final judgment. There is a heaven to be gained and a hell to be feared. The heart of the human dilemma is not our material existence, still less a morally neutral quest for authenticity, but rebellion, sin, transgression that alienates us from our Maker and attracts his just judgment. Certainly there can be no shared vision regarding a solution to a problem if there is no shared vision as to the nature of the problem.

We concur that the heart of the problem, the heart of what it means to be lost, is bound up with our sin. What we need is to be reconciled to God. On countless important points we may disagree on our understanding of Scripture (e.g. as to how far the effects of sin corrode our reason), but this large-scale vision of God, the universe, our place within it, and the nature of our alienation from our Maker is, by and large, common ground. In short, the framework established by the Bible's metanarrative constitutes a shared worldview.

2. *With that shared worldview comes a shared vision, broadly speaking, of what the Bible holds up as salvation.* That bold statement needs a great deal of qualification, as we shall see. Nevertheless this is a place to begin. At the heart of salvation lies reconciliation to the God who made us and under whose just judgment we lie. Its ultimate triumph is a new heaven and a new earth, "the home of righteousness" (2 Pet 3:13), the consummating transformation of this fallen, broken existence, the gain of resurrection bodies, and above all the sheer triumph and glory of God. Along the line we acknowledge the need to be justified (whatever that means), to be sanctified, to be regenerated/created anew, and finally to be glorified. Sometimes these elements are treated separately by the NT writers; sometimes several of them come together in one passage, in one writer, in dramatic form (e.g. Rom 8:30). This is not to say that there are no differences between Catholics and evangelicals on this big-picture view of salvation. For instance, evangelicals have no place for purgatory. But the degree of overlapping visions is considerable.

III. WHAT DIFFERENCES IN OUR RESPECTIVE UNDERSTANDINGS OF SCRIPTURE SHOULD NOT BE ABOUT

1. *We should not trip over disputes arising from the different intellectual domains of Biblical exegesis and systematic theology.* For example, it is typical in evangelical theology, as in Protestantism generally and Catholicism as well, to use the term "sanctification" to refer to the process of continued growth in holiness that accompanies salvation. The fact remains that the most plausible exegesis of most of Paul's uses of the ἅγιος word-group insists that sanctification is primarily in the Pauline corpus what some systematicians would call "definitional sanctification" or "positional sanctification." In other words, we are "sanctified" because we have been set apart for God's use and God's glory, regardless of how (morally) "holy" we have become.³ Certainly that makes sense of, say, 1 Cor 1:2, where a singularly scrappy local church is said to be "sanctified," and of the order of 6:11. But none of this means of course that the NT writers are uninterested in the steps of growth and of progressive holiness. The apostle Paul can speak of

³ The most recent articulate defense of this view is that of D. Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

forgetting what he has achieved and pressing on toward what there is still to attain (Philippians 3), several passages contrast “baby” believers with those who are mature (e.g. 1 Cor 3:1–4; Heb 5:11–14), in various ways a believer is urged to press on and become τέλειος, and so forth. In none of these instances is the ἅγιος word-group found, and yet these passages treat “sanctification” (in the dogmatic sense). Unfortunate interpretive difficulties arise if we wittingly or unwittingly read back the vocabulary from the domain of systematic theology into the vocabulary of the writers of the NT. But among those who are aware of the dangers there is little likelihood of getting snookered by the different language games deployed by different corpora and by different domains of discourse.

Similarly, when we speak of “the doctrine of justification” the term “justification” (whether in the Catholic or the evangelical heritage) bears no isomorphic relation with δικαιοσύνη in the NT. This may be demonstrated by at least three strands of evidence. (1) Different NT writers use δικαιοσύνη in different ways. It is widely agreed, for instance, that δικαιοσύνη in Matthew has to be rendered “righteousness,” not “justification” (regardless of the definition of the latter).⁴ (2) Even within the Pauline corpus a case can be made that δικαιοσύνη does not always mean the same thing. Some distinguish between δικαιοσύνη and δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ;⁵ others argue for a spread of denotational or connotational meanings. It is far less certain that there is a similar semantic spread to the cognate verb δικαιοῶ in Paul. But it is arguable that the abstract noun δικαιοσύνη itself is not, even in Paul, a *terminus technicus*. (3) One may responsibly argue for a “doctrine of justification” even when no form of the δικ- word-group is used. For instance, with respect to John 5:24 (“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life”) C. K. Barrett comments: “The thought is closely akin to the Pauline doctrine of justification, according to which the believer does indeed come into judgment but leaves the court acquitted.”⁶

This is simply another way of saying that crucial NT terms often do not enjoy the technical status imputed to them by later theology and that the doctrines over which we disagree must be established on something more than word studies.⁷

⁴ See especially B. Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* (SNTSMS 41; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1980); contrast N. Yri, “Seek God’s Righteousness: Righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World* (ed. D. A. Carson; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992) 96–105, 268–270.

⁵ So, for example, S. K. Williams, “The ‘Righteousness of God’ in Romans,” *JBL* 99 (1980) 241–290.

⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) 261.

⁷ Of course this also has considerable bearing on the interpretation of James 2, which I shall pass over in silence, more from want of space than want of desire. Two recent essays with voluminous interaction (and adopting slightly different positions) are R. Y. K. Fung, “‘Justification’ in James,” *Right with God* 146–162, 277–287, and T. Laato, “Justification According to James: A Comparison with Paul,” *Trinity Journal* 18 (1997) 43–84.

2. *Certain widespread assumptions among evangelical (not least Reformed) preachers are gently challenged by most evangelical (not least Reformed) NT scholars.* For example, it is popularly held that Galatians 3 teaches that the law must be applied to individuals to bring about consciousness of sin as a preparation for the gospel, as a παιδαγωγός to lead us to Christ. But most students of Galatians—evangelicals and Catholics alike—now recognize that Paul’s emphasis in Galatians 3 is much less focused on individual experience than on redemptive history. In this passage the apostle is less interested in the psychology of conversion than in the place of *tôrâ* within the progress of divine revelation that has brought us, “when the time had fully come” (4:4), to Christ. Against those forms of Judaism that saw the law-covenant not only as *lex* but as a hermeneutical device for interpreting the OT, Paul insists that the Bible’s story line takes precedence and provides the proper hermeneutical key: The promise to Abraham, including the promise of blessings to the nations, was granted to him hundreds of years before the giving of *tôrâ* (3:17) and therefore cannot be annulled by it. As for Abraham himself, he “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:6). That leads Paul to offer reasons why the law was “added” (3:19). This is not all that Paul says about the significance of the law, of course, but it does hint at Paul’s commitment to reading the HB along the axis of its developing plot line.⁸ Of course this reading of the HB may rightly become the basis for pondering the question, “Why then did God, along the axis of redemptive history, take so much trouble through the law to ‘imprison’ the whole world under sin?” We may then conclude that there are some important individual implications in the matter of how we preach salvation. My only point here is that the western tradition favoring individualism has not infrequently affected evangelical readings of texts crucial to our topic, and I pause to utter a *mea culpa* before pressing on. Such matters, I think, should not finally be the focus of divisions between us, though as we shall see they have some bearing on our respective theologies.

3. *I suspect that in this discussion we shall not trip over the recent proposals that stem from the seminal work of E. P. Sanders⁹ and that are developed in various ways by James D. G. Dunn, N. T. Wright and others.* Most Pauline scholars in the Anglo-Saxon world now find it difficult to write anything substantive on Paul without interacting extensively with this growing corpus of comment.¹⁰ Although I do not intend to say much about it here, this growing tradition does have a tangential bearing on the present paper that

⁸ A commitment one also occasionally finds in the synoptic gospels and Acts and frequently in Hebrews.

