

Present Truth

A magazine dedicated
to the restoration
of New Testament Christianity
in this generation

Sola Gratia Solely by Grace
Solo Christo Solely by Christ
Sola Fide Solely by Faith

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Letters

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California 92028.

Mixed Up

Sir / After reading the special issue of *Present Truth* on "Justification by Faith," I was amazed to find how mixed up I was on the doctrine of justification. I always believed that Christ "paid it all," but I didn't know how to look away from my miserable self and see the finished work in Christ. This magazine makes it clear. I'm throwing off the burden and giving glory to the living Christ.

James Harmon
Arizona

Ideas Changed

Sir / Some people tend to think that discussion of the gospel and the truth about it is just vain babbling. They believe that New Testament Christians just proclaimed the truth instead of sitting around and discussing things, and I am sure this is true. If one knows the truth, then he should indeed proclaim it. But in reading the gospel articles in *Present Truth*, it seems that a lot of people (including myself) do not know very much about the gospel, and thus know not the truth. I ask, then, how can one proclaim that which he does not know? I believe that *Present Truth* can show the truth and that we must first sit down and discuss matters. If distinguishing truth from falsehood is babbling, then, by all means, let's babble!

Present Truth has changed many of my ideas about the gospel, justification, faith and grace. I thank you.

W. Hogan Smith
Arizona

Rich

Sir / Every issue of your magazine has been very rich in the greatness of justification. Truly this is the gospel.

I've had you send copies of *Present Truth* to several ministers I know, and what few comments I've heard have been "pro." In recent years I (and many others) have grown despondent from hearing the plan of salvation presented as something we do and the atonement played down as merely a great blessing from God. However, by studying your very biblical articles, many have come to a greater understanding of the great *necessity* of the atonement.

I have used your guidance and thought in speaking many times, and the re-

sults have been great, not because of my work, but because of the fact that people heard the gospel and were very glad and attentive to it.

Thank you for your strong and helpful stand on the great biblical truth of justification by faith. I admire and treasure your magazine more than most of those published by the many so-called "biblical experts" of my former acquaintance.

Tim Stevens
Alabama

Blasphemy!

Sir / On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Ghost was already *in* the believers, but He came *on* them to baptize them and give them boldness to witness for Jesus. And they did what all people do when this happens—spoke in unknown tongues. If this hasn't happened to you, you haven't been baptized in the Spirit.

It may be true that some Christians wax a little eloquent in describing this beautiful, love-instilling experience (which you interpret as "subjective"), but it's also true that their love and enthusiasm for telling the gospel bring people to their knees at the cross—and this is what it's all about.

I agree, too, that this is no passing fad. However, it's certainly not antichrist, but the outpouring of the Spirit prophesied for the last days, which will bring the gospel of Christ to all the world—and it's doing just that!

I could write a letter as long as a book to prove you're wrong, step by step, but such have been written (see *What Meaneth This?* by Brumback, for one), and they're written in God's Word by Paul if your eyes and mind were open to see.

When I read your magazine, condemning the works of the Spirit in these last days, I thought, "I'd like to refute that, but his mind is closed to any but his own ideas—mistaken as they are." Then the thought came to me that prompted me to write this letter. Jesus said, "The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven." By attributing His works to Satan—as you do—you're blaspheming the Holy Spirit. I wouldn't wish this on anyone—much less a Christian. Not only are you blaspheming Him, but through your magazine you're trying to teach others to do the same. This is a terrible accusation, I know, but so is your accusation that neo-Pentecostalism can be identified with

the apostate movement of Revelation 13.

Of course, what *you* say isn't going to stop the mighty outpouring of God's Spirit to bring His gospel to all the world (watch the "700 Club" on TV to see what I mean), but it can condemn you. That's the reason I'm writing this letter. Think about it—and pray.

Ted Wilson
California

Back to Rome

Sir / While "Protestants" vainly imagine that Rome is getting better, you are proving that it is actually the Protestants that are going back to Rome—back to the charismatic renewal once known as the Dark Ages, back to the ecumenical search for unity at the expense of the gospel. You are the real Protest! Thank you again for showing me how to fix my eyes on God's fabulous work in Jesus rather than looking into my own heart to see Him at work. I know He is in me to do as He pleases, but my eyes now focus on the Man at His right hand.

Peter Dunstan
Canada

Blind

Sir / I have been given one of your booklets, *Protestant Revivalism, Pentecostalism and the Drift Back to Rome*, and after reading it, felt that I would like to hand a copy to some of my friends, especially those who have become involved in the charismatic movement.

Here in Tasmania the charismatic movement is growing. All its adherents seem to know of the Father is that God is love. The other side of God's character is hardly ever preached. If it were, people would come to realize what the Bible means when it says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

I am of the old Calvinistic faith and see here, very plainly, the drift back to Rome. But many are too blind to see. A Church of England priest said of late that we need to get back to the position *before* the Reformation. We know where he stands.

It seems to me that our only hope is the return of the Lord Jesus.

Jack Lunnon
Australia

The Reformers recovered the judicial meaning of justification in Paul. This was revolutionary. But when Paul talks about justification, he not only means something judicial, but something eschatological as well. The Reformers did not recover the eschatological aspect of Paul's doctrine of justification. In this sense the Reformation of the sixteenth century was incomplete.

Editorial Introduction

At the beginning of our current series of articles on righteousness by faith, we discussed Luther's "tower experience" and argued for its late dating (December 1518). This is not just a matter of purely academic interest. It helps answer the question, What is the original Protestant doctrine of righteousness by faith?

Since we published our article, we have found Lowell C. Green's essay on this matter in *The Sixteenth Century Journal* (April 1973). We believe that he produces further evidence to refute the more popular earlier dating of Luther's breakthrough into real Protestant theology. We are therefore reproducing Dr. Green's very fine essay in this issue of *Present Truth*.

As chapter six of our current series on righteousness by faith says, the gospel of justification by Christ's imputed righteousness is forever the rock of offense. The issue before every church and every community of Christians is whether we will fall on this Rock and be broken (in repentance) or whether that Rock will fall on us and grind us to powder. Some who are smugly complacent because of their great Reformation heritage are in danger of coming under Christ's rebuke, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead . . . Repent." Unless they do, they may yet awake to find that the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

Come, let us reason together.

R.D.B.



**The gospel of justification by
Christ's imputed
righteousness is forever the
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Recovering Paul's Doctrine of Justification: Its Judicial and Eschatological Meaning

Righteousness by Faith (Part 4)

Robert D. Brinsmead

CHAPTER 7

Justification in Paul: Its Judicial Meaning

Introduction

In Paul, the concept of justification is both *judicial* and *eschatological*. Both of these meanings are basic to the apostolic message. Yet it is doubtful whether Paul's contemporaries grasped the full significance of the message of the great apostle. Certainly there is no evidence that the early Fathers understood the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith. Paul's judicial thought was reinterpreted in an experiential and moralistic way. His eschatological consciousness was lost altogether.

The Reformation began a recovery of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith. We say "began a recovery" quite deliberately. The Reformers certainly recovered the judicial meaning of justification in Paul. This was revolutionary. But when Paul talks about justification, he not only means something judicial, but something eschatological as well. The Reformers did not recover the eschatological aspect of Paul's doctrine of justification. In this sense the Reformation of the sixteenth century was incomplete.

Yet before we today talk about going beyond the Reformers, we need to go back to what they recovered. The way forward is the way back. Only then can we be sure that we are building on the Reformation and not in place of the Reformation.

The following discussion falls quite naturally into two sections. In chapter seven we will review what the Reformation recovered: the judicial meaning of justification in Paul. In chapter eight we will hazard breaking some new ground: the relation of justification to eschatology.

The judicial meaning of justification in Paul has been so adequately argued and established by the Protestant Reformation that we will not here labor to prove what has already been so well proven. We will simply state the case and spend some time in looking at its far-reaching implications.

The words *justify*, *justified* and *justification* are what are known as forensic or judicial words. They belong to the language of courts of law. Paul, of course, is quite at home using such words, because he is by training a lawyer and a judge. In an overwhelming number of instances throughout the Bible, *justify*, *justified* and *justification* appear in the setting of a judgment scene where cases are tried according to law (see Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15; Rom. 2:6-16; 8:31-34; Ps. 143:2; Matt. 12:36-37). Justification is the opposite of condemnation (Deut. 25:1; Rom. 8:33). It is the judgment, declaration, verdict or sentence of the Judge. Although the verdict may lead to profound changes in the life of the person upon whom it is pronounced, justification itself is not a moral change in the person. It means *to declare righteous* and not *to make righteous* (subjectively).¹

Justification which is by faith in Jesus changes our relation to God, but it is not in itself a change in our moral state. It is what God does *for* us and not what He does *in* us. It does not in itself constitute a change in us, but it constitutes a change in the way God regards us. It is by the *imputation* of Christ's righteousness to us and not by the *infusion* of His righteousness into us.

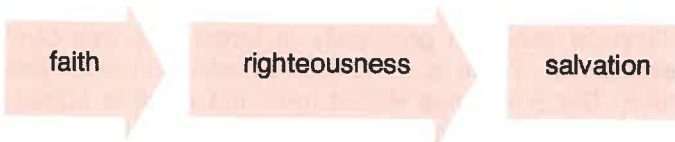
¹It is correct to say that justification means *to make righteous* in the judicial sense only.

According to Paul, righteousness or justification by faith is God's method of saving sinners. It is not enough simply to say that God saves sinners by His grace. God is not only in the business of saving sinners, but He is in the business of saving them *justly*—that is, according to a way which is lawful and right. In the Bible, righteousness is everywhere laid down as a condition of salvation (see Rom. 1:16-17; 2:6-16; Matt. 19:17-20; Ps. 15; Ezek. 18). According to Paul's gospel, the sinner is saved by faith because by faith he receives the righteousness of God's provision, which entitles him to salvation. "He who by faith is righteous shall live [shall be saved]" (Rom. 1:17, RSV).

It is not as if Paul moves from faith to salvation like this:



Rather, Paul moves from faith to righteousness and then from righteousness to salvation:



The apostle's great accent, therefore, falls on that righteousness which acquires for us God's verdict of salvation. This righteousness is called "the righteousness of God" because His grace provides it. It is called "the righteousness of One" because it consists solely in the obedience and blood of Jesus Christ. Gospel preaching is preaching about the mighty acts (righteousness) of incarnate God. Saving faith means that we put our faith in this righteousness of Jesus, which honors God's law (Rom. 3:31) and by this means brings us salvation.

When the Reformers revived these Pauline concepts of judicial salvation, it meant that, in preaching the gospel, they proclaimed the historical doing and dying of

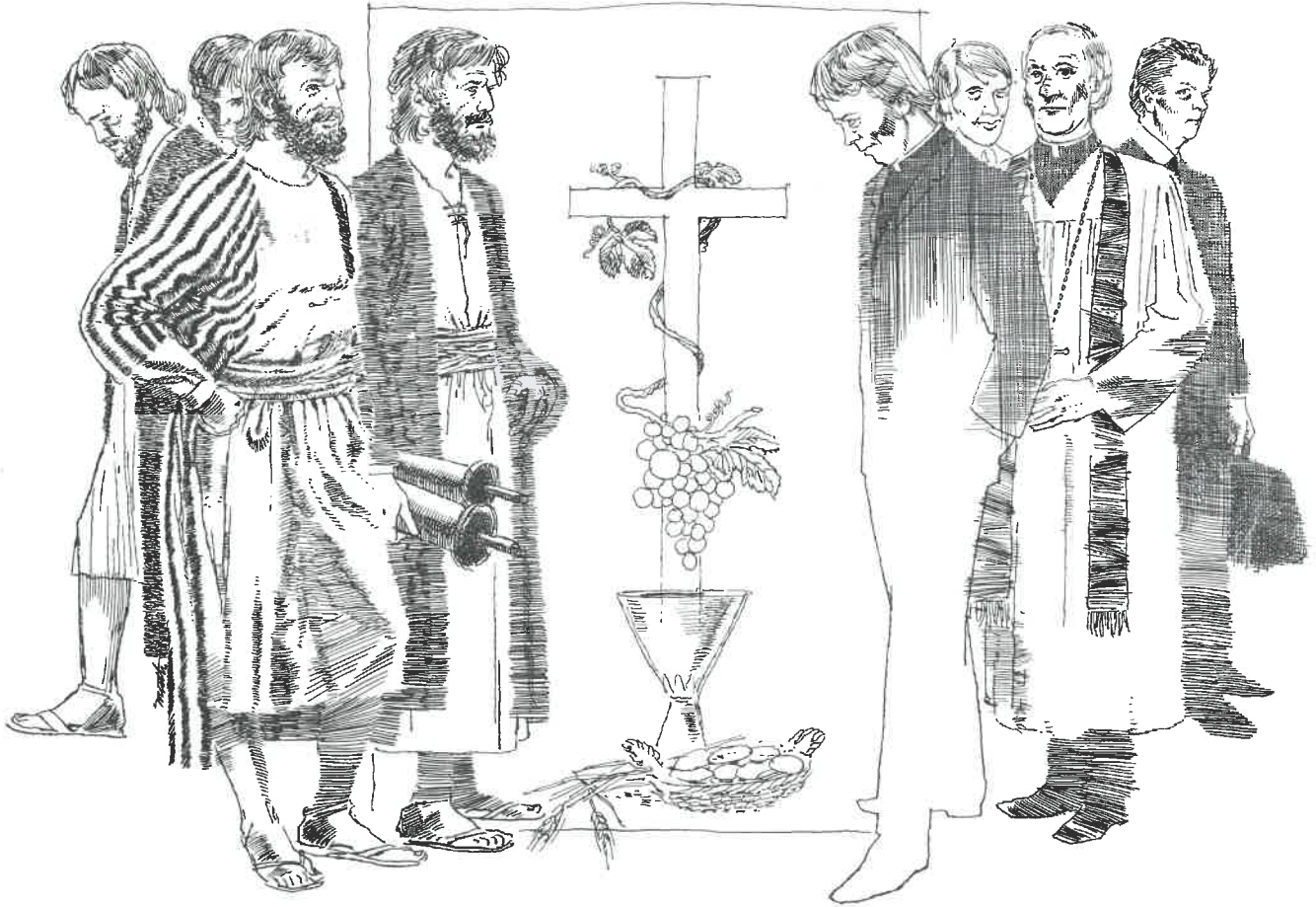
Christ as the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. Their attention was riveted on a righteousness outside of the believer, and their testimony was to the vicarious experience of the God-man and not to their own subjective experience. The Reformers took pains to exclude the new birth, sanctification or any internal change from the article of justification. They did not do this in order to depreciate the necessity of moral renewal. But they realized that an infinitely higher work was necessary to reconcile sinners to God. For the glory of Christ and for the comfort of troubled consciences, they knew that our salvation has to be grounded on an objective work—a righteousness completely outside the experience of the believer. If the judicial nature of justification by faith is lost, then salvation becomes identified, in one way or another, with the believer's own subjective experience.

