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EVANGELISM AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

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Rather than taking a sociological, pragmatic and prescriptive approach to this issue, I will focus mainly on certain biblical and theological aspects concerning the Church, evangelism and the relationship between them. It is my belief that a clear biblical theology generates clear praxiology. And it all must emerge from a clear understanding of the Bible. That is our source of truth. We will approach the theme from a threefold perspective, looking at the nature of the Church, the nature of evangelism, and finally how it all relates to evangelism.

1. The Nature of the Church

Since the theologian Schleiermacher came on the scene, some have accepted the idea that the church is no more than „a society which originates only through free human action and which can only continue to exist through such action,”¹ or that the church is a „communion or association relating to religion or piety.”²

But biblically, it can be argued that the church is not simply a human institution at a horizontal level (like a trade union, an association of fishermen, or a local club). Under the power and the leading of the Holy Spirit, it is far more.

The being of the Church is dynamically related to the being of God, of men and of the world. Using a New Testament language one can affirm that the Church is simultaneously a divine – human organism and a historical-eschatological community. Let us explore this idea further.

1.1 The Church is a divine and human organism

The divine dimension of the Church is given by Christ who is the Head of the Body and by the Holy Spirit who is the Life of the Body. Therefore the Apostle Paul could say to the Colossians: „And He is the head of the body, the church,

¹ F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, H.R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stuart, eds. (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1968), p. 3.

² H. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 5.

who is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Col.1:18; cf. Eph.4:15).

The human dimension is constituted by saved sinners who are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body as members. The Apostle Paul affirms: „Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor. 12:27), due to the fact that „by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (12:13).

It is important to see that the body metaphor teaches the headship relation between Christ and believers in a clear ecclesial, corporate setting and not as isolated believers or disjointed members. The source of everything in the body and every member of the Body is Christ the head and the life giving Spirit. The glory and the strength of the Church resides in the Head and the Spirit. The weakness and the frailty of the Church resides in the Body and its human members. However, there is a relation between the Body and the Head. The Head is not without a Body and the Body is not without the Head. Yet it must be underlined that the Head and the Body do not share the same attributes. The Head is divine, infallible and all powerful, while the members of the Body are human, fallible and weak. Still, God the Father has designed the Church to exist in a dynamic union between the Head, Jesus Christ, and the Body, the believers individually and corporately.

Some are inclined, however, to believe that since the Church is the Body of Christ, whatever is true about the Head is equally true about the members of the Body, at least, in its institutional structures. The risk of such an approach is to develop a sort of triumphalistic institutional ecclesiology with serious consequences for its practice. As Subillia points out: The great truths of the Bible, in Christ, by Christ and for Christ, have been replaced by new formulae, like in the Church, by the Church, for the Church. In other words, it is easy to think that one church has got everything right, so needs give itself to constant re-examination no longer. That can spell death.

The New Testament analogy of the body makes a clear distinction between the Person of Christ and His Body, the Church. Christ is declared to be the Saviour of the Body (Eph. 5:23). The body receives its nurture and unity from its Head (Col. 2:19). And the Body is to grow and mature in every respect in Him who is the Head (Eph. 4:15).

Alternatively, there are others who believe that the Church is simply a voluntary human organization with religious purposes on horizontal level, much like Schleiermacher mentioned earlier. This implies that the church is not an

essential part of the Christian life. However, the Bible clearly declares that to belong to a local church is not an optional matter.

It is not an optional issue because the metaphor of the body offers a clear vertical dimension to the Church. Believers are personally and corporately „members of Christ Himself“ (1 Cor. 6:15). The Church is related primarily to Jesus Christ. „He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all“ (Eph. 1:22-23). Moreover, the Church is Christ’s instrument in this world. Members serve their Head and the kingdom goes forward. This cannot be overlooked.