⁹ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

¹⁰ A noteworthy exception is J. A. Fitzmyer in his fine commentary on *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), who by and large ignores Sanders. For a contemporary exegetical commentary that takes these developments into account (though it is far from following them slavishly) see D. J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

is worth delineating briefly. Sanders argues that Protestant Pauline scholarship, especially German Lutheran scholarship, has been guilty of reading back into the NT late Jewish sources (such as those that picture the final judgment as a matter of weighing up merits and demerits, from the fifth century AD) and thereby construing the conflict between Paul and his Jewish opponents in terms of debates at the time of the magisterial Reformation. In fact, Sanders argues, first-century Jews were not seduced by merit theology or works righteousness. The various strands of second-temple Judaism neatly fit into a pattern of “covenantal nomism”—that is, people enter the covenant by grace and maintain themselves there by works. The same pattern, he argues, is also found in Paul. The real bone of contention between Paul and his contemporaries is Christology pure and simple, though sometimes Paul distorts the positions of his opponents in order to safeguard his own. Dunn builds on this analysis to argue that “works of the law,” especially in Galatians, refers to such social boundary markers as circumcision and the food laws: Those are the real problems Paul has to confront as he expands the locus of the people of God to include Gentiles. “Works of the law” does not refer to “works righteousness” that is confronted by justification by grace through faith. Wright wishes to maintain a forensic notion of justification but understands it to refer to that declarative act of God by which people are declared to belong to the covenant people of God.

The issues are complex and are sometimes characterized by more than a little irony. In the past it has been common to charge Luther with reading Paul’s opponents in Galatia into late medieval Catholicism. Now later Lutherans are being charged with reading late medieval Catholicism back into Paul’s opponents. Inevitably the reality is that there are points of continuity and discontinuity. Enough rebuttal to this new perspective on Paul has been mounted¹¹ to assert with some confidence that although Sanders is quite right to criticize the anachronistic referencing of late Jewish sources, his category “covenantal nomism” is much too broad to embrace fruitfully the diversity of Judaisms in the first century. He frankly overlooks some important matters, such as Josephus’ frequent insistence that God’s grace is meted out in response to merit, or the line of argument in 2 Esdras.¹² Dunn’s approach to boundary markers is not so much wrong as reductionistic: It fails to penetrate to the heart of Paul’s thought. Wright’s definition of justification is so far removed from OT and second-temple Judaism sources as to be frankly unbelievable, even though parts of his emphases regarding Jesus as the locus of the new Israel are entirely right (even if pressed too hard in too many passages). Much more could be said about this new perspective on Paul. But the effect of this influential analysis is to encourage many, not least some evangelicals, to think that the classic debates over

¹¹ One of the finest books on the subject is that of M. A. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (NovTSup 68; Leiden: Brill, 1992). See also S. Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); C. G. Kruse, *Paul, the Law and Justification* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1996).

¹² On which see now B. W. Longenecker, *2 Esdras* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995).

justification are at best *passés* and perhaps misguided, which in turn tends to dampen sharp and open-eyed debate in the area.

4. *Finally, as helpful as slogans can be to summarize a theological stance, we must recognize that agreeing to a slogan is not necessarily the same thing as achieving substantive agreement.* I offer two examples.

On the evangelical side, justification *sola gratia* and *sola fide* carries considerable value as a summarizing formula for our understanding of justification. But its brevity opens up possible misunderstandings and possible transformations. From the Catholic side, Hans Küng accepts *sola fide* if it is used to express the fact that in justification sinners receive everything as a sheer gift from God.¹³ And if I understand Avery Dulles aright, he could live with *sola fide* if the faith in view is animated by love.¹⁴ Yet none of this, from an informed evangelical perspective, deals with the nub of the issue.

On the Catholic side, justification as defended in Protestantism is regularly dismissed (especially in popular conservative Catholicism) as a mere legal act or the like, a forensic fiction that does not really deal with the heart of human sinfulness.¹⁵ But all evangelical theology insists that salvation is more than justification, that “faith alone” is never alone—that is, it is accompanied by other things. Regeneration/new creation is part of this whole. Evangelicals may dispute among themselves over the *ordo salutis*, but only fringe groups teach that a person may be (forensically) justified and then live like the world, the flesh and the devil. Yet would it really satisfy Catholic theology if evangelicals could convince their partners in dialogue that we are not crypto-antinomians? I doubt it. The issues go deeper than the slogan, as we shall see.

IV. SOME BIBLICAL STRANDS REGARDING SALVATION

The following notes are but a skimpy and merely suggestive summary of an extraordinarily rich heritage in Scripture.

1. *God.* The ways of speaking about God in the Bible are extraordinarily diverse. What is striking about them, from the perspective of reflection upon salvation, is how almost every one of these ways of talking about God brings with it an obverse description of human beings that exposes our lostness. God is the Creator. We who bear his image have rebelled and brought down the curse of our Maker upon this entire created order. God initiates covenantal relationships, but while he is the God of the covenant we show ourselves to be covenant breakers. God is the King. We rebel against his rule.

¹³ H. Küng, *Justification* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1963) 248–263.

¹⁴ A. Dulles, “Justification in Contemporary Catholic Theology,” *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII* (ed H. G. Anderson, T. A. Murphy and J. A. Burgess; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 265–266.

¹⁵ E.g. see K. Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on “Romanism” by “Bible Christians”* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998) 167–168.

God is the husband of his covenant people, who go whoring after other gods. God is holy and tells his people to be holy. His people are so frequently unholy and must resort to the cultic systems he himself provides to address their uncleanness, and then in due course they ignore the cultic structures he has mandated and slide toward syncretism. God alone is God. He is one, and therefore he must be jealous with respect to his people, who provoke him to jealousy. God is the God of justice and mercy. We fill the streets with violence and ignore the poor. God is the Shepherd of his people. We are lost, straying, stupid sheep and are led by corrupt shepherds. God pours out his unmerited blessings upon his people. We are characterized by thanklessness and grumbling. God is a farmer, an expert in viticulture. His people are a rotten vine.

These images and ways of talking about God and about fallen human beings are so ubiquitous in the OT that for our purposes it would be tedious to trace them out in detail. What cannot be overlooked is the sheer lostness, the sheer culpability, of the human condition. And in many of these images there is associated with them also a redemptive or transforming facet of God's character. If God is a husband, he buys back his straying wife from slavery (Hos 3:1–5). If he is a shepherd, he leads his sheep to green pastures and promises to be their shepherd so as to nourish and protect them (Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34). If he is a warrior, the captain of the hosts of heaven, he goes to war to save his people (Josh 5:13–15; Isa 59:16–19). If he is a father, he gives life to his people and nurtures them (Deut 32:6, 18; Hos 11:1–2). If he is a kinsman-redeemer, he buys up his inheritance (Isa 44:6, 24). If he is a rock, he is a refuge for his fugitive people (Exod 17:6; Deut 32:3–4; Pss 18:2; 31:3; 95:1). If he is a fire, he not only burns in wrath against sin (Deut 4:24; Isa 9:19) but also purifies his people (4:4; 33:14; Mal 3:2–3). In other words, the Hebrew canon abounds in images of God set against his rebellious image-bearers and yet taking initiative to save them. Theologically this tension traces back to the creation and fall. Our responsibility is tied to the fact that we have been made by and for the one God. The heinousness of our rebellion can be met only by his gracious intervention on our behalf, seen for its spectacular generosity when we remember that with perfect justice he could simply wipe people out (witness the flood and the exile).

Most of the same themes, and more, are picked up and developed in various ways in the NT documents and sometimes assigned to God, sometimes to Jesus. God is all the more clearly set forth as the heavenly Father, but it is Jesus who is the bridegroom and the rock. Such Christological developments we shall glance at in a moment. The point here is that God, sometimes God manifested in Christ Jesus, establishes what it is we are rebelling against and therefore the nature of our lostness, stands over against us in judgment, and pursues us with redemptive purpose. One might pursue such themes across the NT, or corpus by corpus, even book by book. For instance, in Romans God is the Creator (1:25), the one who calls into existence things that are not (4:17). All things are from him and through him and for him (11:36). Since he is one (3:30) he is not only the God of the covenants made with Israel (9:4) but the God of the Gentiles too (3:29). He has graciously dis-

closed himself in the created order (1:19–20). He is the Father (6:4)—not only the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (15:6) but also our Father, the Father of believers (1:7), who cry “*Abba*, Father” to him (8:15), since by his saving work they become his children. For after all, God remains the sovereign Judge over all people (2:3–6), the one who repays everyone according to his deeds (2:6). Indeed, he is a severe God (11:22). No one escapes his judgment (2:3); all must stand before his judgment seat (14:10). Yet he is also the God who out of love chose Israel (11:28) and now pours love into the hearts of Christian believers through the Holy Spirit (5:5, 8).