While in Luther and Calvin all the emphasis fell on the redemptive event that took place with Christ's death and resurrection, later under the influence of pietism, mysticism, and moralism, the emphasis shifted to the process of individual appropriation of the salvation given in Christ and to its mystical and moral effect in the life of believers. Accordingly, in the history of the interpretation of the epistles of Paul the center of gravity shifted more and more from the forensic to the pneumatic and ethical aspects of his preaching, and there arose an entirely different conception of the structures that lay at the foundation of this preaching.²

The Modern Religious Scene

For the most part, Paul's gospel about salvation by the righteousness of faith has no real place in modern preaching. It has even been said that the Reformers' passionate concern about justification by faith does not even make sense to modern man. It is not that talk about salvation is lacking. The modern evangelical would be

²Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 14.



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horrified if it were to be suggested that he did not believe in salvation by grace. And here is the problem: he is so confident about his belief in salvation by grace that it does not occur to him that there may be a radical difference between the way he thinks about salvation and the way Paul and the Reformers thought about it. It is sobering to reflect on how the early Fathers, one generation removed from Paul, knew so little about justification by faith. Yet we are many generations removed from the Reformers. Unless the objective gospel is rediscovered afresh by every generation, it will surely be lost.

Paul and the Reformers who followed him thought of salvation principally in terms of justification by faith in an imputed righteousness. Modern evangelicalism

thinks of salvation principally in terms of a new-birth experience. There is a marked difference in emphasis here. The center has shifted from that which is outside of man to that which is inside of man. This viewing of salvation chiefly in terms of a new-birth experience is more in harmony with classical Romanism than with genuine Protestantism. This is why good Romanists can look upon most modern forms of revivalism and Christian crusades with considerable favor—or in the words of Louis Bouyer, call them "a rediscovery of Catholicism."³

Why are we today so inclined to bypass salvation by the righteousness of faith and opt instead for salvation by an internal experience?

The doctrine of justification by faith deals with the legal aspects of salvation. But modern man does not think in legal categories. Anybody with a scant knowledge of the Christian religion knows that legalism is a bad and ugly thing. No one wants to be a legalist! But this antipathy toward legalism has rubbed off onto the law itself

³See Louis Bouyer, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism* (Cleveland: World, 1964), pp. 186-197.

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so that any great interest in the legal categories of biblical thought has been suspected of legalism. For instance, the liberals have attacked the Christian doctrine of the substitutionary atonement of Christ as a legalistic concept. (It is true that the substitutionary atonement is a legal atonement—an atonement designed to make satisfaction to the claims of the divine law.) Also, the idea of living strictly by what the Bible says has been branded as legalism. So in the place of an atonement which honors God's law (Rom. 3:31) and leads the believer to a kind of life which also seeks to honor God's law, we have the "moral influence" theory of atonement and a "Spirit" (situation) ethic—which in the final analysis is the most pitiful kind of legalism indeed.

The doctrine of justification by an imputed righteousness seems too abstract for modern man. It sounds too academic at best and too legal at worst. (Isn't legalism bad?) The thought goes something like this: "Let's leave the nit-picking theologians to argue about the legal niceties of salvation. That has no vital relevance to our concrete situation. People can't see how a righteousness in heaven can help them very much. The essence of Christianity is transformation. It is not a legal religion. Christ changes lives. That's the real cash value of the gospel. Here is religion which can be seen and felt. When Christ is invited into people's lives, it's for real; it's dynamic. Then they can witness to something real—to their new-found peace and happiness. What difference does some legal transaction called justification by faith make, or an abstract reckoning of righteousness to our account in heaven (celestial bookkeeping), when we have a real, tangible experience of Christ in the heart?"

It is perhaps ironical that this age, which is conspicuous for its vast technological progress, is also conspicuous for its shallow thinking about man. This sort of preaching, which bypasses justification by faith in favor of the "gospel" of the changed life, is woefully shallow. Its proponents may think they are making the gospel relevant to man's basic needs, but they are not. This whole ap-

The sort of preaching which bypasses justification by faith in favor of the "gospel" of the changed life is woefully shallow.

proach to the Christian message is based on a twofold misunderstanding. It is based on a misunderstanding of God, and it is based on a misunderstanding of man.

The Misunderstanding of God

The God of Jesus and Paul is the God of the Old Testament. Righteousness is fundamental to His character and to all His dealings with men. Righteousness—uncompromising and perfect—is the condition of salvation. The law of God is an expression of His undeviating righteousness (Ps. 119). As Creator, Law-giver and Judge, He makes His law known to man and expects them to walk in it. "The law must be fulfilled so that not a jot or tittle shall be lost, otherwise man will be condemned without hope."⁴ "Perfect obedience to the law is righteousness." "Righteousness consists in the observance of the law." "For the Lord promises nothing except to perfect keepers of His law."⁵

Let us make no mistake about it; the God of biblical revelation is the God of law. Law "is the way in which He administers His universe" (Morris).⁶ It is true that He hates and curses legalism, but we must not confuse *legalism* with that which is properly *legal*. Legalism is not legal but illegal. The law demands perfect righteousness, and when the legalist offers his imperfect obedience to the law, he insults its divine splendor.

The God of the Bible sees to it that the honor of His law is maintained at all costs—even at the cost of Calvary. He will not overlook sin, which is lack of respect for His law. Sin arouses God's anger, and He must take action against it. If God were easygoing enough to pass over sin, might He not also overlook righteousness? But He sees to it that we live in a universe where justice is done and all debts will eventually be paid.

God's governance of the universe is depicted to us in the Bible in legal categories. God relates to man by way of a covenant. Covenant is a legal conception. It spells out the terms of the God-man relationship, provides legal security, promises rewards for compliance with its terms, and sanctions against noncompliance. The legal terms of God's covenant are always carried out to the letter. God's righteousness is His undeviating fidelity to His covenant. Whatever God does, He will uphold the covenant and carry out all its promises and threats with immutable consistency.

As Judge, God is pledged to call all men to His judgment seat and judge them according to His impartial law (Rom. 2:6-16; James 2:10-12). Whatever He does will

⁴Luther's Works, American ed. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-), Vol. 31, pp. 348-349.

⁵John Calvin, *Institutes*, Bk. 3, chap. 17, sec. 7; Bk. 2, chap. 17, sec. 5; Bk. 3, chap. 17, sec. 1.

⁶See Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, pp. 253-258, for an excellent section on the relation of God and His law.

God does not save men by casting aside the stipulations of His covenant, but the law itself is honored in the way in which God saves the believing sinner.

be lawful—according to law. This includes salvation itself. God does not save men by casting aside the stipulations of His covenant, but the law itself is honored in the way in which God saves the believing sinner (see Rom. 3:31). The propitiatory death of Jesus was a transaction related to the law of God. The word *propitiation* takes us back to the mercy seat or lid of the ark. On the Day of Atonement the blood of the sin offering was brought into the holy of holies and sprinkled on the lid of the ark, beneath which were the ten stipulations of the covenant. Even so did the blood of Jesus Christ make full satisfaction to the claims of the divine law on behalf of all who believe.

So God is not disinterested in His law. The great biblical words such as *judge*, *judgment*, *covenant* and *righteousness* should lead us to appreciate the genuine legal categories of biblical thought. And unless our thought follows these important legal categories, which are closely related to God's character and to all His dealings, there is no way that we can understand justification by faith. For *justification* is a great biblical word which belongs to these legal categories.

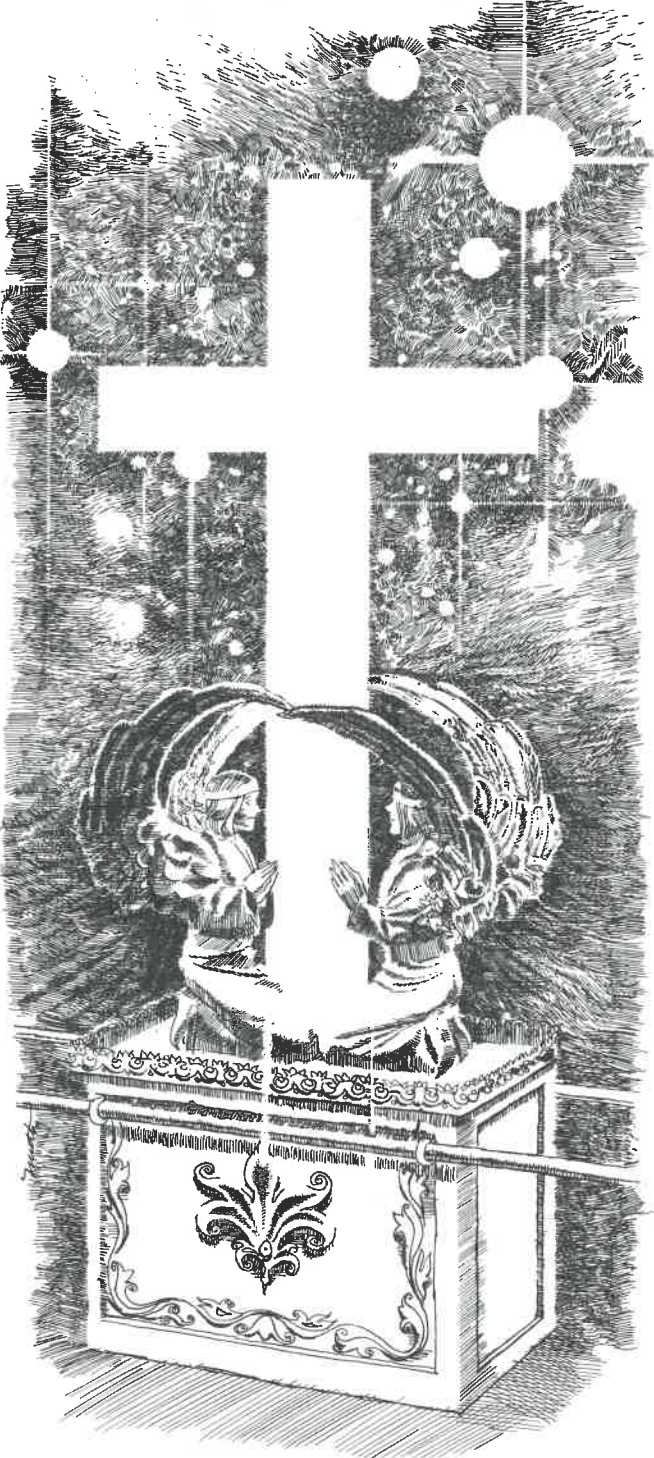
The modern scene has no time for law, and it has made for itself a god who does not care for law either. The current neglect of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith is based on a misunderstanding of God.

The Misunderstanding of Man

The failure of the modern scene to think in the legal categories of the Bible is also based on a misunderstanding of man. This is because our view of God determines our view of the creature who was made in the image of God.

As the creature of God, man is related to law (Rom. 3:19). Man cannot escape from the jurisdiction of law (the authority of God) any more than he can escape from his own creaturehood.

A serious reflection about human nature will show that human life is inextricably bound up with its relation to law. Every important human transaction is legal: business transactions, possession of property, citizenship, membership in various social groups. The most important intra-human transaction—marriage—is a legal arrangement. Love is not just based on a fluctuating human



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experience. Love is based on a legal covenant which guarantees security and reciprocal responsibility. True love must therefore be lawful, or it stands judged by a decent society as immoral.

Man's relationship with God is not just a matter of "falling in love with the Lord." The marriage covenant reflects the mode of the divine-human relationship. God's fellowship with man is based on a covenant which offers to the human party security and responsibility. Our union with God must be altogether a righteous union—a union which is lawful.

Then consider the phenomenon of the human conscience. This has rightly been called "the moral judiciary of the soul." The conscience is related to the moral law. It takes hold of the law and either excuses us or accuses us. The conscience will not be satisfied or appeased unless justice is done. A man may stop doing wrong, but the conscience will not be satisfied by transformation. Conscience demands that the law be satisfied. The sinner has no rest because he is at war with himself. The conscience will not let him forgive himself.

There is in the human heart a passion to be in the right. That is why we all tend to justify ourselves. If we had no great passion to be in the right, we would not make excuses for our wrong behavior, rationalize, project our guilt (blame others), and indulge in repression, regression, masochism (self-punishment) and compensation. People spend an enormous amount of time and effort trying to justify themselves. Life itself becomes an attempt to justify one's existence. Why do people fight, argue and compete with each other? These exercises are generally done to achieve justification. Psychologists and psychiatrists call it the need for acceptance—self-acceptance, acceptance before God, or acceptance before others. The Bible gives the true reason for this. Man was made in God's image, and the essence of God's image is righteousness. The sinner is bereft of righteousness, and he feels naked and insecure. Until the Spirit of grace reveals God's way of putting him right with the law (justification), the sinner has to go on trying to justify himself.