The understanding of the Church as a simultaneous human-divine organism offer a clear perspective on evangelism and provides its motivation. Thus, evangelism is not additional work to the being of the Church, but its very mode of being. It would be difficult to biblically substantiate a non-salvific relation between Christ and the Holy Spirit, on the one hand, and the lost world, on the other. If that is true, the presence and the purpose of the New Testament church in this world must be evangelistic. The Church exists primarily to bring glory to God and lost souls to Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we speak about evangelism and the Church, we have to keep in mind all believers. All believers are to be a witness to Christ’s power to save. Then there are especially gifted believers in the ministry of evangelism; evangelists are reapers. In both senses of the word, the evangelist is not and cannot be an isolated member of the body in his/her private relationship with Christ. The entire Church is to be involved in the grand task of evangelism, and then the evangelist fills his role. This aspect is further emphasized by the historical-eschatological dimension of the Church.

1.2 The Church is simultaneously a historical-eschatological community

Another analogy the Apostle Paul uses to explain the mystery of the church – for it is a divine-human mystery – is drawn from the Old Testament idea of the „people of God“. Schnackenburg argues that in Hebrew thought, the Lord’s people constituted a whole, a corporate entity, to the extent that every individual was perceived to be absolutely and deeply involved in the future of the entire community.³ An extreme individualism, as seen in much western thought is out. It is not biblical.

³ R. Schnackenburg, *Church in the New Testament*, W.J. O’Hara, trans. (NY: Seabury, 1965), p. 149.

As with their Hebrew predecessors, a corporate personality must characterize the new people of God, the community of those who trusted in the risen Christ. Believers are one in Christ. As Paul says: „When one suffer all suffer; when one is exalted all are exalted.“

Behind the establishment of this new, unified people of God was the reality of the risen Christ, „who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself people that are His very own, eager to do what is good“ (Titus 2:14).

However, one must not spiritualize this oneness with Christ and one another in some Gnostic, unreal sense. This new reality is a historical community of concrete living persons in the flesh, living in time and space on earth.

Yet, it must be recognized and emphasized that although the Church, as Christ’s unified Body lives in this world, it is not of this world, it is an eschatological community with its gaze fixed on the Parousia, the return of Christ. Moreover, the historical people of God are simultaneously citizens of their lands and „citizens of heaven“. In other words, the Church is part of this age and the age to come, history and eschatology.

The wedding of history and eschatology in the life of the Church underlines the simultaneous nature of its historical and eschatological mandate. The historical mandate is „GO into all the world“ (Mark 16:15), while the eschatological mandate is „COME you blessed of my Father“ (Matt. 25:34).

Although the life of the Church is multifaceted and needs a careful study, it can be stated here, in general terms, that the dynamic of the church is determined by the relation between „GO“ and „COME“, or between missions and worship. Historically, some have overemphasized missions to the detriment of worship, while others have emphasized worship to the detriment of missions. In other words, some „COME“ but never „GO“, while other always „GO“ and never „COME“. A biblically balanced Church emphasizes both worship and missions.

Additionally, some have neglected the eschatological nature of the Church and under the pressure of history, culture and trends pursue evangelism much as a human enterprise; the result being that the Church is no longer different than the world it seeks to evangelize. The irony of such an approach is that although we all know that the world cannot save itself, some are still bewitched by the methods of the world.

The Apostle Paul reminds us all that although „we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons

of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:3-4).

Alternatively, others have transformed the Church into an eschatological ghetto. It is no longer relevant to the world in which it lives. It looks like a museum, or an antic shop. The main concern of such a church is to preserve its structure and tradition, and not to win the world for Jesus Christ. To such people the Apostle Paul says: „Though I am free and belong to no man, I made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all man so by all possible means I may save some. I do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

In the teachings of the Apostle Paul, we see an extraordinary balance of the historical and eschatological dimension of the Church. This interplay of the divine-human and historical-eschatological dimensions of the Church provides a theological frame of reference for the relation between evangelism and the local church. Evangelism is the way of life of a worshiping community. In other words, evangelism is the life style of the believing community of the age to come. The evangelist is not a Lone Ranger on earth, but a member of the believing community. However, before we explore this aspect, it is important to look at the nature of evangelism.