The theme of God the Judge requires a few more lines. Human relations with God are repeatedly viewed from the perspective of his just judgment. Kings were not only warriors but judges. All God’s ways are just. He is a faithful God who does no wrong, for he is upright and just: “Yahweh the Righteous” is in the midst of Jerusalem (Deut 32:4; Zeph 3:5). God’s justice is perfect. He cannot be corrupted (Deut 10:17), and his own justice must set the standard for judicial practice among his people (Lev 19:15; Deut 1:17).

At this juncture some terminological distinctions must be introduced. It is widely recognized that in Latin *iustitia* (“righteousness”) is meritorious and therefore deserves recognition or recompense.¹⁶ By contrast, in Hebrew a person’s “righteousness” is commonly seen in the context of a verdict that could be pronounced upon him. If he is “in the right” he withstands the accusation. The Greek terms side with Greek notions of civic virtue, but in the LXX and NT they slide over toward the Hebrew background.¹⁷ Similarly, while the verb δικάσιω in classical Greek meant “to do justice to” (usually in the negative sense of “to punish”), Hebrew דָּקַרְתִּי commonly means “to declare to be in the right”—that is, to acquit or even to vindicate.¹⁸ If Israel’s judges are commanded “to justify the righteous and condemn the wicked” (Deut 25:1—with a kind of pun in Hebrew: “to justify the justifiable and to condemn the condemnable”)—it is clear that “to condemn” must mean “to declare to be wicked” or the like, not “to make wicked.” Similarly, “to justify” means “to declare to be righteous,” not “to make righteous.” The notion of a verdict is inescapable. This sort of pattern is common. Job is accused of “justifying” himself rather than God (Job 32:2). The just God insists that he will not justify the wicked (Exod 23:7; 20:11; compare also the synonymous verb נָקַרְתִּי [piel], “to clear [the wicked],” 34:7). The point is that God’s standards of justice are perfect and that he is incorruptible.

The purpose of this recital is twofold. (1) We remind ourselves that our human dilemma is bound up with our alienation from God, our rebellion against God, our vaunted independence from God. Small wonder that Jesus insisted that the first commandment is to love God with heart and soul and

¹⁶ Cf. e.g. A. E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986) 1.23.

¹⁷ Here the work of D. Hill is still worth careful study: *Greek Words with Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (SNTSMS 5; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1967).

¹⁸ These points are now widely recognized; cf. e.g. Schrenk, *TDNT* 2.212–214; N. M. Watson, “Some Observations on the Use of *dikaioō* in the Septuagint,” *JBL* 79 (1960) 255–260.

mind and strength. He well recognized that the first sin is not to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength. It follows that all that is encompassed by salvation is bound up with being reconciled to this God. (2) We remind ourselves of some of the linguistic evidence that prepares the way for a fair treatment of justification.

2. *History and eschatology.* Unlike some strands of Greek thought, the Bible does not present a history that turns back on itself or that goes through cycles. There is a beginning, and there is an end. Along the way there are decisive steps: the call of and covenant with Abraham, the exodus and Sinai code, entrance into the promised land, the rise and fall of the Davidic monarchy, and so forth.

It is this developing time line that Paul exploits in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 to explain the importance of faith and the place of the law covenant in the sweep of redemptive history.¹⁹ It also opens up the way for realized or inaugurated eschatology. The promised kingdom comes with Jesus the Messiah, yet the kingdom is not consummated. The ultimate verdict from the final judgment is pronounced now, on the ground of the death of Christ. The implications for a full-blown grasp of salvation in the NT are considerable. Such inaugurated eschatology is variously tied to the Holy Spirit as the down payment of the ultimate inheritance, to the Church as the assembly of saints already gathered before the throne of God, to a kingdom ethic that is already brought back from the *eschaton* to be lived out, in substantial measure, here and now.

The presence of this time line makes possible a handful of related concepts. In particular, (1) it opens up the possibility of promises and their fulfillments (e.g. the promise to Abram that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed), (2) it opens up patterns of relationships—types, if you will—that make it possible for later writers to look back on the past and discern a prophetic model that has brought them to this point (not a few of the NT fulfillment formulae introduce OT passages that are tied to the NT by some such means), and (3) together these things prepare the way for the first Christian confessions of Jesus as the one who in the fullness of time fulfilled these promises and patterns. Among the most intriguing of these are the temple, the priesthood, David himself as the founder of the Davidic dynasty, and certain persons such as Melchizedek. None is more central than the notion of covenant. The various covenants God enacts finally lead to the repeated promise of a new covenant (e.g. Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36). At the heart of this new covenant stand God's promises to forgive sin, to transform his people (taking away their heart of stone and giving them a heart of flesh or, alternatively, pouring out his Spirit on them), ensuring that all of his

¹⁹ Incidentally the classic tripartite distinction—namely, moral, civil and ceremonial law—received its first (so far as I am aware) systematic treatment as a key to explaining the relationship between the OT and NT by Thomas Aquinas, and this tripartite division later became a commonplace in Protestant theology. Doubtless it has certain heuristic value, but it is far from clear that any of the Biblical writers thought in precisely those categories.

people know him, from the least to the greatest (thereby destroying or transforming the essentially tribal/representative structure of the old covenant). According to Luke and Paul, when Jesus first instituted the Lord's supper he spoke of the "new covenant" he was establishing in his blood. It appears, then, that Jesus' self-understanding of his role in his own location on this unfolding time line was connected with his death. It is not an accident that all four canonical gospels have as their central plot the movement of Jesus toward the cross. It is no accident that after the confession of Jesus as the Messiah, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus himself explains with clarity and persistence the inevitability of his movement toward the cross, almost as if to put aside any expectations of a merely triumphalistic Messiah. Small wonder, then, that when Anselm asked his famous question "*Cur Deus Homo?*" the answer was: "To die."

3. *Christology.* As the HB arouses expectations of various complex kinds, it is unsurprising that some people during the period of second temple Judaism expected two messiahs, one priestly and one Davidic. The categories of messianism are so interwoven that it seems an impertinence to introduce them so cursorily here. And yet NT notions of salvation are so dramatically tied to Jesus in his role as the promised Christ, the Messiah, that it would be still less responsible to say nothing.

At the risk of considerable oversimplification, we may discern two axes of personal, "messianic"²⁰ hope in the HB. On the one hand, Yahweh repeatedly promises that he himself will come and rescue his people, be their God, become their Shepherd, lay bare his arm and rescue them, and the like. On the other hand, Yahweh employs various agents who rescue his people or who promise to do so. Here we may think, *inter alios*, of David, the Danielic son of man, the angel of the Lord, Melchizedek in Psalm 110—not to mention an array of judges, prophets, priests and kings. Yet the two patterns—one that focuses on God himself, one that focuses on God's agent—develop strange twists.

First, the agent may be tied to God or identified with God in unexpected ways. For example, in Ezekiel 34 God, after saying about twenty-five times that "I" will rescue the flock—that is, that all the human shepherds have failed and that he himself will shepherd the sheep, tend them, and so on—suddenly says he will place over them one shepherd, "my servant David, and he will tend them" (34:23). Again, in Isaiah 9 readers are told that "to us a child is born, to us a son is given," someone who will reign on David's throne—and yet this Davidic monarch is also called, among other things, "mighty God" (which I take to be the right translation) and "everlasting Father." His kingdom shall continue forever—as will the kingdom of the Daniel 7 figure, "one like a son of man" who approaches the Ancient of Days to receive his kingdom. The angel of the Lord is almost notorious for being alternately identified with and distinguishable from God himself. In the OT,

²⁰ The term is in quotation marks because the word itself is often not used to refer to the various figures about to be mentioned. I use it here as a generic catchall.

Melchizedek appears in only two passages: Genesis 14 and Psalm 110. From these two passages the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews infers (1) that the textual silence regarding Melchizedek's ancestry and death in Genesis 14, in a book where the genealogy and death of virtually everyone of importance are properly established, is a symbol-laden omission that makes him "like the Son of God," and (2) that centuries later the promise of a priesthood under his aegis signals the principal obsolescence of the Levitical priesthood and thus a prospective change in the law covenant that surrounds the Levitical system. It is against this wealth of OT background that the strongest Christological confessions of the NT are to be understood. In Jesus all the fullness of the Deity resides in bodily form (Col 2:9). The Word is simultaneously with God (i.e. God's own fellow, even in the beginning) and is God (i.e. God's own self)—and this Word became flesh (John 1:1, 14).