The need to be justified (in the right) is the most basic human need. This means that man's most essential problem is related to the law. It is legal. Sin is primarily



a matter of guilt. That is why Jesus spoke of sin as a debt (Matt. 6:12; 18:23-35). Debt is a legal problem. No amount of inner transformation pays the debt. The gulf between God and man cannot be bridged by having Christ or the Spirit come into the sinner's heart. The sinner cannot climb to heaven by his sanctification—even if that sanctification is wrought in him by God. If sin were only a matter of pollution, and man's only need transformation, then we could dispense with Christ's reconciling act, His atoning blood, the Mediator of the covenant, and His intercession of righteousness at God's right hand. But these are the distinctive, objective realities of the Christian religion. If we dispense with the law and the legal categories of the Bible, we dispense with the gospel of salvation objectively accomplished.

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To summarize: Justification which is by faith is a judicial transaction related to God's law and to the divine jurisprudence. Unless it is seen that God is a God of law and man is a creature of law, the doctrine of justification makes absolutely no sense. And that is precisely the situation in altogether too much of the current religious scene.

Paul's Perception of the Divine-Human Problem

The apostle Paul clearly perceives the fundamental problem of the divine-human relationship. He has the necessary background for the evangelical faith: the Old Testament with its demand for a righteousness which fulfills the covenantal stipulations. It is important to see how Paul takes up the gospel in the book of Romans. Let us look at his leading words: *righteousness, righteous judgment, judgment, judge, wrath, condemnation, justify, guilt, law*. These are all legal words—words which fit in so naturally with a covenantal religion.

Paul does not zero in on the fundamental human problem as if it were a matter of pollution and the need of transformation. (That, of course, is a problem; but we insist that it is not the fundamental problem.) The basic human need is not met by preaching, "Are you happy? Have you a sense of purpose? Do you want a radiant experience which will put zip into your life? Is your business failing? Is your mother-in-law getting you down? Are you bothered by the pimple on your nose?" (How petty is so much of this "relevant," problem-oriented preaching which offers an Alka-Seltzer Jesus in the heart to end all troubles!) The fundamental human problem is that man is on the wrong side of the law, and he is cursed and condemned for his life of rebellion and disrespect toward its authority. There is no hope of getting right with God unless the sinner gets right with the law. How can its inexorable demands for righteousness be met? How can the debt owed the holy law be liquidated? True preaching will arraign the sinner before the bar of divine judgment and show him his predicament before the law. That predicament is guilt, and there is one sentence for it: the wages of sin is death. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Rom. 6:23; Heb. 9:22).

A way of salvation must be provided which will satisfy both divine and human justice. God's grace has provided the righteousness which His law demands. On the grounds of the propitiation made by Christ's blood, God can be just and the Justifier of the believing sinner (Rom. 3:24-26). This method of salvation honors the law (Rom. 3:31). It is the basis of a just and lasting peace between God and man. Christ's obedience to the law is legally reckoned (imputed) to the believing sinner. He stands before the law as one who has fulfilled all its demands.

The fundamental human problem is that man is on the wrong side of the law, and he is cursed and condemned for his life of rebellion and disrespect toward its authority.

By this means the Judge can render His verdict that the sinner is righteous. This is a just verdict because it is according to law.

When the believing sinner realizes that God not only forgives him, but forgives him justly, his own conscience is "cleansed." The blood of Christ satisfies the human conscience. Justice has been done. The believing sinner has legally died with Christ (2 Cor. 5:14; Gal. 2:20). With this verdict of God's court, the sinner can silence the accusing of his conscience. He can forgive himself when he knows that God, who is greater than his heart, has forgiven him.

Some Further Implications

There are two further implications which arise from this message of salvation by the righteousness of faith:

1. It means that salvation is secured to us by that which has already happened, by that which is entirely outside the experience of the believer. If salvation is made to rest on the believer's moral renewal, he can never stand before God with an easy conscience. Once the subjective element is introduced as the ground of acceptance with God, the believer is thrown into the terrors of a gnawing uncertainty. If the degree to which the believer is transformed and lives in new obedience never satisfies his own ideal, how can it satisfy the divine ideal?

The gospel of the righteousness of faith hits the sinner in the center of his existence because it shows him that nothing in his own existence can give him standing before God. He must in faith flee from his own acts, even his good and valid acts of repentance and holiness, and

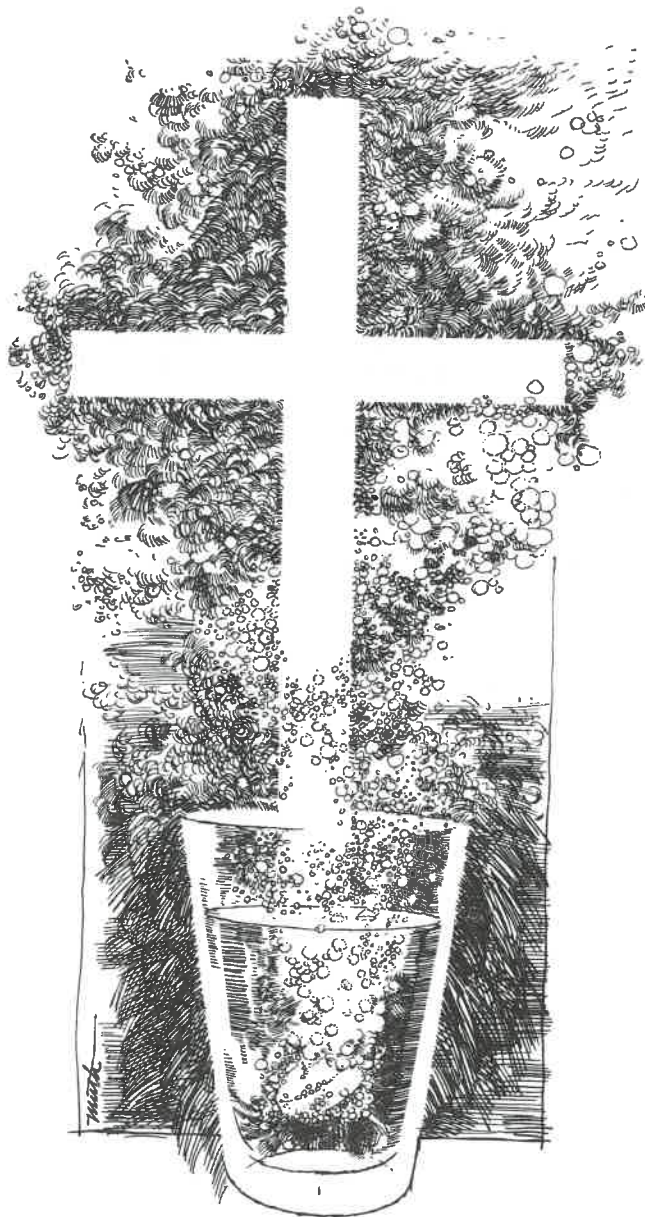
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Once the subjective element is introduced as the ground of acceptance with God, the believer is thrown into the terrors of a gnawing uncertainty.

hide himself in the faithfulness of Another. To be righteous by faith means self-renunciation at the deepest level of existence—for the deepest level is the need to be in the right. To be accepted because of what Another is and what Another has done is to find our justification wholly apart from our own strivings. This is freedom indeed. It does not mean that we no longer toil and work and strive to be as successful as possible. But it means that we do not have to do this to justify our existence and give ultimate meaning to life. Christ has justified our right to live, and He has given our life its ultimate meaning. Our labor may now be a labor of love, because it is not done from the ulterior motive of securing our justification. We work *from* justification, not *to* it.

2. If the law of God has been honored by the righteousness of faith, this must have profound ethical consequences in the lives of those who believe such a gospel. The same gospel which turns the sinner from his own righteousness to the righteousness of Another must also turn him from divising his own standard of conduct to the rule of life which Almighty God has decreed for all men. A salvation which honors God's law can only lead the believer in a kind of life which shows respect for the law of God. Justification by faith makes the law and the sinner friends (Rom. 8:7). If the church has become permissive in regard to sin, soft and flabby in regard to moral discipline, it is because she has neglected the doctrine of justification by faith. Where justification is exalted, so is the law of God—both as a schoolmaster to lead to Christ and as a rule of life for the believing community. Or to say this another way, justification is the mother of sanctification. The essential content of sanctification is a life gratefully submitted to the authority of God's law.

Justification is a judicial concept. A revival of the preaching of justification by faith is therefore possible only as there is a return to the legal categories of biblical revelation.



CHAPTER 8

The Eschatological Meaning of Justification

The material principle of the Reformation was justification by faith. The Reformers rescued this as the chief article of the Christian religion when they recovered its judicial meaning. Never since the apostle Paul had this doctrine been taught with such clarity in the church. The church had confused the righteousness of faith and the regenerate life of the believer. It was this synthesis between righteousness by faith and sanctification which was the heart of the medieval system with all its abominable fruits. But Luther broke this synthesis. Justification was clearly distinguished from regeneration.

The Reformers showed that justification is being *declared* righteous, not being *made* righteous. It concerns what was done *for* us and not what is done *in* us. It is by an *extrinsic* righteousness *imputed* to us and not by an *intrinsic* righteousness *infused* into us.

The Reformation moreover affirmed the primacy, all-sufficiency and centrality of justification by faith: its primacy because the relational (legal) change takes precedence over the vital (moral) change; its all-sufficiency because it is a justification unto life eternal; its centrality because the glory of Christ's finished work is magnified and the comfort of troubled consciences is provided for in the preaching of forensic justification.

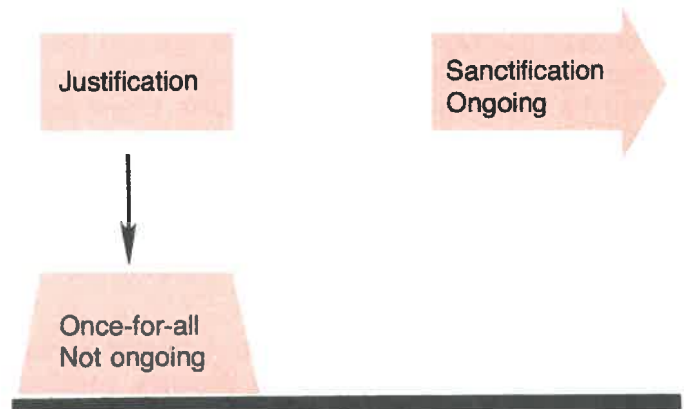
Protestantism has not always been successful in maintaining the primacy, all-sufficiency and centrality of justification by faith. The tendency has ever been to subordinate justification and to slip away from the objective focus of the Pauline gospel. The believer and his private experience have so often taken the spotlight from the awesome, infinite act of God in Jesus Christ.

As we have said, there is a need to go back to recover the great Reformation insight. But we must not only go back; we must also go forward. Justification is not only *judicial*; it is *eschatological*. The Reformation stopped short of a rounded-out eschatological consciousness. Because of this, the Reformation doctrine of justification

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by faith has been exposed to certain weaknesses—weaknesses which only time could highlight to us. We will point out two of these weaknesses.

1. It has often been said, especially in the Reformed stream of thought, that justification is a once-and-for-all, nonrepeatable act. This final act, it has been said, is followed by sanctification. We might diagram this as follows:



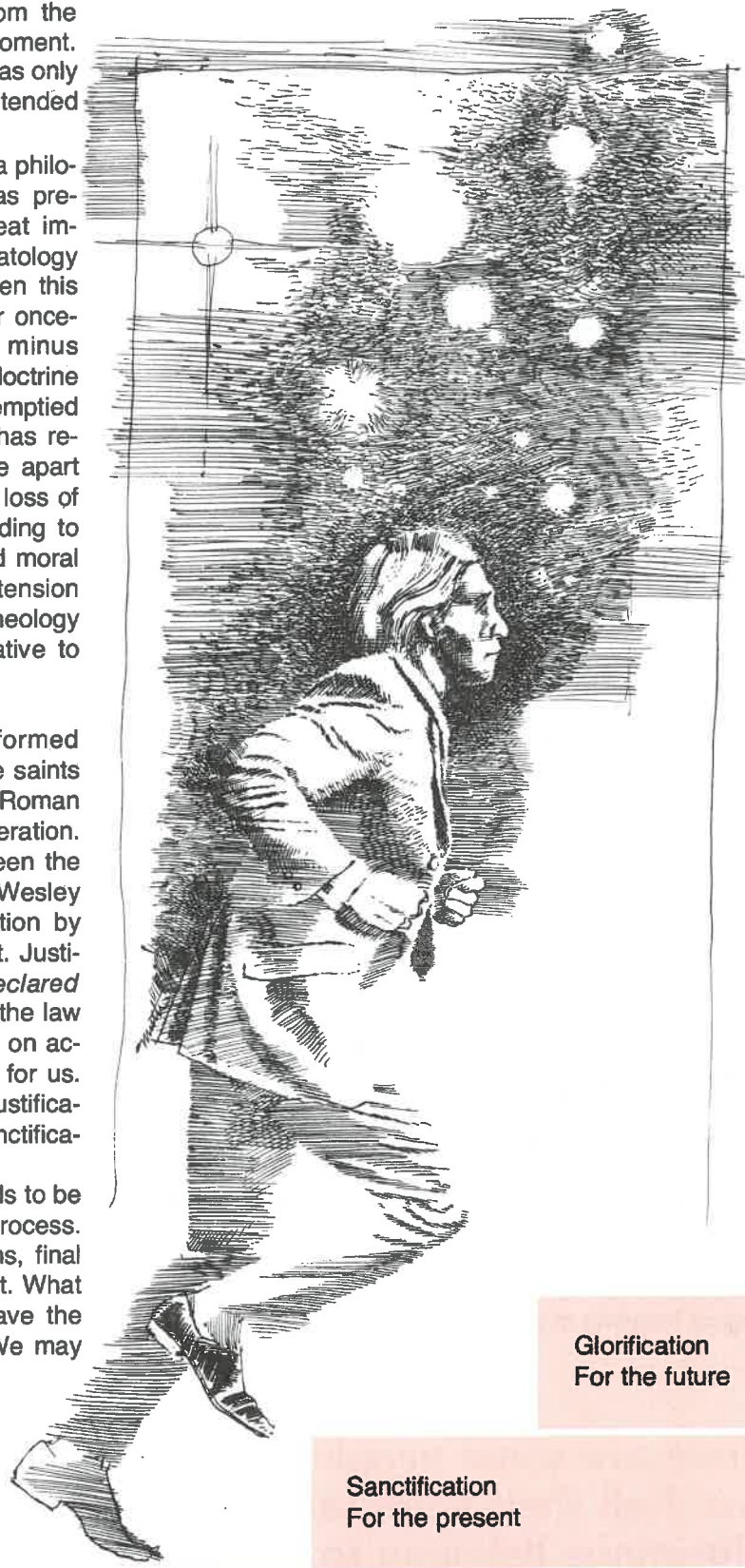
What inevitably happens in this way of viewing things is that justification becomes static. It becomes relegated (as far as the believing community is concerned) to a thing of the past. There is a tendency for it to become a warm memory. To be sure, it is something very relevant

to begin the Christian life, but it slips away from the central place in the thinking of the existential moment. For all the strong points of Puritan theology, one has only to reflect on it in order to notice that sanctification tended to swallow up justification.

When this static justification is combined with a philosophical, rationalistic idea of election, as well as preoccupation with immortality of the soul, the great importance which the New Testament gives to eschatology begins to slip out of sight. It is even worse when this static justification is reduced to the more popular once-saved-always-saved-ism—which is Calvinism minus the perseverance of the saints. Here the biblical doctrine about the final judgment according to works is emptied of all meaning. In this line of thinking, the soul has received practically everything of significance quite apart from the final judgment and the last day. Such a loss of the Bible's emphasis on a final judgment according to works is often attended by disastrous ethical and moral consequences. In cutting much of the biblical tension between the *now* and the *not yet*, this type of theology cuts much of the tension of the biblical imperative to holiness.

2. Wesley did not like this aspect of Reformed thought, especially when the perseverance of the saints was shorn from it. Yet he did not opt for the Roman solution, which confounds justification with regeneration. He maintained the Reformation distinction between the righteousness of faith and sanctification. But Wesley weakened the Reformation doctrine of justification by reducing it to forgiveness for the sins of the past. Justification, said Wesley, does not mean *being declared righteous* on the grounds of Christ's having kept the law for us. It simply means *forgiveness for past sins* on account of Christ's meeting the penalty of the law for us. In Wesley's thought, this weakened version of justification was to be followed by the experience of sanctification.

It should be noted that sanctification here tends to be regarded as a higher stage of the soteriological process. Since justification is only forgiveness of past sins, final salvation awaits the future verdict of the judgment. What happens here is that there is a tendency to have the believer's final salvation rest on sanctification. We may diagram this scheme as follows:



Glorification
For the future

Sanctification
For the present

Justification
For the past

Who would have the nerve to pray in confidence, “Come, Lord Jesus,” if only the perfect could stand when He appeared?

This Wesleyan scheme, as history has amply demonstrated, lends itself to perfectionism—some rather implicit, some quite explicit. (Wesley realized that his perfectionism was only possible on the premise of the dualism of mortal body and immortal soul.)

The line of thought in point one means that there is no real need of the advent—at least the believing community can get along quite well without thinking too much about it. As A. J. Gordon once put it, many think far more about their *going* than about Christ's *coming*. The rationalistic view of election and the dualistic view of man privatizes salvation and lends itself to an individual eschatology at death rather than a corporate one at Christ's coming.

The line of thought in point two really means that the believing community is never ready for the advent. If being ready is based on sanctification, no one is ever convinced that he is ready for the Lord to come. Some go all the way and make the coming of Christ dependent on the believing community's being spiritually perfected (that is, sinless). But instead of hastening Christ's coming, this sort of program can only delay it. Who would have the nerve to pray in confidence, “Come, Lord Jesus,” if only the perfect could stand when He appeared? There are some people who spend all their spiritual pilgrimage listening to preachers pulverize them with the imperative of getting ready for Jesus to come. And the sad fact is that they are always “getting ready” rather than “being ready.”

As to which is worst—having no need of the advent or not being ready for the advent—we must leave the reader to judge. But if we are to escape from the horns of this dilemma, we must come to grips with the eschatological meaning of justification by faith.

There are some people who spend all their spiritual pilgrimage listening to preachers pulverize them with the imperative of getting ready for Jesus to come.

Eschatology and the New Testament

The Old Testament looks forward to God's promised salvation at “the end of the age.” God's act of intervention—His arraignment of the world in judgment, attended by His wrath on the wicked, the resurrection of the just and the deliverance of His people—are all anticipated at the end of the world.

The New Testament shows us that the anticipated end of the world consists in two moments: the first and second comings of Christ. At the first coming of Christ the end of the world took place in principle. The Christ event is described as a last-day happening (Heb. 1:2; 9:26). In the Person of God's Messiah the kingdom of the future broke into history. In Him who was the new Head of the race, God arraigned the world in judgment and poured out His wrath against sin. By Him sin was put away at the end of the age (Heb. 9:26), death was abolished, and life and immortality were brought to light (2 Tim. 1:10). The long-looked-for act of salvation took place in the death and resurrection of Christ. All that God promised in the Old Testament by way of His eschatological salvation was fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Acts 13:32-33; 2 Cor. 1:20). Eternal life—literally, the life of the age to come—was brought to us by Jesus Christ. All who believe are incorporated with Christ into the new eon; old things have passed away, and all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

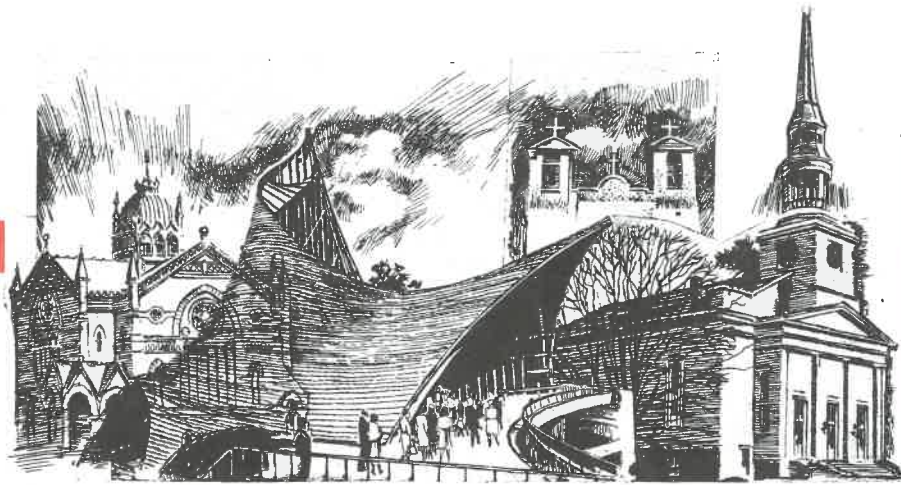
The New Testament community sees itself as living at the end of the age. The resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit are signs that the final resurrection and the Spirit's final work of glorification of all of God's people will be the next event. The *parousia* will only mean the visible manifestation of what has already taken place in Christ, or the open manifestation of what every believer already enjoys by faith alone.

The church of the New Testament, which lives in the moment between the two advents, is an eschatological community. She stands on tiptoe, waiting eagerly for Christ's return. The appearing of antichrists (false teachers) and the waning love of others who depart from the faith are all seen as signs of the last hour. Christ, the great High Priest, has gone into the sanctuary, having made His final offering for sin; and the believers are like the Israelites waiting for the high priest to come out of the holy of holies to bless the waiting congregation with salvation (Heb. 9:28). The New Testament church, being an eschatological community, is a pilgrim community. In this world she has no abiding city, but she seeks one to come. Like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, she lives in tents. We find no record of the building of churches and institutions by the apostolic church. She had no time.

We need to understand that the books of the New Testament were written in this eschatological atmosphere. Many of the great words in Paul's Romans, for

1st
Advent

2nd
Advent



We find no record of the building of churches and institutions by the apostolic church. She had no time.

instance, are eschatological words—that is to say, they are words loaded with end-time significance. *Salvation* (Rom. 1:16) is what the prophets had promised at the end time (Isa. 25:9). It is the same with *life, shall live* and *eternal life* (Rom. 1:17; 5:10, 18-21; 6:23; 8:10-12). The *righteousness of God* now revealed in the gospel is that eschatological saving act of God which the prophets had promised (Isa. 56:1; Rom. 1:17). The words *judgment, righteous judgment of God, and wrath* are obviously eschatological (see Rom. 2:3-16; 5:9). So also are *glory of God, glorified, Spirit and redemption* (Rom. 5:2; 8:23-30).

In the same way, we must consider what Paul means by *justified* and *justification*. These words are not only judicial (related to law), but eschatological (related to the end of the world). In a setting both judicial and eschatological, the apostle declares:

The doers of the law shall be justified . . . in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.—Rom. 2:13, 16.

We may place a passage by Jesus alongside of the above:

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.—Matt. 12:36-37.

It was the expectation of the pious Jew that at the end of the age there would be a judgment day. Then God would justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. Justification was what would take place for the people of God on the day of judgment. The passages cited above show that in a certain sense Paul and Jesus shared that expectation. Justification is eschatological. It is the verdict of acquittal and approval which is rendered on the day of judgment.

The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment

Before we look further into the Pauline meaning of justification, let us consider what the Bible teaches us about the judgment.

1. The Bible teaches that there will be a final judgment of all according to works. Many of the parables of Jesus tell us this in the plainest possible way. Paul, the apostle of justification by faith, says more about a final judgment according to works than does any other apostle. Romans 2 is a classical example and is not, as some more liberal scholars have suggested, a hangover from Paul's Judaistic training. Justification by faith alone

Justification is eschatological. It is the verdict of acquittal and approval which is rendered on the day of judgment.

and a final judgment according to works are not inimical. They go well together in Paul's theology.

All that men have done, including the lives of the righteous, must pass in review before God. Every secret thing will be brought into the judgment, whether good or evil (Eccl. 12:13-14). The Lord will not gloss over any piece of evidence. He will not hide the facts, even about His elect. The undeleted evidence will be brought to light. The standard of the judgment will be the law of God, the ten stipulations of the everlasting covenant (Rom. 2:13; James 2:10-12). The demand for righteousness will be rigorous and uncompromising. Those who have perfect righteousness will be justified; those who fall short will be condemned.

2. The New Testament teaches us that the judgment is imminent. The resurrection of Christ is the assurance of this (Acts 17:31). James reminds the believing community who are tempted to judge one another that "the Judge standeth before the door" (James 5:9). Peter could even say that "the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17). Everywhere the "everlasting gospel" is announced, it declares, "The hour of His judgment is come" (Rev. 14:7).

If a person is to really appreciate what Paul means by his message of justification by faith, one must enter into the eschatological consciousness of the New Testament community and see himself standing in the very presence of God's final judgment. By faith he must enter this holy of holies and see himself before the ark of the testimony, as the Jews were summoned to meet with God on the day of Yom Kippur.

Justification: Future and Present

Justification, being the verdict of God's judgment seat, is yet future. Just as Paul can talk of "the hope of eternal life" and "the hope of salvation," so he can talk about "the hope of justification" which we yet wait for (Gal. 5:5). Hope pertains to what is future (Rom. 8:24-25). Paul waits for the crown of righteousness (justification) which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to him on the final day (2 Tim. 4:8). "The doers of the law [the righteous] *shall* be justified" (Rom. 2:13). This future (eschatological or final-judgment) dimension of justification is also evident in Romans 8:31-39. Says Shrenk:

In the full sense a man is judicially acquitted and declared righteous only when the retributive sentence of the last judgment has been pronounced in his favour as regards the whole of his life's work . . . [Romans] 8:33 . . . obviously refers to the last judgment.⁷

⁷G. Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), Vol. 2, pp. 217-218.

We have seen that the men of the Old Testament and the pious rabbis believed in this future justification on the day of judgment. Now we must see wherein Paul radically breaks from traditional Judaism. He grants that only the righteous will receive the verdict of life, but he shows that such righteousness is impossible by man's work. Paul declares, "He who through faith is righteous shall live" (Rom. 1:17, RSV). By faith the sinner accepts the vicarious, God-pleasing righteousness of Jesus and therein finds a righteousness with which the law is well pleased. But that is not all. On the grounds that the future has already taken place in Jesus, the believer may grasp the verdict of the final judgment in the *now* by faith. Faith possesses the future (Heb. 11:1).