Second, within the canonical framework not only do the OT agents frequently find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus but also they are often connected in surprising ways with Jesus' suffering and death. Jesus' connection with David is reiterated in various ways. But who would have predicted the frequent appeal to the theme of unjust suffering and betrayal in Davidic psalms (e.g. the frequent appeal to Psalm 69)? The Son of Man receives a kingdom, but perhaps a third of the gospel references to the Son of Man are intimately connected with Jesus' passion, not least the pivotal passage Mark 10:45 (= Matt 20:28): "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus is king, but his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). To use the symbolism of the fourth gospel, he rules from the cross. Jesus is priest, but he is also the Passover lamb. He himself is the temple, the ultimate meeting place between God and his people, yet he is such because this "temple" is destroyed and raised again in three days (2:20–22). He is the shepherd, but this good shepherd gives his life for the sheep (chap. 10). He may be the warrior apocalyptic lamb who comes from the very throne of God, but he is also the slaughtered lamb—not to mention the only one who is worthy to open the seals of the scroll in God's right hand and thus bring about all God's purposes for judgment and blessing (Revelation 5). In short, everywhere the messianic expectation is redirected toward the cross.

4. *Christ, the kingdom, and the cross.* The purpose of the exercise I have just undertaken, which is of course no more than the skimpiest review of some massive Biblical themes and their intertwinings, is to serve as a reminder of three realities:

(1) The nature of our lostness. Here I have probably said enough. We shall never agree on the nature of the solution if we cannot agree on the nature of the problem. One recalls Paul Schrottenboer's assessment of the agreements and differences between Catholics and evangelicals (of which he was one) connected with the World Evangelical Fellowship:

All participants recognized that there is a difference in assessment of men and women in their natural state. This difference did not seem as great to the

Catholics as it did to the Evangelicals. The Catholic view does not seem to take entirely seriously the biblical statement that we are dead in trespasses and sins prior to rebirth.

According to most recent papal encyclicals human nature has remained basically intact. We agreed that all people have a knowledge of God (Rom. 1:21) but argued that it should be affirmed also that the response of the unregenerate to this knowledge is to hold down the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).²¹

(2) The convergence of various lines of hope and expectation on the person of Jesus, who introduces an inaugurated eschatological kingdom that still awaits the consummation—and that this vision largely defines what we mean by salvation.

(3) The convergence of various lines, more narrowly, on the cross and resurrection of Jesus as the climactic redemptive event that effects our salvation. For example, unlike the second-century *Gospel of Thomas*, which is almost exclusively a collection of independent sayings, the canonical gospels, as I have already said, carry a story line that in every case moves toward the cross and resurrection. How the cross and resurrection achieve prominence in the rest of the NT turns out to be a complex subject, since most if not all of the documents are occasional in nature. But achieve it they do. In 1 Peter the unique and salvation-effecting death of Jesus (e.g. 2:22–24; 3:18) becomes the paradigm for Christians to follow his example as they learn to suffer unjustly, yet with joy and steadfastness. In Hebrews, the blood of bulls and goats did not afford Jesus entry into the Most Holy Place. Rather, “he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12). The animal blood doubtless had its ceremonial uses. “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (9:14). Indeed, it is for this reason that “Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant” (9:15). Obviously one could go on to wrestle with the triumph of the Lamb in the Apocalypse, with the presentation of Jesus as the ἰλασμός in 1 John 2:2, with Paul’s determination to avoid manipulative rhetoric and instead preach Christ crucified, the true wisdom of God, in 1 Corinthians 1–2.

But perhaps the most systematic NT treatment to depict the way the cross answers our need and provides the solution is found in the opening chapters of Romans. Paul directs all his powers of argumentation, from 1:18 to 3:20, to prove that the entire race, Jew and Gentile alike, is under sin and therefore lost. The final catena of Biblical references (3:10–18) is calculated to drive home his point. We shall not rely on our works to restore us to God, for there is no one righteous, not even one. We shall not rely on our

²¹ P. G. Schrotenboer, “Introduction” [to the entire fascicle of *ERT* 21/2 (1997) that reports the discussion, with papers and responses from both sides] 102.

rationality, for there is no one who understands. We shall not rely on our mystical yearnings, for no one seeks God (3:10–11). “All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (3:12). Against this utterly dismal backdrop Paul insists that “now” (3:21)—that is, at this point in redemptive history—a δικαιοσύνη from God has been made known to us apart from the law covenant (in my view, that is what νόμος here means), to which nevertheless both the Law and the Prophets bear witness. The entire remainder of the paragraph focuses on what Christ achieved on the cross—or, more precisely, what God achieved by Christ’s death.

We shall glance again at these and related texts in a few moments. But my immediate point is that Biblical lines promising or depicting salvation are traced back again and again to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other circumstances it would be useful to explore Paul’s new-Adam Christology, his new-creation theology, his presentation of the Spirit as the ἀρραβὼν promised inheritance, the fundamental themes of reconciliation and redemption in the Pauline corpus and elsewhere. It would be an easy task to show that in case after case the cross is what secures these and other aspects of salvation. For example, the new birth that John depicts in the third chapter of his gospel issues from the fact that God so loved the world that he sent his Son, who would be lifted up on a tree the way the bronze serpent in the wilderness was lifted up on a pole (3:13, 16). The “lifted up” terminology in the fourth gospel becomes progressively clearer as a pun on crucifixion. Jesus is lifted up on the cruel cross, and by this means he is lifted up to the glory he had with the Father before the world began. Under every aspect of salvation, one is driven back to the cross. Here no one simple theory of the atonement suffices. What the cross and resurrection achieve is so comprehensive that a full-orbed theology is called for, not some popular reductionism.

5. *Justification.* But if this is true, then we cannot avoid a careful assessment of the ways in which justification is tied to the cross and resurrection—not only because justification is itself one aspect of all that is encompassed within salvation but also and especially because it is justification that is tied to the cross most explicitly, repeatedly and emphatically—especially in the Pauline corpus—and sometimes also, no less explicitly, to the resurrection. A subject that every year calls forth many scores of books is not going to obtain adequate coverage in a few pages here. But perhaps the following points will adequately summarize the principal areas we must reflect on together.

(1) We come, first, to terminology. Contract verbs in the -όω class are commonly causative, but it is now widely granted that δικαιόω, influenced by the OT background, means “to declare [someone] righteous,” not “to make [someone] righteous.” Thus Joseph Fitzmyer rightly says:

When, then, Paul in Romans says that Christ Jesus “justified” human beings “by his blood” (3:25; cf. 5:9), he means that by what Christ suffered in his passion and death he has brought it about that sinful human beings can stand before God’s tribunal acquitted or innocent, with the judgment not based on

observance of the Mosaic Law. Thus "God's uprightness" is now manifested toward human beings in a just judgment, one of acquittal, because Jesus "our Lord . . . was handed over (to death) for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (4:25). This was done for humanity "freely by his grace" (3:24). For God has displayed Jesus in death ("by his blood") as "a manifestation of his [God's] uprightness . . . at the present time to show that he is upright and justifies [= vindicates] the one who puts faith in Jesus" (3:26; cf. 5:1). Thus God shows that human activity, indeed, is a concern of his judgment, but through Christ Jesus he sets right what has gone wrong because of the sinful conduct of human beings. Paul insists on the utter gratuity of this justification, because "all alike have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). Consequently, this uprightness does not belong to human beings (10:3), and it is not something that they have produced or merited; it is an alien uprightness, one belonging rightly to another (to Christ) and attributed to them because of what that other has done for them. So Paul understands God "justifying the godless" (4:5) or "crediting uprightness" to human beings quite "apart from deeds."²²

Regarding this crucial passage in Romans 3, then, Fitzmyer rightly insists on the declarative or forensic force of *δικαίω*. He adopts the same stance in not a few other passages (e.g. 2:13; 3:4, 20; 8:33).²³ But many instances, he thinks, are ambiguous, and in at least one instance he argues that the evidence runs the other way—that is, in Rom 5:19: "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners [surely not simply declared sinners?], so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous [*δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται*]."