The divine justification which was accomplished at the cross, which is now believed and which is a continuing gift in the present, is to be expected as a consummated and definitive acquittal in the Last Day.⁸

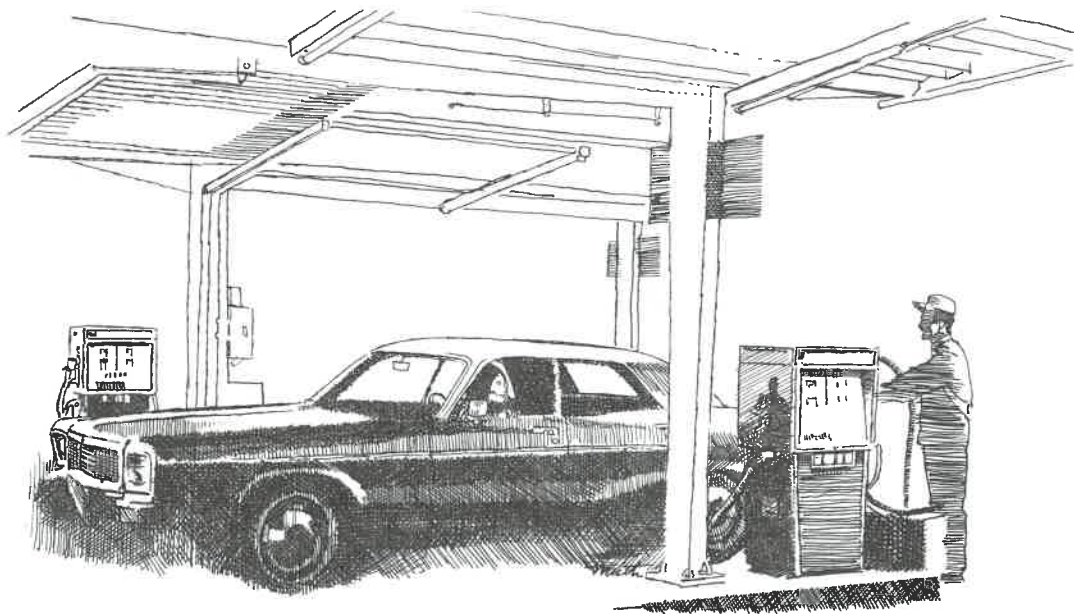
Justification is the verdict of the final judgment—God's ultimate verdict—possessed in the *now* by faith. The blessing is held only in faith, and it still hangs in hope. We must not destroy this tension between what is present in faith alone and what is future by empirical reality.

The Significance of Eschatological Justification

When justification is seen as God's eschatological (ultimate) verdict, it must always remain central. Justification is not a static event in our past experience. On the contrary, we are always moving toward it. Constantly we are reminded and we remind ourselves that we face the terrors of the great judgment. Faith anticipates and

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 218.

If a person is to really appreciate what Paul means by his message of justification by faith, one must enter into the eschatological consciousness of the New Testament community and see himself standing in the very presence of God's final judgment.



As we hold to its eschatological implications, justification by faith can never become static but must remain the dynamic center of Christian existence, the continuous present.

grasps in the now the verdict of acquittal so that we hasten toward that great day, crying, "Oh, happy judgment day!"

We repeat, Justification is not a thing that we pass and get behind us. As Barth rightly said, it is not like a filling station that we pass but once. As we hold to its eschatological implications, justification by faith can never become static but must remain the dynamic center of Christian existence, the continuous present. We are always sinners in our eyes, but we are always standing on God's justification and, perhaps more importantly, moving toward it. To be justified is a present-continuous miracle to the man who present-continuously believes, knowing that he who believes possesses all things, and he who does not believe possesses nothing. Such a life is only possible where the gospel of justification is continually heard and where God's verdict of acquittal is like those mercies which Jeremiah declared were new every morning—"great is Thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23).

Here is every reason for ample encouragement and no reason for presumption. The day when God will actually, irrevocably pronounce His decree is before us, and this summons us to keep the faith.

Since justification is God's ultimate verdict, it can never be superseded, never subordinated by sanctification. Since it is God's ultimate verdict of life eternal, it meets our deepest need—the need to be in the right before the judgment bar of God. And because faith holds God's ultimate verdict, it frees its possessor to a life of true sanctification. This holy living is not participated in to impress the Judge or to score some points to help secure one's ultimate acceptance. True holiness is possible because faith frees us from the ulterior motive of trying to earn the verdict of eternal life.

Conclusion: A Renaissance of Justification by Faith

If we are to witness a renaissance of the teaching of justification by faith in our day, it will not come from communities which are soft and flabby through lack of the stern discipline of hearing God's law. Neither will it come from those who have no vital interest in eschatology but who dream that the day of the Lord is a long way off. It will be spearheaded by a community which, for a background, has two essential features:

1. It will take God's law, the absolute moral imperatives, and the legal categories of the Bible with radical seriousness.

2. It will have an eschatological consciousness like that of the New Testament church—not an eschatological consciousness which is directed to Palestine and to weird and wonderful events dreamed up by prophetic prognosticators, but an eschatological consciousness directed to the ark of the covenant and to God's mercy seat in heaven (Heb. 8:1-2; Rev. 11:19).

(To be concluded)

A growing minority is favoring a comparatively late date for Luther's new doctrine of justification, setting it in the year 1518-1519.

One of the most central questions of the Reformation remains without a completely satisfactory answer: When did Luther make the transition from an Augustinian monk to the Protestant reformer, and in what did that change consist? The older view seems still to predominate, according to which the evangelical discovery came rather early, somewhere around 1513-1514; this position necessarily views Luther, consequently, as a rebellious critic of the Church, who entered the indulgence controversy in order to oppose the traditional doctrine of penance. Over against this interpretation, a growing minority is favoring a comparatively late date for Luther's new doctrine of justification, setting it in the year 1518-1519. This view, advanced by scholars like Uuras Saarnivaara, Ernst Bizer, Kurt Aland, and F. Edward Cranz,¹ is capable of further support. It is the purpose of this article to produce additional evidence which shows that Luther's evangelical discovery was the result, rather than the cause, of the indulgence controversy.

¹Deserving of careful study is the monograph of Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel. New Light upon Luther's Way from Medieval Catholicism to Evangelical Faith* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951); it has the merit of having first made accessible in English the results of German, Finnish, and Scandinavian scholars, and offering a plausible solution. Perhaps a weakness of this book is the attempt to identify Luther's evangelical discovery, correctly dated 1518-19, with the problematical "Tower Experience" (see Part IV of this essay). One of the most effective challenges of the established view came from Ernst Bizer, *Fides ex auditu, Eine Untersuchung über die Entdeckung der Gerechtigkeit Gottes durch Martin Luther* (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1958), who found the *Acta Augustana* of 1518 the dividing point between Luther's pre-reformational and reformational theology. A completely different approach, coming out of a joint seminar between Kurt Aland and Ernst Kinder at the University of Munster, produced the monograph by Kurt Aland, *Der Weg zur Reformation. Zeitpunkt und Charakter des reformatorischen Erlebnisses Martin Luthers*, in the series *Theologische Existenz heute*, N. F., 123 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1965). Aland wisely avoids refuting the position of eminent scholars, but makes his case on the basis of much material previously neglected; especially the letters of Luther 1516-1518 come in for discussion (pp. 10-39), and yield convincing evidence for a later dating of Luther's transition. An American writer is F. Edward Cranz, *An Essay on the Development of Luther's Thought on Justice, Law, and Society*, published in the series *Harvard Theological Studies*, XIX (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); Cranz's approach is noteworthy because he proceeds from an entirely different basis, seeking to clarify Luther's view on legal and social issues, but thereby making an especially welcome contribution.

Faith, Righteousness and Justification: New Light on Their Development Under Luther and Melancthon

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Saarnivaara's pioneering work, of 1951, unknown to many European scholars, was a book of great merit; however, it suffered at the point where it tried to identify Luther's "discovery of the Gospel" with that elusive "tower experience." Bizer's valuable investigation has deservedly attracted much attention in America as well as in Europe; nevertheless, one suspects that his finding the "theology of the Word" as the center of Luther's discovery has been colored unduly by contemporary theology, such as that of Karl Barth. Moreover, while Bizer correctly finds a great change reflected in the *Acta Augustana* of 1518, he overlooks some important aspects of the new understanding of faith, righteousness, and justification.

It is surprising how little research has been devoted to the evolution in Luther's concept of faith. Instead, it has been falsely assumed that his doctrine of faith under-

It has been falsely assumed that Luther's doctrine of faith underwent little change between 1514 and 1519.

Previous to 1518, Luther's doctrine of faith was definitely pre-Reformational.

went little change between 1514 and 1519. The term *credulitas* is central in Luther's lectures on Romans; yet, a glance at the published research shows that this term has been almost totally neglected (*infra!*). This understanding of faith as submission to the teaching authority of Mother Church is an integral part of his thinking, until the transition takes place which will be described below. Previous to 1518, Luther's doctrine of faith was definitely pre-Reformational. It was still dominated by the medieval construction of the three theological virtues of *fides, caritas et spes*. Not until Luther overcame this view of faith as a virtue formed by charity could he find place for faith as a relationship with God [*fiducia*]. The importance of this aspect has received almost no attention until now. Schwarz's splendid investigation (*infra!*) examined the reformer's earlier use of these three terms, but did not draw all the necessary conclusions because of the assumption that the evangelical discovery had

occurred at an earlier date. Consequently, the momentous change in Luther's doctrine of faith, righteousness, and justification did not emerge clearly enough.

Some scholars still confuse the issue of the Indulgence Theses because they fail to realize that Luther, loyal to Catholic teaching, accepted the free remission of guilt in 1517, while still requiring a subsequent remission of the punishment. We shall take time to clarify this point, and realize that Luther could not possibly have held his later view of Romans 1:17 until his views had clarified under the fire of his Roman opponents.

I. The Conservatism of the Ninety-Five Theses

The medieval church had distinguished between the remission of sins (*remissio culpae*) and the remission of punishment (*remissio poenae*). Sins were remitted freely for Christ's sake, but the punishment remained. An indulgence was a leniency on the part of the church which made it easier for the sinner to bear his punishment.² In his 95 Theses,³ Luther accepted (in theory) all the official points of Roman Catholic teaching on the indulgence,⁴ except that (in practice) he felt that indulgences often tended to lower spiritual standards. Under the fire of his critics, Luther clarified his position in his *theologia crucis*: the Christian cherishes punishment, death, and crosses [WA, I, 613]; he seeks and loves to do penance for his sins [Thesis 40].

We reject the notion of a once-for-all conversion of Luther in the sense of the Romantics, and insist that, besides the daily spiritual onslaughts which he regarded as normal, he spoke of special struggles over such doctrines as predestination, justification, and, here, repentance (*poenitentia*). In his *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses*,⁵ Luther opens with a letter addressed to

²For a recent summary by an eminent Catholic writer, see Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Spiritual Intent of Indulgences," in *Lutheran World*, XIV, 3 (1967), pp. 11-32.

³We cannot go into the recent debate over whether Luther actually posted the 95 Theses (See also Part IV). For a convenient collection of sources on the indulgence controversy, see Kurt Aland, ed., *Martin Luther's 95 Theses with the Pertinent Documents from the History of the Reformation* (St. Louis and London: Concordia Publishing House, 1967).

⁴In saying that Luther represented Roman Catholic teaching on the indulgence in 1517, it must be remembered, of course, that many crucial points had not been officially decided, and hence were open questions. These included the problems of how the indulgence might benefit the dead in purgatory. Later Pronouncements of the Roman Church, of course, rendered Luther's stance "heretical." There is general agreement among Catholic and Protestant scholars that Tetzels doctrine was uncatholic.

⁵The 95 Theses should be studied in conjunction with Luther's interpretations of them during the next year, especially the *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute* (1518), found in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Behlau, 1883ff.), I, 525ff., hereafter cited as WA; and in *Luther's Works* (American Edition; Philadelphia and St. Louis, 1955ff.), XXXI, 81ff., hereafter cited as LW. The 95 Theses (*Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum* of 1517) are in WA, I, 233ff., and LW, XXXI, 25ff. Contrary to what one should expect, the Indulgence Theses have not been studied carefully enough; a glance at the bibliographies exposes the tendency merely to repeat what has been said before.

John Staupitz. In it he refers to a period in his life when the word repentance had been bitter; more recently it had become sweet, when related to the wounds of the Savior [WA, I, 525]. Luther continues to relate how subsequently, through the studies of "most erudite men" who taught Greek and Hebrew (Erasmus and Reuchlin), he had come to learn that repentance meant not only to do penance, as in medieval theology, but involved a total renewal of the mind and heart [WA, I, 526f.]. A glance at Erasmus' *Annotations* on Matt. 3:2 will immediately confirm Luther's indebtedness to the humanist. It is this insight that Luther developed in Thesis 1, when he stressed that not only in doing penance, but in one's life as an entirety, there must be continuous repentance.⁶

If this were true, then it follows that the remission of punishment through the indulgence is *vilissimum*—"a very slight thing" [WA, I, 609]. Yet, although he sees many problems in connection with the indulgence, Luther is not ready to abandon the concept. Why not? Because the believer must submit to the judgment of the pope and the church. "If anyone speaks against the apostolic verity of indulgences, let him be anathema and accursed" [Thesis 71]. There could be no exception to this [WA, I, 618, 620].⁷

While it is true that Luther's acceptance of indulgences was largely due to his obedience to Mother Church, this does not alter the fact that his doctrine at this point did not accord with his "mature" understanding of justification. In Protestant thinking, a forgiveness of guilt which did not include the remission of punishment for the sin was no forgiveness at all. Scholars have often overlooked this when they have interpreted the 95 Theses in the light of their own systems; it would be better instead to interpret their systems in the light of the 95 Theses. Taken out of context, Theses 81-90 have been interpreted as sarcastic arguments by Luther against the whole indulgence system; reviewed more carefully, these will be seen as scornful remarks made by the man on the street in response to the abuses of men like Tetzels. Luther, in seeking to defend the proper doctrine of the indulgence, firmly believes he is supported by the pope, and is defending his holiness [Theses 80f., 90f.].

Therefore, our brief reference to the Indulgence Theses points toward a doctrine of justification at variance with the common notion of what Luther taught regarding faith, righteousness, and justification in 1517. Is it really true that Luther had not come to his "evan-

⁶Erich Vogelsang pointed out the influence of Erasmus on the 95 Theses in *Die Bedeutung der neuveröffentlichten Hebraerbrief-Vorlesung Luthers von 1517/18* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1930), pp. 11ff.

⁷In his later statements, Luther invariably recounts that, at this time, he had no intention of rejecting the indulgence. See WA, XXXIX, i, 6 and WA, LIV, 180. Melancthon gives the same report in his biography of Luther in *Corpus Reformatorum* (Halle: C. A. Schwetschke, 1834ff.), VI, 162; hereafter cited as CR. These accounts are conveniently given in English translation in Aland, *95 Theses*, pp. 86, 25, and 47.