What shall we make of these observations? First, it must be pointed out that even in Rom 5:19 it is entirely possible to understand the *δικ-* word in a forensic fashion.²⁴ Second, even if *δίκαιος* here refers to what a person actually becomes, it is worth observing that this is an instance of the adjective—not the abstract noun *δικαιοσύνη* and still less the verb *δικαίω*. There is no linguistic requirement that all the elements of a word-group suffer exactly the same semantic restrictions as all the other elements of the word-group. In this instance the use of the adjective in a substantivized form in the quotation of Hab 2:4 in Rom 1:17 shows that the word can refer to a person who is characterized by righteousness, by righteous performance. Third, it does not follow that every time Paul uses any word in the *δικ-* word-group he is expecting the entire semantic range of the word-group to be called up. That would be the worst kind of illegitimate totality transfer. In other words, if it is shown that there is a doctrine of declarative or forensic justification in Paul it is quite unnecessary to tie that doctrine isomorphically with a particular word-group—hence the cautions articulated at the beginning of this essay. Fourth, if then it were argued that in addition to this forensic or declarative justification by grace there must also be some making of the person

²² Fitzmyer, *Romans* 117–118.

²³ This is not to deny that there are some who insist that justification in Paul is regularly effective, not declarative; cf. e.g. K. Kertelge, "Rechtfertigung" bei Paulus. *Studien zur Struktur und zum Bedeutungsgehalt der paulinischen Rechtfertigungslehre* (Münster: Aschendorf, 1967). I cannot argue the toss at each point here.

²⁴ See *inter alios* Moo, *Romans* 344–346.

just in some sense or other, few evangelicals would wish to demur. We too recall the long list of sinners Paul lists in 1 Cor 6:10 as exemplary of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. We too insist on the transforming power of the Spirit of God, on demonstration of genuine justifying faith in life and performance. But such constructions are sharply distinguishable from justification by grace through faith in a declarative or forensic sense, regardless of any overlap in terminology that might occur (and in my view there is less overlap than some think, at least in Paul).

In contemporary discussion, especially on Romans and Galatians, commentator after commentator tries to get at the expression “righteousness of God” (cf. Rom 1:17) by examining what range of meanings the expression had in the OT.²⁵ The breakdown is usually threefold. The expression might refer to an attribute of God (i.e. his rectitude, his uprightness, his justice), a status given by God (i.e. his vindication, his decision to acquit or vindicate), or an activity of God (i.e. God’s salvific intervention on behalf of his people). Clearly it is the second of these that took hold under the Reformers. Käsemann’s interesting suggestion essentially combines the second and third of these options: He thinks the righteousness of God is “God’s salvation-creating power” or the like. I happily concede that it is possible to argue the toss in some passages but that the second sense is extraordinarily strong in a number of crucial passages, some of which I shall list below.

(2) The expression “the works of the law” occurs twice in Romans (3:20, 28) and six times in Galatians. Many argue that in the latter epistle the “works” in view are the identity markers or boundary markers that distinguish Jew from Gentile: circumcision, eating kosher food, observance of Sabbath. They therefore have nothing to do with works performed out of a sense of obedience to law, generating a kind of merit theology. But whether that is the case in Galatians, it certainly will not do in Romans. Paul argues that “no flesh”—that is, no human being—will be justified by the works of the law (Rom 3:20). He says this because not even the Jews who had the law had faithfully observed it. What he has in mind is not their observance or failure to observe Sabbath laws or circumcision (after all, they had been circumcised [2:27]). Rather, their failures were in the moral arena (2:21–23). In other words, in 3:20 Paul must be saying that no one will be justified on account of his or her moral achievements.²⁶ Romans 3:28 has a similarly wide perspective on the works of the law by which a person cannot be justified. Even in Galatians, where *ἔργα νόμου* may in the first instance refer to certain Jewish identity markers, it is far from clear that when Paul responds to the problem he does so only on the level of those identity markers and not on a deeper level.

It is worth observing that where a contrast is drawn in Galatians (four out of six occurrences) between “works of the law” and something else, the something else is bound up with faith. Thus we are told not to pursue *ἔργα θεοῦ* but rather *διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* (2:16), with the result being justifi-

²⁵ There is an excellent summary of the evidence in *ibid.* 70–73, 79–90.

²⁶ So rightly Kruse, *Paul* 186–187.

cation; ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ (2:16), with the result being justification; ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως (3:2), with the result of receiving the Spirit; and ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως (3:5), with the result of being given the Spirit/working miracles.

(3) In any case, there is in Paul an extraordinarily strong connection between δικαιοσύνη and faith. Quite apart from the preceding passages it is commonly observed that “the righteousness of God” in Rom 3:5, 25–26 is among those rare occurrences in which the expression is not tied to faith—and that is one of the reasons why in these contexts the expression probably refers to God’s faithful, righteous commitments to his person and promises. But “righteousness of God” is tightly tied to faith in 1:17; 3:21–22; 10:3. The parallel between “righteousness of God” and “righteousness based on faith” in 10:3–6 is striking. In 3:21–26 the “δικαιοσύνη of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ²⁷ to all who believe” (3:22; italics mine).

(4) Certain elements in the flow of the argument in 3:21–26 strongly favor the forensic view of justification. We have seen that 1:18–3:20 serves to condemn the entire human race. This condemnation is not an impersonal force. It means, rather, to stand under the righteous wrath of God that is now revealed from heaven (1:18 ff.). It is this alienation from God that is the heart of the human tragedy. Paul not only places the unit 3:21–26 immediately after this universal condemnation but also even within the unit draws attention to the condemnation once again: This δικαιοσύνη from God comes to all who believe (3:22); it could not come to those with the law, or to Jews, or to those with greater merit, or to some other privileged subgroup, for there is no difference among all the people in this respect; all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (3:23). We are “justified freely by his grace” (3:24). The contrast between our guilty impotence and God’s gracious provision could scarcely be stronger. This was achieved by the “redemption that came by Jesus Christ”—a phrase that is immediately unpacked and explained: God presented Christ as a propitiation,²⁸ “in his blood” (i.e. in the cross) and received by faith. God does this to display his own δικαιοσύνη—that is, so that he might simultaneously be just (δικαιος) and the one who justifies (δικαιόω) the one who has faith in Jesus. If God were simply to forgive without dealing with the sin he would be immoral, he would be unjust. But in the cross God simultaneously displays his justice and justifies the one who has faith in

²⁷ Objective genitive; see the excellent discussion of this complicated matter in Fitzmyer, *Romans* 345–346.

²⁸ The meaning of the Greek word ἱλαστήριον is of course disputed (contrast the respective commentaries of Fitzmyer and Moo). Certainly in common Greek the word was used to refer to propitiation, but in the pagan world such propitiation understood human beings to be propitiating the gods. The LXX connection with the “mercy seat” is probable. While C. H. Dodd and others think the focus (whether or not there is a reference to the mercy seat) should be on expiation (i.e. the removing of sin) rather than on propitiation (i.e. the removal of God’s wrath), L. Morris (*The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965] 136–156) and others have drawn attention to how frequently the removal of sin and the setting aside of God’s wrath are linked. In the light of Rom 1:18 ff. it is difficult to deny the connection here. Of course this must not be construed in the same way as pagan propitiation, in which human beings are the subjects and the gods are the objects. Here the wonder of the cross is that God is the subject (he presents Jesus) and the object (the sacrifice of Jesus averts the judicial sentence that God himself has imposed).

Jesus. Peter summarizes: "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Pet 3:18). Edmund P. Clowney's summary is surely correct:

There is a past, present, and future aspect to our justification. The past stretches back to God's electing purpose when he chose us in Christ (Gal. 3:8; 1 Pet. 1:1,2; Eph. 1:5). The plan of God for the salvation of sinners includes his purpose to call, justify, and glorify (Rom. 8:30). Christ was chosen before the creation of the world as the Lamb of God, whose precious blood would atone for sin (1 Pet. 1:19,20). God could withhold punishment for sin in the ages before Christ's coming because of his justifying purpose in Christ (Rom. 3:25). God's purpose was accomplished when Jesus Christ finished his work of obedience and atonement on the cross (Gal. 4:4,5; 1 Tim. 2:6; Rom. 4:25; 4:9; 6:6,7; 2 Cor. 5:19; Isa. 53:11). The present is the moment when the Holy Spirit applies to us the benefits of Christ's redemption (Col. 1:21,22; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:4-7). The future, for which we are guarded by faith, is the salvation ready to be revealed at the last time (1 Pet. 1:5). At the last judgment God's justifying verdict will be publicly declared; God's saints will be vindicated, and God's judgment will bring them joy and salvation (1 Thess. 5:9; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 6:10,16).²⁹

(5) As an evangelical participant in this discussion I have tried to prepare the ground so that we are now better placed to assess Catholic statements on justification. Dulles rightly remarks that

justification is not a central category in contemporary Catholic dogmatics. . . . From the time of Trent until the early twentieth century, justification was studied primarily with the conceptual tools of late Scholasticism. It was accordingly understood as an efficacious divine intervention whereby a supernatural accident was infused into the human soul as a kind of ornament rendering it pleasing in God's sight. This accident ("sanctifying grace") made its possessor inherently righteous and able to perform meritorious actions, thus earning a strict title to eternal rewards. The justified person possessed a variety of infused virtues that reduplicated on the supernatural plane the qualities of the naturally virtuous soul as understood in Aristotelian philosophy.³⁰

During this century, Dulles continues, there has been "a strong movement away from Scholasticism." Nevertheless he writes:

In reaction against some Protestant statements that stress the alien or extrinsic character of justification, Catholics have tended to emphasize that righteousness is really communicated to the recipient, who becomes inherently just. God's justifying sentence is regarded as effective and thus as producing what it declares. Not untypically Karl Rahner, while admitting that the objective event of God's act in Christ is causally prior to any change in the redeemed, holds that the subjective justification of the individual is really identical with that individual's sanctification. . . . Catholic theologians often list other terms such as redemption, regeneration, new creation, adoption, reconciliation, and divine indwelling as virtual synonyms.³¹

²⁹ E. P. Clowney, "The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith," *Right with God* 47-48.

³⁰ Dulles, "Justification" 256-257.

³¹ *Ibid.* 257-258.

This assessment is entirely confirmed by reading the relevant sections of the recently published *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “The grace of the Holy Spirit has the power to justify us, that is, to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us ‘the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ’ and through Baptism” (§1987). “The First work of the grace of the Holy Spirit is conversion, effecting justification in accordance with Jesus’ proclamation at the beginning of the Gospel: ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Moved by grace, man turns toward God and away from sin, thus accepting forgiveness and righteousness from on high. ‘Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man’ [cited from Trent (AD 1547): DS 1528]” (§1989). “Justification *detaches man from sin* which contradicts the love of God, and purifies his heart of sin. Justification follows upon God’s merciful initiative of offering forgiveness. It reconciles man with God. It frees from the enslavement to sin, and it heals” (§1990). “Justification is at the same time the acceptance of God’s righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Righteousness (or ‘justice’) here means the rectitude of divine love. With justification, faith, hope, and charity are poured into our hearts, and obedience to the divine will is granted us” (§1991). “Justification has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ who offered himself on the cross as a living victim, holy and pleasing to God, and whose blood has become the instrument of atonement for the sins of all men. Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy” (§1992). “The Holy Spirit is the master of the interior life. By giving birth to the ‘inner man,’ justification entails the sanctification of his whole being” (§1995). “Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man” (§2019). “Justification has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ. It is granted us through Baptism. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who justifies us” (§2020).

Whatever is meant by the passing of scholasticism, mainstream Catholic thought does not seem to have moved that far from Trent. The categories of Trent (e.g. the differentiation of the various “causes”) have been eclipsed, but the substance on justification does not seem to have changed very much. Consider Trent 6.7 (AD 1547):

The causes of this justification are: the final cause is the glory of God and of Christ and life everlasting; the efficient cause is the merciful God who washes and sanctifies gratuitously, signing and anointing with the holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance; the meritorious cause is His most beloved only begotten, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when we were enemies, for the exceeding charity wherewith He loved us, merited for us justification by His most holy passion on the wood of the cross and made satisfaction for us to God the Father; the instrumental cause is the sacrament of baptism which is the sacrament of faith, without which no man was ever justified finally; the single formal cause is the justice of God, not that by which He Himself is just, but that by which He makes us just, that, namely, with which we are being endowed by Him, are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and not only are we reputed but we are truly called and are just, receiving justice within us, each

one according to his own measure, which the Holy Ghost distributes to everyone as He wills, and according to each one's disposition and cooperation.

The statement becomes increasingly problematic for evangelicals from the "instrumental cause" on. Trent (and the contemporary *Catechism*) stresses the sacraments; evangelicals stress apprehensive faith. The formal cause insists that we are made just on the inside, and justification itself becomes not only transformationist but also a process. Justification is here not forensic or declarative but distributive. It is meted out on semi-Pelagian principles: It is contingent upon our *habitus* and cooperation (*meritum de congruo et condigno*).

Richard White has recently argued that the current impasse in the ecumenical dialogue on justification stems from an inadequate treatment of the nature of justifying righteousness—that is, the "formal cause" of the Tridentine formulation. But White's own solution remains entirely within the Roman Catholic heritage:

In the human realm, there is a vital relationship between a child's *legal* standing in a family and his or her *ontological* status; a child is given the name "Smith" and is treated like a "Smith" because he or she really *is* a "Smith." Such a relationship exists in the divine realm too. For in justification, the person is *declared* "just" in a legal sense because he or she really has been *made* a child through grace. Thus, infused righteousness is the sole, formal cause of justification because God necessarily looks with favor on the person He has generated anew; this righteousness is of itself the basis of a real relationship of adoptive filiation.³²

Alister McGrath is surely correct when he says that it was this "deliberate and systematic distinction . . . between justification and regeneration" that distinguished Protestant from medieval Roman Catholic theology.³³ But evangelicals claim in this respect to hark back to a still older tradition that must be traced to the NT.

It would be tedious to go through these statements line by line and highlight the repeated emphases to which evangelicals, from our understanding of Scripture, must take exception. We freely acknowledge that, just as there are some who call themselves evangelicals who cheerfully distance themselves from evangelical theological commitments, so there are some who call themselves Catholics who do not align themselves very closely with, say, the new *Catechism* on these points. Nevertheless the differences between mainstream Catholicism and evangelicals on justification seem to me to be substantive and important.

From an evangelical perspective, evenhanded evaluation of these matters is made more complex by two additional factors.

First, although all confessional Catholics are conscience-bound to adhere to the *Catechism*, some write in terms that seem (to this outsider) to adopt

³² R. A. White, *Justification in Ecumenical Dialogue: An Assessment of the Catholic Contribution* (dissertation, Marquette University, 1995) 229.

³³ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* 1.183–186.

a stance that does not easily cohere with the *Catechism*. Earlier I cited extensively from Fitzmyer's commentary on Romans. He attended the discussion. Few informed Protestants would want to disagree with his exegesis of those passages that were discussed. What is harder for an evangelical to fathom is precisely how the same mind can produce such exegesis and adhere to the new *Catechism*.³⁴

Second, certain Roman Catholic treatments of justification include emphases and categories that on first reading sound remarkably evangelical. But it is neither honoring to the Catholic tradition nor fair exegesis to ignore the theological matrix in which they are formulated. For example:

Q: What is justification?

A: It is a grace which makes us friends with God.

Q: Can a sinner merit this justifying grace?

A: No, he cannot; because all the good works which the sinner performs whilst he is in a state of mortal sin, are dead works, which have no merit sufficient to justify.

Q: Is it an article of the Catholic faith, that the sinner, in mortal sin, cannot merit the grace of justification?

A: Yes; it is decreed in the seventh chap. of the sixth session of the Council of Trent, that neither faith, nor good works, preceding justification, can merit the grace of justification.

Q: How then is the sinner justified?

A: He is justified gratuitously by the pure mercy of God, not on account of his own or any human merit, but purely through the merits of Jesus Christ; for Jesus Christ is our only mediator of redemption, who alone, by his passion and death, has reconciled us to his Father.

Q: Why then do Protestants charge us with believing, that the sinner can merit the remission of his sins?