Luther states in his autobiography that his great turning-point occurred in 1519.

Romans 1:17 in 1515. But a perusal of these texts will reveal not a shred of evidence that this verse from the Bible held any especial meaning for him in 1515, or that he possessed the new doctrine of justification by faith, ascribed by himself first in 1519, so early as the Romans Lectures. The treatment of Romans 1:17 is painfully short. The exposition of those crucial words, *iustitia Dei revelatur*, extends to only eighteen lines, half of which are padded with quotations from Augustine and Aristotle; only 24 additional lines are devoted to the second part of the verse, *ex fide in fidem*, and this length is attained by citing the views of Nicholas of Lyra, the *Glossa ordinaria*, Augustine of Hippo, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Paul of Burgos. Luther even leaves out of the *scholia* any mention of the famous passage, "The just shall live by faith" (!), while, in the *glossae*, he remarks soberly, at the crucial point, that "by faith" means *ex Credulitate*, i.e., by faith as intellectual assent.⁸ "The just shall live by faith," a citation from Habakkuk 2:4, recurs in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38; but in his lectures on both these Epistles (in 1517 and 1518), he still dodged that *locus classicus* of the Protestant doctrine of justification [WA, LVII, ii, 80; WA, LVII, iii, 226].

Much has been said and written about the importance of Luther's concept of faith. Strangely enough, there has been a dearth of genetic studies, based on sources of Luther's late medieval teachers as well as on his own works. Our knowledge of Luther's development is seriously hindered by the lack of studies into the medieval background of his youth to provide the necessary *Sitz im Leben* behind his ideas; however, we can point to two monumental investigations by Reinhold Schwarz and Heiko Oberman.⁹ A key word for faith in the Young Luther

gelical discovery" of passive righteousness before his encounter with Tetzel? This seems to be a distinct possibility, at the very least. However, we must test our hypothesis against the evidence of Luther's development as shown in a larger context. Accordingly, we shall next look into the reformer's understanding of faith and righteousness during this period.

II. Faith and Righteousness in the Young Luther

Luther scholars have almost unanimously agreed that the break-through in justification was the illumination of Romans 1:17: "For herein is the righteousness of God revealed, as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" Here, at least, they agree with Luther himself [WA, LIV, 185]. But this assertion from Luther's autobiographical sketch of 1845 is almost the only point of consensus between the reformer and his interpreters. He states in his autobiography that his great turning-point occurred in 1519. Many modern scholars feel that Luther actually reached his "mature" doctrines of faith and righteousness by 1514, and that these doctrines, as found in the Lectures on Romans, already presented his reformational teaching. Who is right—Luther or his historians? If we consult the primary sources, we shall have to decide in favor of Luther. We possess the Lectures on Romans in unusually good transmission. There are four redactions of what Luther said concerning

⁸Luther's gloss on Rom. 1:17 is in WA, LVI, 10f.; the scholion in his own manuscript is in WA, LVI, 171-73. The same, but from the student's copybook, is in WA, LVII, i, 14 and 133f., respectively.

⁹Deserving of careful attention is the book by Reinhold Schwarz, *Fides, spes und caritas beim jungen Luther unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der mittelalterlichen Tradition* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1962). Schwarz analyzes the three theological virtues in medieval thought, and then traces the influence of Luther's scholastic teachers in his earlier works, while attempting also to show Luther's transition to a Protestant position; the excursus at the end, pp. 414-27, generously provides hard-to-find references from the fathers and the schoolmen. More general in scope, but also helpful, is Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology, Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1967). See also Reinhold Seeberg, *Die Dogmengeschichte des Mittelalters*, Vol. III of *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, reprint of 4th ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buch-Gemeinschaft, 1953), especially §60.8, §64.11, §65.3, §70.7, and §71.18 and 21. Seeberg treats Luther in *Die Entstehung des protestantischen Lehrbegriffs* (Vol. IV/1 of *Lehrbuch*), §75.14.

was *credulitas* [credulity or assent]; yet, this term, with its rather unpleasant connotations, has been overlooked by most Luther scholars.¹⁰ Some interpreters to the contrary, Luther in this earlier period saw faith not in the reformational sense of *fiducia* [trust], but as assent to the teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church. He associated the concept with the “theological virtues” syndrome of faith, charity, and hope—*fides, caritas et spes* [note the scholastic word-order, varying from I Cor. 13]. One can hardly look for a reformational insight within this medieval structure, under which Luther had been educated.

What was the role of faith, charity, and hope in late medieval scholasticism? We can only give a generalized sketch here.¹¹ Crucial was the idea of grace as a medicinal, healing substance; infused through the Sacraments, it developed these three virtues, resulting eventually in the justification of the believer, after a long process of “making righteous.” *Fides* [faith] was in some ways the least of the virtues. As *fides infusa*, it was divinely imparted through Baptism; when developed by instruction in the creeds and doctrines of the Church, it became an acquired faith [*fides acquisita*] and was termed *credulitas*.¹² Such faith, being assent and located in the intellect, was called “unformed” [*fides informis*] until it learned to perform meritorious good works and practiced them through charity [*fides caritate formata*]. *Caritas*, often identified with “grace,” seemed superior to faith since it produced meritorious works. In scholasticism, *spes* [hope] took over much of the position occupied by “faith” in later Protestant thought, since *fiducia* [trust] was correlated with *spes* rather than with *fides*. While faith was oriented to the present aspect of time, hope was the link with the future: the confidence that God was just, and would reward one’s merits with justification and everlasting life. Hence, justification was futuristic. Under this system, of course, there was no sure certainty of salvation until the end of one’s life. As Schwarz has abundantly documented in his monograph, the Young Luther shared most of these views for a number of years. However, it is clear that there was no

In his Biblical lectures between 1515 and 1517, Luther still saw good works as a part of justification.

room for the reformational concept of justification by faith until Luther’s understanding of righteousness could be separated from this system of virtues, and his idea of faith become a term of relationship comprehending also the future aspect of time. This came to pass when he was able to equate faith with *fiducia*. But he did not reach this insight before 1518.

In his Biblical lectures between 1515 and 1517, Luther still saw good works as a part of justification. Of course, he rejected the Law’s works [*opera legis*]—those which were thought to be sufficient for righteousness and salvation. But he who performs truly good works, in order that he may prepare himself for the grace of justification, is already just, in a way,” . . . since a large part of righteousness is the desire to be righteous” [WA, LVI, 254]. These are works of faith [*opera fidei*] in contrast to works of the law; the latter are wrong, because confidence is placed in them, but the former are good, since they result from faith in God. “Therefore salvation and righteousness can be had neither without works, nor out of works, but with works—nevertheless with this difference, that the more they increase within, the more they decrease without” [WA, LVII, ii, 68].¹³ While, perhaps, we cannot follow Karl Holl all the way, at least we can agree with him that for Luther during this period, justification was “analytic,” i.e., based upon a person’s inward state of sanctification, and that the declaration of justification was proleptic, anticipating a state of perfection which God would achieve within the believer following a life-long process of making him just.¹⁴

¹⁰One detects an all-around reluctance to investigate the usage of *credulitas*, also in medieval theology; however, this block must be overcome. Seeberg discusses the concept in Alexander of Hales, III, §60.8, and in Luther, IV/1, §75.11. On Luther’s usage of *credulitas*, see also my doctoral dissertation, “Die Entwicklung der evangelischen Rechtfertigungslehre bei Melanchthon bis 1521 im Vergleich mit der Luthers” (Erlangen, 1955), Chap. 8, and my pending publication, *Luther and Melanchthon on Justification*, Chap. 5.

Luther employs the term, *credulitas*, or discusses its implications, among many passages, in WA, LVI, 224/20, 10/9, 41/12, 227/18; WA, LVII, iii, 227/4, 234/9. *Credulitas* is correlative to *credere* in passages such as WA, LVII, ii, 70/5.

The usage of *credulitas* is closely related to his concept of faith as obedience to the teaching authority of Mother Church, and of faith as one of the three cardinal virtues; in the latter case, faith is assent to certain propositions, as developed elsewhere in this article.

¹¹For a fuller treatment of these virtues, see Seeberg, III, 492-97, Oberman, pp. 68-84, and Schwarz, *passim*.

¹²Held by Alexander of Hales, according to Seeberg, III, 348.

¹³Cf.: *Maledicti sunt omnes, qui operantur opera legis. Benedicti sunt omnes, qui operantur opera gratiae dei*. Theses against scholasticism, 1517. WA, I, 228.

¹⁴See Holl’s essay from 1910: “Die Rechtfertigungslehre in Luther’s Vorlesung über den Römerbrief mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Frage der Heilsgewissheit,” in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (7th ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1948), I, 111-54. Less known but equally important is his essay of 1922: “Die Rechtfertigungslehre im Licht der Geschichte des Protestantismus,” in *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1928), III, 525-27. Here Holl attacks Melanchthon’s position, not always with discernment, as that view which dominated later Lutheranism and was often uncritically attributed to Luther himself. Our later dating of Luther’s evangelical discovery makes it possible to accept Holl’s more valid conclusions, while still accounting for seeming contradictions in Luther’s later statements, as well as Melanchthon’s doctrine of justification.

This earlier doctrine of justification cost Luther many a struggle. One senses his uncertainty in the exposition of Romans 4:7: "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." How can one call men "blessed" who actually are sinners? Luther found them sinners in empirical reality, but justified in hope of the future: *Peccatores in re, iusti autem in spe* [WA, LVI, 269]. Here, justification is futuristic; certitude of salvation was unclear. Unable to explain it any other way, Luther has developed, here, a paradox based on time. Justification is seen in terms of a contrast between present and future, so that the believer is justified only in anticipation of actual perfection in the future. After 1518, the paradox would change from one of before-and-after to one of both-and, or simultaneity: the believer would be both sinner and saint. He would be seen as completely justified in view of the extrinsic righteousness of Christ, but as totally sinful from the aspect of his own, intrinsic state of goodness. Writing on a different subject, Cranx has also noticed this change in Luther's thought about 1518; Cranx finds a new awareness that the Christian dwells in two realms of experience, the worldly and the spiritual. In the eyes of the world, man remains a sinner; but in the eyes of God, the believer is justified.¹⁵

If, as we noted before, Luther's new understanding of Romans 1:17 is not yet present in the Lectures on Romans, where does it first appear? In a very careful investigation, Ernst Bizer locates it in the *Acta Augustana* of October 1518. Luther writes, "The just shall live by faith," and then identifies faith with righteousness for the first time: "Therefore the righteousness of the just, and his life, is his faith" [WA, II, 13]. Bizer stresses that such faith is none other than faith in the divine promise, or in the Word. He finds this a decisive advance over the Romans Lectures, where humility had taken this place belonging to faith, and had been capitulation before the Word as the condemning voice of the Law. Here, it is faith in the saving voice of the Gospel.¹⁶

This interpretation of Romans 1:17 in the *Acta Augustana* contains another important development which should be added to what Bizer has shown. Here Luther finally leaves the view of faith as virtuous credulity, adherence, or assent, limited to past and present but linked to the future through fiducial hope; in its stead appears faith as a term of relationship which effects immediate justification and communion with God, beginning already in the present time, and, by embracing also the future, assuring one's eternal salvation. Thus, justification is no longer confined to hope, making it futuristic, but is related especially to faith, bringing it into

the present.¹⁷ There are several features in Luther's view of faith in the *Acta Augustana* which might be synthesized as follows.

(1) Luther's new view of faith, called *fides specialis* or *particularis*, is clearly contrasted to a more general view, *fides generalis* or *historica*. This individual or specific faith is the only faith that justifies.¹⁸

(2) Specific faith operates without any pre-disposition or preparation [*dispositio*] prior to justification. This is in contrast to the view previously mentioned, according to which an act of the will and works of faith help to provide the basis for justification.¹⁹ He writes: *Sola fides justificat* [WA, II, 14]!

(3) Specific faith achieves a visible effect [*effectus*]. Luther cites Biblical examples—the Canaanite woman who secured healing for her daughter by her specific faith, the two blind men in Matt. 9:28f., the centurion, the nobleman in John 4, and a number of other instances in the teachings of Christ.

(4) Repeatedly, Luther shows how this specific faith, which achieves visible effects, is thereby active in the present, and not merely in some remote future. Applied to Romans 1:17, this means that the man with a specific faith receives justification which is actual instantaneously.²⁰

This treatment of faith and righteousness, one of several fragments in which the *Acta Augustana* consist,

¹⁷This shift in meaning of the word *fides* was an important event in the history of theology, but was not as radical a change as one might think at first. It was basically a regrouping of aspects of the three theological virtues under a new concept of faith. Nevertheless, it enabled Luther to throw important new light upon the difficult doctrine of justification. Negatively, its significance is dramatically portrayed in the inability of his Catholic opponents, through the Council of Trent and until modern times, to understand his intention. They assumed Luther was speaking of a *fides historica*, isolated from charity and hope, whereas he meant faith active in love and embracing hope; from their point of view, they were right in rejecting Luther's doctrine of justification. It can be valuable for the Catholic-Protestant dialogues today to avoid needless misunderstanding and reestablish communication at this point. A study of the controversy over this point in the sixteenth century is given by Hans Emil Weber, *Reformation, Orthodoxie und Rationalismus*, I/1, *Von der Reformation zur Orthodoxie* (reprint of 1st ed.: Gutersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1966), pp. 10-12, 124-32.