A: Their ignorance of the Catholic doctrine is the cause of this, as well as many other false charges.³⁵

This is intriguing. The first exchange proves nothing at all, of course: The category "friends with God" is patient of many interpretations. The fourth exchange sounds, on first reading, as if it adopts much that the most ardent evangelical might desire. But even here it is imperative to see that the context of debate and the definition of terms in the two camps, Catholicism and

³⁴ When pressed on this point, Fitzmyer offered some helpful remarks on the workings that develop such documents in the Catholic Church (and that should probably not be repeated here). All of us appreciated his acute analysis. But although this explains in part the political machinery of Catholicism, it does not address the point I am raising.

³⁵ S. Keenan, *Doctrinal Catechism* (Boston: Patrick Donahoe, 1852) 138–139.

evangelicalism, make such optimistic analysis something that only the most naive will accept.³⁶ For a start, the sequence is established with respect to the justification of those who have committed “mortal sin”—which of course already brings one into a world of distinctions not easily derivable from the Bible. More importantly, Catholics have customarily argued that justification involves the infusion of grace and that this infusion of grace is the basis for forgiveness. There is nothing in this catechetical formulation that calls that perspective into question. By contrast, evangelicals hold that God’s gracious act of justifying sinners is fundamentally forensic and is the ground for regeneration and continuous renewal. Both Catholics and evangelicals insist that justification is finally all of grace. But that does not mean that the two sides agree on what justification means, on how it is appropriated, and on what is entailed. For example, *sola fide* can be affirmed by many informed and committed Catholics, but this is achieved by insisting that to be justifying such faith needs to be animated by love, whereas confessional evangelicalism holds that love springs from justifying faith or, more precisely, from the transformed and renewed individual who has already been justified by grace, such grace appropriated by faith that clings to Christ and the gospel. For us “faith alone” (as the means of appropriation) is never alone, in that it produces fruit. But the fruit is not to be confused with the faith.

In short, what seems like common ground suddenly begins to break up all around us when we probe more deeply. I concur with those lines in the report of the United States Lutheran-Catholic dialogue that speak of “contrasting concerns and patterns of thought,” of “different patterns of thought and discourse,” of “contrasting theological perspectives and structures of thought.”³⁷ Is this the reason, as George Vandeveldel has pointed out,³⁸ that while some hailed that joint document as an ecumenical landmark³⁹ others speak of an “impasse”?⁴⁰

(6) Evangelicals have often spoken of justification as a central doctrine, or at very least a central focus in Pauline theology. The category of centrality is slippery, and so it deserves some reflection from the evangelical side.

Justification is surely not central to, say, Pauline thought, if centrality is determined by the number of references to $\delta\iota\kappa$ -forms across the Pauline corpus. On such a basis it would not even be central to Romans: “God” would beat it hands down. Nor is it clear that justification is the great unifying principle of Paul’s thought, even in Romans and Galatians: The category “great unifying principle” is scarcely less slippery than “central.” One might reasonably argue that the unifying worldview behind these epistles is an eschatological awareness of the dawning of the age to come, and that the

³⁶ Of course the others who will accept this as an acceptable joint confessional stance are those who are happy to adopt common statements that mean different things to the two sides—which is no substantive agreement at all.

³⁷ *Justification* (ed. Anderson *et al.*) §§94, 96, 121.

³⁸ G. Vandeveldel, “Justification Between Scripture and Tradition,” *ERT* 21 (1997) 139.

³⁹ E.g. A. McGrath, “Justification: the New Ecumenical Debate,” *Themelios* 13/2 (1988) 43.

⁴⁰ G. Forde, “Justification by Faith Alone: The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls?,” *In Search of Christian Unity: Basic Consensus / Basic Differences* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991) 68.

supremely important center for Paul is Christ himself. But justification is surely central for Paul in this sense: It marks the entry point into this holistic salvation, the event by which rebels are accepted back to their Maker on the basis of a sacrifice he himself provided.

Moreover, as J. I. Packer has pointed out:

In all the places where Paul writes in the first person singular of the convictions that made him the man and the missionary that he was, he couches his testimony in terms of justification by faith (Gal. 2:15–21; 2 Cor. 5:16–21; Phil. 3:4–14; cf. 1 Tim. 1:12–15). The terms in which a man gives his testimony indicate what is nearest his heart. . . . Surely Scripture requires us to restore the often neglected emphasis on a coming personal judgment for each of us at the hands of a holy God, and against that background to reinstate the precious truth of justification—the wonderful exchange, as Luther called it, whereby Christ took our sin on himself and set righteousness upon us in its place.⁴¹

If this is even approximately right, it explains why for us justification is a critical issue. It is tightly bound up with how we preach the gospel⁴² and what lies at the heart of that good news as we, as Christ's ambassadors, command and implore people: "Be reconciled to God." Catholicism does not have much to lose on this issue, because by its own confession justification (however understood) is not nearly as central in Catholic thought as some other elements. Evangelicalism has an enormous amount to lose, for to us justification is that forensic act of God by which God, on the basis of the substituted death of his Son on behalf of sinners, acquits guilty sinners and declares them just. That is glorious good news. Of course if that is all that God did it would be a horrible excuse for the worst licentiousness of antinomianism.⁴³ But we insist on distinguishing justification, so understood, from other elements of salvation, not only because we think there are numerous Biblical passages that warrant the distinction but also because as a result the gospel we hold out is configured differently (and, we judge, with greater Biblical fidelity) than it would otherwise be, and the purpose and triumph of Christ's death are displayed in sharper focus.

We recognize that some of the formulae we use may be offensive to our Catholic partners in dialogue, or at least initially opaque (e.g. *simul iustus et peccator*). But no informed evangelical deploys the formula as an excuse for sin or pretends that this is a summary of our view of salvation in its wholeness. It is merely an entailment of justification, Biblically understood: Because justification is a gracious declarative act of God received by faith alone, the sinner is a sinner still. That does not mean that other elements in the wholeness of salvation will not operate to bring him or her to growing conformity to Christ. It does mean that justification is for us too important a

⁴¹ J. I. Packer, "Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation," *Evangelical Affirmations* (ed. K. S. Kantzer and C. F. H. Henry; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 127, 129.

⁴² I use the term "gospel" here in a generic sense, fully aware that there are shadings of emphasis in the different NT books.

⁴³ Even here, however, it is worth reflecting that the apostle Paul could be charged, however unjustly, with something like antinomianism. Apparently his position could be misrepresented along such lines. It is difficult to imagine the same charge being leveled against, say, the pope.

doctrine to be abandoned. To use the language of Dulles, justification by grace through faith, understood forensically, is for us a “binding doctrine,”⁴⁴ and that leaves us very little scope for movement.

V. SOME BROADER DOCTRINAL CONNECTIONS AND PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS

It is vital in all theological systems to recognize that the issues being debated can never responsibly be restricted to the issues themselves, since they are invariably linked to a broader theological structure.

For many evangelicals, for example, our understanding of justification is tied to a rejection of purgatory, indulgences, and claims that Mary may properly be called a *coredemptrix*. For us the doctrine of purgatory (to go no farther) implicitly asserts that the death of Christ on the cross for sinners was in itself insufficient or inadequate. Catholics, within a quite different framework, draw no such conclusion. Sooner or later, of course, the dispute over purgatory gets tracked farther back to the dispute over the locus of revelation. It is very difficult to substantiate purgatory from the Protestant Bible. Catholics themselves commonly appeal to the Apocrypha (especially 2 Macc 12:46) and tradition.⁴⁵ Suddenly our reflections on justification become inextricably intertwined with complex debates not only over purgatory but also over Scripture and tradition, papal authority, and so forth. This is not an attempt to blow smoke over an already confusing terrain. It is simply a way of saying that the old linguistic adage *tout se tient* applies no less to the field of theology. To formulate a shared statement on justification without recognizing that the two sides bring diametrically opposed sets of baggage to the table, with the baggage intact when we walk away from the table, is to construct a chimera.

Many on both sides have understood the sheer interconnectedness of the opposing theological systems. Consider the following paragraphs written by Karl Keating, a very conservative Catholic—so conservative, it must be said, that one of the Catholic scholars at the evangelicals-Catholics dialogue wryly referred to him as the Dave Hunt of the Catholic world. I cite him not because all informed Catholics would espouse his views but as the first of three Catholic voices that converge at least on this point, that the structures of theology are intertwined:

For Catholics, salvation depends on the state of the soul at death. Christ has already redeemed us, unlocked the gates of heaven, as it were. . . . He did his part, and now we have to cooperate by doing ours. If we are to pass through those gates, we have to be in the right spiritual state. We have to be spiritu-

⁴⁴ See A. Dulles, “Paths to Doctrinal Agreement: Ten Theses,” *TS* 47 (1986) 32–47. Perhaps not all evangelicals would be happy to say, with Lutherans, that justification by grace alone through faith alone is the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, but it is surely one of them.

⁴⁵ Even here, however, it is worth observing that the notion of purgatory receives no prominence in the western Church until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; see J. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984). (I am indebted to John Woodbridge for this reference.) Would one be perverse to point out that this seems like a remarkably loose use of the Vincentian canon?

ally alive. If a soul is merely in a natural state, without sanctifying grace, which is the grace that gives it supernatural life, then it is dead supernaturally and incapable of enjoying heaven. It will not be allowed through the gates. But if it has sanctifying grace, then heaven is guaranteed even if a detour through purgatorial purification is required first. The Church teaches that only souls that are objectively good and objectively pleasing to God merit heaven, and such souls are ones filled with sanctifying grace.

The saint who never committed a mortal sin and the lifelong sinner who did not stop sinning until he repented on his deathbed will each gain heaven, although the one will have to be cleansed in the anteroom of purgatory. When they get to heaven, the one with the greater capacity for love will enjoy greater blessedness there, although each will enjoy it as fully as he is capable. As Catholics see it, anyone can achieve heaven, and anyone can lose it. . . . Grace abounds and can always be grabbed if only reached for. God does everything short of getting down on his knees in front of us and begging us to repent.

That, anyway, is the way the Catholic Church looks at the matter. For fundamentalists it makes no difference how one lives or ends his life. . . . The reason is that “accepting Jesus” has nothing to do with turning a spiritually dead soul into a soul alive with sanctifying grace. The soul remains the same. Whether one has led a good life or a clearly wicked one, the soul is depraved, worthless, unable to stand on its own before God; it is a bottomless pit of sin, and a few more sins thrown in will not change its nature, just as taking a cleaning compound to it will not make it shine in the least. For the fundamentalist, sanctifying grace is a figment of Catholics’ imagination. Accepting Christ accomplishes one thing and one thing only. It makes God cover one’s sinfulness. . . .

The Reformers saw justification as a mere legal act by which God declares the sinner to be meriting heaven even though he remains in fact unjust and sinful. It is not a real eradication of sin, but a covering or nonimputation. It is not an inner renewal and a real sanctification, only an external application of Christ’s justice. The Catholic Church, not surprisingly, understands justification differently. It sees it as a true eradication of sin and a true sanctification and renewal. The soul becomes objectively pleasing to God and so merits heaven. It merits heaven because now it is actually good. . . .

The assurance of salvation is perhaps the most enticing tenet of fundamentalism, particularly for people steeped, justly, in the guilt of their former lives.⁴⁶

My point in citing this slightly purple prose is not to evaluate the fairness of its depiction of “fundamentalism,” still less to wrestle with the connections between fundamentalism and evangelicalism, but to observe that within the vision of this conservative Catholic author an array of stances stand or fall together: a certain view of justification, purgatory, the nature of sanctifying grace, the nature of assurance, and so forth. Inevitably I connect things rather differently, but I do entirely concur with Keating on the connectedness of theology. It follows that for Catholics and evangelicals to pursue discussions on salvation and justification may be slightly distorting, precisely because both sides bring interconnected baggage to the table.

⁴⁶ Keating, *Catholicism* 166–168.

But we may pursue the same point in more elevated circles. In a 1995 address Pope John Paul II, speaking to commemorate the 450th anniversary of the Council of Trent, said, “Thus, with the Decree on Justification—one of the most valuable achievements for the formulation of Catholic doctrine—the council intended to safeguard the role assigned by Christ to the Church and her sacraments in the process of sinful man’s justification.”⁴⁷ I cite the passage not because once again Trent on justification is approved and justification is presented as a process but because the pope sees the connection with sacrament and Church. At the risk of oversimplification, Catholicism elevates ecclesiology over soteriology; evangelicalism does the reverse.⁴⁸

The same point about connectedness can be made from the writings of the convener of this dialogue, Richard John Neuhaus. In his review of the recent *Catechism* Neuhaus observes that in this massive document the historic disputes over the concerns of the Reformation are not directly addressed because the *Catechism* “intends to be a positive setting forth of Catholic teaching”⁴⁹ rather than a polemical document. Nevertheless, he insists, “the careful reader will recognize that the classic concerns of the Reformation, although not mentioned, are very much taken into account.”⁵⁰ I think that is correct, but from an evangelical perspective it is also frightening. For if the *Catechism* has taken those concerns into account, and yet come up with its formulations on justification (cited above *in extenso*), then the official teaching of the Church is that we are as far apart on this doctrine as Protestants and Catholics were at the time of Trent—notwithstanding the formal agreements that can be forged by handfuls of scholars from the two sides meeting in New York.

It would not be difficult to trace out various connections between Catholic views on justification and several other matters on which Catholics and evangelicals differ: assurance, the nature and role of priests, the nature and purpose of the mass, the definition of the Church, and so forth. Similarly, on the evangelical side, though we represent different denominations with a variety of emphases, it would not be difficult to trace out various connections between evangelical views on justification and a similar array of matters where Catholics and evangelicals will disagree. Although it may be a depressing way to end a paper, I firmly believe that the integrity of dialogue will be much greater if we face the divergences with clear eyes.

Finally, one of the connections on the evangelical side is worth a brief mention precisely because it is easy to overlook. Because justification grounded in the cross of Christ is so foundational and precious to us, we have a vast heritage of hymns and devotional literature (what Catholics more frequently call

⁴⁷ “Trent: A Great Event in Church History,” *The Pope Speaks* 40/5 (September–October 1995) 291.

⁴⁸ We are sometimes charged with having no ecclesiology. It would be closer to the truth to say that the ecclesiology we do have is not liked.

⁴⁹ R. J. Neuhaus, “The New Catechism and Christian Unity,” *TToday* 53 (1996) 172.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

“spiritual literature”) that turns on this theme. Some of this is shared with Catholicism, especially pre-Reformation Catholicism (which in many forms of its expression we too wish to espouse: It is not always appreciated how much Catholicism *qua* institution has changed across the centuries). I close with a couple of samples. The first is a seventeenth century hymn by Paul Gerhardt, who apparently adapted a Latin composition by Bernard of Clairvaux (1091–1153). The second was written in the nineteenth century by William Rees. The first was written in German, the second in Welsh.

O sacred Head once wounded,
 With grief and pain weighed down,
 How scornfully surrounded
 With thorns, Thine only crown!
 How pale art Thou with anguish,
 With sore abuse and scorn!
 How does that visage languish
 Which once was bright as morn!

O Lord of life and glory,
 What bliss till now was Thine!
 I read the wondrous story,
 I joy to call Thee mine.
 Thy grief and Thy compassion
 Were all for sinners' gain;
 Mine, mine was the transgression,
 But Thine the deadly pain.

What language shall I borrow
 To praise Thee, heavenly Friend,
 For this Thy dying sorrow,
 Thy pity without end!
 Lord, make me Thine for ever,
 Nor let me faithless prove;
 O let me never, never
 Abuse such dying love!

Be near me, Lord, when dying;
 O show Thyself to me;
 And, for my succour flying,
 Come, Lord, to set me free:
 These eyes, new faith receiving,
 From Jesus shall not move;
 For he who dies believing
 Dies safely through Thy love.

* * * * *

Here is love, vast as the ocean,
 Lovingkindness as the flood,
 When the Prince of life, our ransom,
 Shed for us His precious blood.

Who His love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing His praise?
He can never be forgotten
Throughout heaven's eternal days.

On the Mount of Crucifixion
Fountains opened deep and wide;
Through the floodgates of God's mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
Poured incessant from above,
And heaven's peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love.