¹⁸"Primo, quando mulieri Cananaeae dixit: O mulier, magna est fides tua, fiat tibi sicut credidisti. Hic patet, quod non de fide illa generali agitur, sed de speciali, quae erat de effectu sanandae filiae, quem mater petiit" WA, II, 14/14. "Tercio, centurio ille 'dic tantum verbo,' inquit, 'et sanabitur puer meus,' non utique generali fide, sed speciali de praesenti effectu credidit et impetravit," *ibid.*, 14/24. "Et si totum Euangelium percurras, invenies exempla alia multa, quae omnia non de fide generali, sed particulari, et quae ad effectum aliquem praesentem pertineat, dicuntur. Quare necessaria est fides certa absolvendo, cum sacramenta novae legis, iuxta magistrum, sint in exercitium et actuationem fidei nostrae instituta," *ibid.*, 15/1. "Septimo. Hinc discipulos et Petrum saepe reprehendit dominus, quod essent modicae fidei, non generalis ut dicitur, sed specialis de effectu praesente, ut patet," *ibid.*, 15/6. "Et breviter, quicquid illustre factum legimus in veteri et nova lege, fide factum esse legimus, non operibus nec fide generali, sed fide ad praesentem effectum destinata: inde nihil aliud in scriptura quam fides commendatur . . .," *ibid.*, 15/21.

¹⁹See note 21 for the Latin text.

²⁰See note 18 for the Latin text.

¹⁵Cranx, p. 57. It is striking that an essay on "justice, law, and society" should give such strong confirmation to the investigations of Saarnivaara, Bizer, Aland, and myself.

¹⁶Bizer, pp. 97-105.

makes up less than three pages in the modern Weimar Edition. Yet, the new insight that specific or individual faith appropriates actual justification at the very first instant in which the faithful believe is stated explicitly five times, while the entire fragment treats this implicitly throughout. Quoting Heb. 11:6, Luther states: "If one should believe that he is a Rewarder, one should all the more believe that he is the Justifier and the Giver of Grace in the present time, aside from which there will be no award" [WA, II, 13/29].²¹ The Roman centurion sought and found healing for his servant in that very hour because not with a general but "with a specific faith he believed according to the result in present time, and he got it" [*fide . . . speciali de praesenti effectu credit et impetravit. Ibid., 14/25*]. Luther says that his (nine) arguments are but a few of many examples from Scripture, which treat not a general or historical faith, but a particular or individual faith, "and which pertain to some effect in the present" [*ibid., 15/2*]. When Jesus rebuked Peter and the other disciples for their unbelief in the tempest, it was not a general but a specific faith which they lacked [*ibid., 15/7*]. "And briefly, whatever illustrious deed we read about in the old or the new Law, we read that it was accomplished by faith—not by works or by a general [historical!] faith, but by a faith determined for a result in present time" [*ibid., 15/21*]. Luther summarizes his position on justification in this rather remarkable statement, in which his emphasis upon the *sola fides* is especially noteworthy: "Through no preparation [*dispositio*] will you be worthy, nor through any work will you be fitted for the sacrament [of penance], but through faith alone. This is because only faith in the word of Christ justifies [present tense!], makes alive, makes worthy, and prepares; without faith all other attempts are strivings of presumption or despair. But he who is just does not live on the basis of his disposition but on the basis of faith" [*ibid., 14/5*].²²



It appears, then, that Luther has taken a major step. From now on, the faith-concept will be centered in Rom. 1:17 rather than I Cor. 13:13 or Heb. 11:1; faith has become soteriological as never before. Righteousness is no longer the dominance of virtues in the believer, but the apprehension of Christ and his righteousness through a new relationship of faith as trust.

III. The Position of Philip Melancthon

Just as Luther must be studied against the background of his medieval predecessors, so he must also be seen in conjunction with his contemporaries, and especially the Biblical humanists. Several prominent Luther scholars have pointed out that his evangelical discovery was really an accomplishment in scholarship.²³ Three humanists who decisively guided Luther in his Biblical studies were John Reuchlin, Desiderius Erasmus, and Philip Melancthon. John Reuchlin, the first Christian scholar of the Hebrew language of the Renaissance, published in 1506 his *De Rudimentis Hebraicis*, a three-volume work including a grammar and lexicon, which was procured and used by Luther years before

²¹"Primo per illud Apostoli Heb:xi. Oportet accedentem credere, quia deus sit et inquirentibus se remunerator sit. Hic patet, quod non licet dubitare, sed firmiter oportet credere, quod deus sese inquirentes remuneret. Quod si oportet credere remuneratorem, omnino oportet etiam credere iustificatorem et gratiae largitorem in praesenti, sine qua premium non largietur" WA, II, 13/26.

²²"Si autem dixeris 'quid, si sim indignus et indispositus ad sacramentum?' respondeo ut supra: Per nullam dispositionem efficeris dignus, per nulla opera aptus ad sacramentum, sed per solam fidem. Quia sola fides verbi Christi iustificat, vivificat, dignificat, praeparat, sine qua omnia alia vel sunt praesumptionis vel desperationis studia. Iustus enim non ex dispositione sua, sed ex fide vivit. Quare de indignitate tua nihil oportet dubitare. Ideo enim accedis, quia indignus es, ut dignus fias et iustificeris ab eo, qui peccatores et non iustos quaerit salvos facere. Dum autem credis verbo Christi, iam honoras verbum eius et eo opere iustus es &c." WA, II, 14/4.

These statements were all translated in LW, XXXI, 270-74. However, the translation failed to follow the Latin text in distinguishing between past, present, and future aspects of time—a crucial issue here.

In addition to the works already cited, reference should also be made to Walther von Loewenich, *Luthers Theologia crucis*, (4th ed., Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1954). Von Loewenich noted the modification of Luther's understanding of faith from an eschatological to a soteriological emphasis, p. 105, and also gave one of the few interpretations of the concept of *fides specialis*, p. 130; however, he did not refer to the *Acta Augustana*, and, in general, reached different conclusions.

²³The "Scriptural theologico-scientific" nature of Luther's break-through, as brought out by Johannes von Walter, Ernst Wolf, and Anders Nygren, is summarized by Saarnivaara, pp. 46-49, especially note 102.

he became proficient in the Greek. Luther introduced Greek word-studies in the latter part of his Lectures on Romans, following the publication of Erasmus' *Novum instrumentum omne* of 1516; while Erasmus' Greek Testament had many defects, it did mark an important milestone in history, and in Luther's career. Erasmus' chief accomplishment, of course, was his skill in the Latin language. A much greater Graecist was Reuchlin's grand-nephew, Philip Melanchthon.

Luther and Melanchthon first met when the latter began his career as professor of Greek literature at Wittenberg in August 1518. Right at the start, Luther began his first systematic study of the Greek language under his younger colleague. One of Melanchthon's claims to undying fame is that he equipped Luther for his interpretation of the Hebrew and Greek Testaments and his monumental translations of the Bible into Latin and German. One can also call Melanchthon a theologian—after all, his *Loci communes*, the first Protestant dogmatics, preceded Calvin's *Institutes* by fifteen years, and excelled them in many points!—but he should be regarded first and foremost as a humanist, philologist, educator, and “father of the German education system.”²⁴ Still, one can no longer foster the claim that Melanchthon was a *tabula rasa*, religiously and theologically, before he met Luther. Recent research by Wilhelm Maurer has shed new light upon Melanchthon's work in theology and Biblical studies during the early years at the University of Tübingen.²⁵ In his Inaugural Address at Wittenberg, Melanchthon announced courses in the philology of Homer and Paul's Epistle to Titus—an indication of things to come.

²⁴For too long, our portrait of Melanchthon has been warped. It will no longer be possible to neglect this important figure, merely because of “unsound doctrines” regarding election or the Eucharist, or on account of his yielding position during the Leipzig Interim. Most studies written by theologians downgrade him as a humanist, evidently a “bad word.” For a more positive appraisal of his contribution to the Reformation as a humanist, see Werner Elert, “Humanität und Kirche. Zum 450. Geburtstag Melanchthons,” in *Zwischen Gnade und Ungnade. Abwandlungen des Themas Gesetz und Evangelium* (Munich: Evangelischer Presseverband für Bayern, 1948), pp. 92ff. The standard work on Melanchthon as educator is by Karl Hartfelder, *Philipp Melanchthon als Praeceptor Germaniae*, Vol. VII in the series, *Monumenta Germaniae Paedagogica* (Berlin: A. Hofmann & Co., 1889; reprinted Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1964). For a study in English, see William Harrison Woodward, *Studies in Education during the Age of the Renaissance, 1400-1600* (Cambridge: University Press, 1906), pp. 211-43. For a more recent appraisal, see my own essay, “The Reformation and Education in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Faculty Publications 1969-70*, in the *Bulletin of Appalachian State University*, Boone, N.C., LXVII, 4, pp. 34-49. An excellent, current bibliography on every aspect of Melanchthon is by Wilhelm Hammer, *Die Melanchthon-forschung im Wandel der Jahrhunderte. Ein beschreibendes Verzeichnis*. Vol. I, 1519-1799; Vol II, 1800-1965 (in the series, *Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte*, Vols. XXXV and XXXVI, Gutersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1967 and 1968).

²⁵For years, the need had been felt for studies in the early period of Melanchthon before his association with Luther. See my article on Melanchthon in *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), II, 1517-27, and especially 1526f. This need has been supplied by the two-volume work of Wilhelm-Maurer; *Der junge Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation*. Vol. I: *Der Humanist* and Vol. II: *Der Theologe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967 and 1969), of which Vol. I applies particularly to our theme.

Just as Luther must be studied against the background of his medieval predecessors, so he must also be seen in conjunction with his contemporaries, and especially the Biblical humanists.

Luther had been planning to prepare his Lectures on Galatians (1516-1517) for publication. However, at the end of 1518 he destroyed his manuscript and started over; the new result was the Shorter Commentary on Galatians of 1519 [WA, II, 443-618]. In this commentary, which was ready for the printer in May, Luther drops an interesting remark about his relationship with the young humanist, in which he candidly says that it was Melanchthon who led him to clarity in the meaning of Hebrews 11:1, that “definition” of faith which for so long had been an obstacle for him. Luther wrote:

Jerome understood faith as described by the apostle in Heb. 11 as the “substance of things hoped for.” Thus he expounds *substantia* as “possession,” saying: “Because that which we now hold by faith, we do hope will come in the future” [*Quia quod fide possidemus, speramus esse venturum*]. I also was of this opinion for a long time, because I had observed that *substantia* was commonly employed in various parts of the Holy Scriptures to denote capabilities and possession. I held tenaciously to the authority of Jerome on this doctrine. For who would revise all the things that the sententiarists had compiled concerning *substantia*? But since then I have begun to employ Philip Melanchthon as my teacher in Greek—a man young in respect to his body, but a hoary-headed sage in regard to his intellectual powers!—who would not let me understand it thus, and showed me that when *substantia* means “faculties,” it doesn't come from the Greek word *hypostasis* (the word the Apostle uses in Heb. 11), but from either *ousia*, *broton*, or *hyparxis*. Then I changed my mind, and I now concede that in my understanding, *hypostasis* or *substantia* properly signifies *subsistentia* and the essence of anything which subsists in itself, as Chrysostom understands it [WA, II, 595].

How shall we evaluate these words? They should neither be laughed out of court, as some narrow Luther enthusiasts have wanted to dispose of them, but neither should they be bagatellized to assign an exaggerated importance to Melanchthon. Taken by themselves, the words do not say that Luther derived his concept of faith from Melanchthon, although, of course, they also do not deny this. Basically, three points can be gleaned from this testimony. 1) As a competent linguist, Melanch-

thon rendered Luther valuable service in his Biblical studies. 2) Besides, the younger associate had an excellent grasp of patristic and scholastic theology and philosophy. 3) This knowledge of Melanchthon was of great value to Luther in arriving at his concept of faith. Just what this episode implies is largely a matter of judgment. However, if our finding is correct that Luther's mature concept of faith first appeared in the *Acta Augustana (supra)*, we then are faced with the fact that this doctrine may have been formed through his Biblical studies under Melanchthon; and if we should dare to bring this into conjunction with the self-disclosure in the Galatians Commentary [WA, II, 595], we should have some ground for pondering the question whether Melanchthon's contribution was theological as well as philosophical. At any rate, the new concept of faith (*fiducia*) appears more often in the writings from this period of Melanchthon than those of Luther, just as the new concept of grace (*favor Dei*) more quickly replaced the view of grace as a medicinal substance in Melanchthon than in Luther. In fact, the development of this sort of term was typical of the scholarly Melanchthon much more than of the dynamic Luther, and one may have strong reasons for crediting them to the humanist.²⁶

The 1519 Commentary on Galatians made a tremendous impression when it first appeared, and has always been regarded as one of Luther's best works. However, the commentary was partly the work of Melanchthon; the extent to which this is true has never adequately been determined. J. K. F. Knaake, the editor of the Weimar Edition of our commentary, found Melanch-

Luther had been planning to prepare his Lectures on Galatians (1515-1517) for publication. However, at the end of 1518 he destroyed his manuscript and started over.

thon's collaboration reflected in the statement about his guiding Luther in interpreting Heb. 11:1 [WA, II, 436]; however, one would rather object that whatever Melanchthon provided, at least it was not this praise of himself! This must come from Luther. It is widely accepted that the preface was written by Melanchthon under the pen-name of Otho Germanus [WA, II, 443], and that the postscript, entitled PAVLVS COMMODOVS BRETANNVS LECTORI S., refers to Melanchthon, who was born in Bretten. Of course, these fragments, of themselves, would provide no reason for attributing parts of the commentary itself to him. But Karl Meisinger, editor of the more recently-published original Lectures on Galatians (1516-1517), asserts a Melanchthonian editorship on the basis of the elegant Latin style of certain passages, which he also lists [WA, LVII, ii, p. XVIff.] This theory is supported by the circumstance that Melanchthon was a professional editor and proofreader, having worked for years in the printery of Anshelm at Tubingen.²⁷ Furthermore, we know that Luther was so over-burdened with work that he was assisted by Melanchthon and others in preparing his works for publication. For example, he had been at work on the publisher's draft of the Galatians Lectures as early as 1516, but had been hindered, first, by the pressure of other duties, and, more recently, by a modification of his views. Maurer accepts Melanchthon's involvement in the project, but insists that this can only have influenced the outward form, not the content; however, as Maurer himself admits, a more thorough investigation will be needed before one can determine the extent of Melanchthon's influence upon the content of the Commentary.²⁸ At least, this leaves us with the tantalizing question—what if Melanchthon's pen had also contributed positive content in matters like the concepts of faith and grace, at points where a comparison with the Lectures on Galatians [WA, LVII, ii] give no precedent? This must remain a question until further

²⁶As late as 1515-16 Luther still employed *fiducia* as a perjorative term connoting false security: in the Romans Lectures [WA, LVI, 280/10 and 503/4, for example] and in his marginal notations to Tauler's Sermon: "Quia confessio saepe nocet, dum fiduciam praebet peccati dimissi, ubi tamen cautio futuri non faciendi vera non fuit ex corde" WA, IX, 104/12. He also understood *fiducia* as the assurance that God would remain true to His promises: "Sciens cum fiducia, quoniam Deus mentiri non potest . . ." WA, LVI, 387/21. According to Reinhold Seeberg, Gabriel Biel, mentor of one of Luther's teachers, had held that *fiducia* applied to both confidence in the divine *gratia* as well as the *merita* of the believer [Dogmengeschichte III (1953), 783]. Reuchlin [WA, LVI, 280, note 10] and Erasmus [WA, LVII, iii, 61, note on vv. 17/18] had pointed out a positive usage of *fiducia*. In the *Acta Augustana* of October 1518, Luther seems first to have reached the fiducial concept of faith.

Since we have no theological works of Melanchthon prior to this, we cannot conduct a similar genetic study for him, except to note that he was the follower of Erasmus, who had made related observations in his *Annotations in the New Testament* (1516). However, due to the Aristotelian character of his thought-delineation with its emphasis upon terms, he places far greater emphasis upon the word *fiducia* than does Luther, beginning in 1520.

So far as the concept that *gratia* is not a medicinal substance miraculously effecting the regenerated life from within, but rather the divine benevolence toward the sinner (*favor Dei*) is concerned, I am more inclined to assign the priority to Melanchthon, although, again, unassailable documentation is difficult. In his polemic against Emser, written late in 1520, Melanchthon clearly defines: "Nam ubi gratia, quod Christo favoris vocabulum est . . ." ["Studienausgabe," *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl*, ed. Robert Stupperich et al. (Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann and Gerd Mohn, 1951 ff.), I, 84/33; hereafter cited as SA]. This view is found only implicitly in his Declamation on Paul of January 1520 [SA, I, 40] and his Baccalaureate Theses of September 1519 [" . . . iustitia nostra est gratuita . . ." I, 24]. See my study, *Luther and Melanchthon on Justification*, chapters 5 and 6.

²⁷See Maurer, *Der junge Melanchthon*, I, 30ff.

²⁸Maurer, *Der junge Melanchthon*, II, 52-55 and 64-67.

evidence is gathered.²⁹

We must still consider Melanchthon's statements on faith and righteousness, as well as on the three theological virtues. The earliest documentation we have for Melanchthon's view on righteousness dates from September 9, 1519: "Therefore righteousness is the benefaction of Christ. All our righteousness is the free imputation of God" [SA, I, 24]. These statements are Theses 9 and 10, respectively, from the disputation required for the Bachelor of Bible degree. In spite of the determined attacks upon their authenticity, their genuineness is almost beyond dispute; as to content, they tend to speak for themselves, presenting the first clear statement of the Melanchthonian doctrine of justification through the imputation of the merits of Christ.³⁰ In the Baccalaureate Theses, he also questioned the scholastic doctrine of faith when he termed *fides acquisita* a mere supposition, *opinio* [WA, I, 25]. In another series of theses published the following August, he struck at the heart of the system. The distinction between a formed and an unformed faith was a bit of fiction (Thesis 3), while unformed faith was no faith at all, but merely a false supposition (Thesis 4). He held that charity was the work of faith (Thesis 2) and that it followed faith (Thesis 4), thus overthrowing the idea of a *fides caritate formata*. Since justification was through faith (Thesis 1), one could not speak of any merit whatsoever from works (Thesis 14), and human works were consequently sins (Thesis 14) [SA, I, 54f.]. In his defense of Luther against Thomas Rhadino, Melanchthon, following Luther's example, attacked the "abuse" of the virtues of faith, charity, and hope [SA, I, 83-85]. The defense was composed toward the end of 1520; a few months later followed his positive development of the theological virtues in the *Loci com-*

²⁹Maurer might be right when he attributes Melanchthon's learning the concept of grace as *favor Dei* from Luther's Galatians Commentary. However, the phrase does not strike one as Lutheresque. Perhaps both reformers learned the concept from their common teacher, Erasmus. For Maurer's view see his essay, "Zur Komposition der Loci Melanchthons von 1521," in *Luther-Jahrbuch*, XXV (1958), 156.

³⁰The Baccalaureate Theses of 1519 had been virtually unknown before the turn of the present century. In spite of his rejection of their content, Otto Ritschl tried to ascribe their authorship to Luther rather than Melanchthon(!). Succeeding generations of scholars have repeated this bizarre approach—either to criticize imputative justification, or else to say that it was so good that it had to come from Luther rather than Melanchthon, in spite of the fact that Ritschl later published a retraction. Thus even Maurer, *Der junge Melanchthon*, II, 102f., seems to follow Ritschl's unsuccessful attempt. The treatment of the Baccalaureate Theses in my Erlangen dissertation (Chap. 12, pp. 101ff.) produced several criticisms, none of which, in my view, have analyzed the study carefully enough. Of these critics, only Rolf Schafer has grasped the depth of the doctrinal problem involved. See Schafer, *Christologie und Sittlichkeit in Melanchthons frühen Loci* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1961), pp. 6-7. Schafer correctly sees that I distinguished between what Luther and Melanchthon taught in order to clarify the permanent effect of Melanchthon upon Lutheranism. In a sense, I reject the doctrine of justification of the Young Luther in favor of Melanchthon's forensic view (which I also find in the Mature Luther in modified form), while Schafer rejects the Evangelical Lutheran position in favor of the earlier Luther. Hindered for a long time by duties of the parish ministry, I have at last prepared an answer: "Formgeschichtliche und inhaltliche Probleme in den Werken des jungen Melanchthon: Ein neuer Zugang zu seinen Bibelarbeiten und Disputationsthesen," accepted for publication soon in the *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*.

munes. Here, he held that charity and hope were both born of faith. "And so faith is trust in the free mercy of God, without respect to any works of ours; in the same way, hope is the expectation of salvation, without respect to any merits of ours" [SA, II/1, 114f.].

In general, it can be said that Luther came from the cloister, while Melanchthon came from the world. While one who knows the early Melanchthon from the sources will not likely agree that the young humanist lacked genuine religious problems or theological concern, nevertheless there was no "Tower Experience" to compare with Luther's. It appears likely that the scholastic syndrome of faith, charity, and hope held no interest at all for the Young Melanchthon. Instead, their place was taken by a program of improving the minds and renovating the morals of the young through proper education, while not neglecting piety and theology [SA, III, 30ff.]. Moral improvement came through the renewal of human affections by divine grace; in this system, faith, charity, and hope, as a triad, were not prominent [CR, XXI, 53-54]. While Melanchthon may have helped Friar Martin solve the problem of the theological virtues, he himself had travelled a different route.

IV. A Retrospect

A half century ago, the Roman Catholic historian, Hartmann Grisar, developed his view of the "Tower Experience" of Luther, and started a debate which has never stilled. One can survey the literature before Grisar and find hardly a word on this subject. The great bibliographical works of Gustav Wolf and Karl Schottenloher do not contain listings on the topic. Actually, it appears to be much ado about nothing, for there are no primary sources at all on which a case could be built; what little evidence exists is found in poorly-attested and contradictory accounts of Luther's Table-Talk, which have only corroborative value. *Therefore, the "Tower Experience" is not historical.*³¹ It is hence surprising that the episode was taken so seriously by so many scholars, and that it was able to produce the monumental confusion that resulted. If the portrait of Luther that emerged from these discussions was colorful, nevertheless it hindered the sober processes of historical research. Hence, we cannot leave our subject without at least a cursory attempt to summarize what we have learned about faith, righteousness, and justification on the basis of the testimonies of Luther and Melanchthon from 1545 and 1546, respectively.

Philip Melanchthon has been called the father of modern historical research; whether we assign this honor to him or not, he was unquestionably an outstanding

³¹The table-talks are given in *WA Tischreden*, II, 177 (No. 1681) and *WA Tischreden*, III, 228 (No. 3232). A useful collection of sources on our subject is found in Otto Scheel, ed., *Dokumente zu Luthers Entwicklung (bis 1519)* (2nd ed.; Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1929).

historian. During the recent debates whether Luther actually posted his 95 Theses on October 31, 1517, scholars have been amazed to discover that Melancthon's biography has been almost the only source for this important event.³² However, the contemporaries of Grisar were upset because, as they believed, Melancthon set the "Tower Experience" before 1510. Actually, Melancthon either had never heard of such an experience, or else did not think it relevant to a biography on Luther, for he did not refer to it; it was only the false assumptions of Romantic historians, wrongly identifying Luther's evangelical progress with such a once-for-all experience, which led them to read this into Melancthon's remark about the help that an older monk gave him in the cloister at Erfurt [CR, VI, 159]. Melancthon relates having himself seen Luther in great spiritual struggles, which suggests that Luther had *Anfechtungen* after 1518 and all his life. He mentions the death of Luther's friend in 1505 as such a crisis [CR, VI, 158]. Thus, that associate who was closest to Luther supports our suggestion that there was no single "conversion" upon which all else depended, but a succession of crises and break-throughs.

In the Preface to his published Latin works in 1545, Luther singled out one important experience from the year 1519 in which he said he came to understand the "righteousness of God" properly for the first time [WA, LIV, 185-187]. Naturally, this assertion was repugnant to that generation which had rediscovered Luther's marvellous Lectures on Romans. Some of the most talented historians and theologians of the twentieth century struggled to salvage as much of Luther's autobiography as possible, while nevertheless vitiating its testimony with the alleged discovery of the *iustitia Dei passiva* in the Romans Lectures, which, they felt, called for a dating of the "Tower Experience" before 1515.³³ Seeming contradictions in Luther were noted, including the remark that after discovering the new meaning of *iustitia*, he had discovered to his surprise that this view was also partially present in Augustine's *De Spiritu et litera* [WA,

LIV, 186]. A common way out of the difficulty was to refer to Luther's "notorious inaccuracy with dates," and simply to assign the date 1519 to a mind's trick of the aging reformer. It is true that there are several seeming conflicts in the Preface of 1545 that offer difficulties, but, in the main, his own account is a primary source from the view-point of a historian, and is to be preferred to the artificial constructions of recent writers. One problem is Luther's claim to have taught passive righteousness in 1519, while the term actually cannot be traced back before 1525.³⁴ Actually, the date was right, and the content described as correct. The real difficulty is explained by the circumstance that Luther, writing twenty-six years later, utilized terminology which had become established only meanwhile at Wittenberg. Another problem is that the view that Luther ascribes as first appearing in 1519 seems to be present in the Lectures on Romans. In this case, various steps in Luther's developments are being confused. At least three phases must be distinguished.

(1) In an earlier wrestling with the problem of the *iustitia Dei*, he came to the insight, known to many medieval theologians, that God's righteousness is not merely punitive, but also soteriological.

(2) In the Lectures on Romans, he reached another break-through: he found that the *opera fidei* on which an analytic justification is based are produced by God himself, not by the individual. This was the recovery of Augustine's position.

(3) The discovery of 1518-1519 was that justification does not rest at all upon the works of men, not even works of faith worked by God, but that it rests solely upon the work of Christ; in terms of a later terminology, it was the discovery that the passive righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer by grace through faith.³⁵

If one is determined to identify the "Tower Experience" with one of the three steps outlined above, it doesn't matter with which of these it is associated, so long as the genetic issues are kept clear.

This essay has raised more questions than it has answered. At least, it is my hope that it will show the tentative character of many past conclusions that some scholars regard as unassailable. I hope to have shown that the development of the evangelical doctrine of faith, righteousness, and justification has not been treated previously in a fully satisfactory way, that this evolution was crucially important, and that Luther's teaching after 1518 was far different in important respects from what it had been previously. The Indulgence Controversy was the turning-point.

³²Melancthon's biography of Luther, as well as Luther's autobiographical sketches from various periods and other material germane to our subject, are conveniently assembled in English translation in Aland, *Martin Luther's 95 Theses*. Melancthon's sketch, the Preface to Vol. II of Luther's Latin Writings (1546), is given on pp. 38-49, with collation of the pagination of the biography in the *Corpus Reformatorum*, VI.

³³The literature on Luther's progression from the older Catholic to the Protestant position is immense, and in this essay limitations of time and space forbid any but the briefest suggestions. Most of the epoch-making treatises which had become difficult to procure are now available in full or in excerpt in the anthology edited by Bernhard Lohse, *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968). A list of authors represented includes Heinrich Denifle, Hartmann Grisar, Emanuel Hirsch, Ernst Stracke, Ernst Bizer, Gerhard Pfeiffer, Regin Prenter, Albrecht Peters, Heinrich Bornkamm, Kurt Aland, Heiko Oberman, and Otto Pesch. Another basic title is Wilhelm Link, *Das Ringen Luthers um die Freiheit der Theologie von der Philosophie* (3rd ed.; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968). There is a more thorough analysis of the literature in my pending publication, *Luther and Melancthon on Justification*, Chap. 1.

³⁴This was brought out years ago by Emanuel Hirsch, "Initium theologiae Lutheri," reprinted in Lohse, p. 72.

³⁵See my monograph mentioned in note 33, Chap. 7.

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