2. The Nature of Evangelism

The Bible uses a number of phrases to explain evangelism, such as the „proclamation of the Gospel“, „making disciples“, „bearing witness to Jesus Christ“, „fishing for men“, being the „salt of the earth“ and the „light of the world“, „bearing fruit“ that lasts, being the „aroma of Christ“, the „ministry of reconciliation“ and „declaring the wonderful deeds of God.“ However, due to the complexity of the subject and the variety of methodologies, Christianity is far from having a universally accepted definition of evangelism. Moreover, J.I. Packer argues that:

There is confusion about evangelism in the modern church. The trouble comes from our habit of defining the activity institutionally and behaviorally rather than theocentrically and theologically. Some give the name of *evangelism* to any kind of meeting in which the leader works up an altar call of some sort, never mind what has or has not been affirmed before the call comes. Other will equate evangelism with any activity that expresses goodwill to persons outside the church...⁴

The following definitions of evangelism will illustrate this fact. Thus, the 1918 Anglican definition affirms that:

To evangelize is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him as their Saviour, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church."⁵

One of the most quoted definitions of evangelism is D.T. Niles's 1951 definition: „It is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food“. The context of the definition is this:

Evangelism is witness. It is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food. The Christian does not offer out of his bounty. He has no bounty. He is simply a guest at his Master's table and, as an evangelist, he calls other too. The evangelistic relation is to be „alongside of“ not „over against“ The Christian stands alongside of the non-Christian and points to the Gospel, the holy action of God. It is not his knowledge of God that he shares, it is to God Himself that he points. The Christian Gospel is the Word become flesh. This is more than and other than the Word become speech.⁶

The 1977 Church Growth definition argues that:

To evangelize is to proclaim Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, to persuade people to become his disciples and responsible members of his church.⁷

⁴ J.I. Packer, „Foreword“, in L.A. Drummond, *The Word of the Cross: A Contemporary Theology of Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman Press), 1992, p. 5.

⁵ *Towards the Conversion of England* (Westminster: The Press and Publications Board of the Church Assembly), 1944, p. 1.

⁶ D.T. Niles, *That They May Have Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers), 1951, p.96.

⁷ Donald A. McGavran and Winfield C. Arn, *The Steps for Church Growth* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers), 1977, p. 51.

The Lausanne Covenant defines evangelism as follows:

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the Gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church and responsible service in the world.⁸

George Hunter gives the following definition of evangelism in his 1979 volume, *The Contagious Faith*:

Evangelism is what WE do to help make the Christian faith, life and mission a life option to undisciplined people, both outside and inside the congregation. Evangelism is also what JESUS CHRIST does through the church's *kerygma* (message), *koinonia* (fellowship), and *diakonia* (service) to set people free. Evangelism happens when the RECEIVER (receptor, respondent) turns (1) to Christ, (2) to the Christian message and ethic, (3) to a Christian congregation, and (4) to the world, in love and mission – *in any order*.⁹

Delos Miles in his book *Introduction to Evangelism* gives the following definition:

Evangelism is being, doing and telling the gospel of the kingdom of God, in order that by the power of the Holy Spirit persons and structures may be converted to the lordship of Jesus Christ.¹⁰

And finally, L.A. Drummond defines evangelism as:

A concerted effort in the power of the Holy Spirit to confront unbelievers with the truth about Jesus Christ and the claims of our Lord (Acts 2:22-24, 31) with a

⁸ J.D. Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (Minneapolis: World Publications), 1975, p. 4.

⁹ George G. Hunter, III *The Contagious Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon), 1979, pp. 26, 28, 30-31.

¹⁰ D. Miles, *Introduction to Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman Press), 1983, p. 47.

view to leading unbelievers into repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21) and thus into the fellowship of His church so they may grow in the Spirit.¹¹

From the perspective of the relation between the evangelist and the local church, it can be argued that in spite of different theologies of evangelism enshrined in these definitions, there are some common trends:

- First, the role of the local church in evangelism is being perceived almost exclusively as the place where the converts should be directed for fellowship and discipleship after evangelism.
- Secondly, evangelism is defined either in impersonal or individualistic terms and not in corporate terms.
- And finally, evangelism is defined in the context of the Kingdom of God and Lordship of Christ with no clarification regarding the relation between the Kingdom and the church.

Moreover, due to the fact that some fail to understand the relation between the local and universal church or between what has been referred to as visible and invisible church, some evangelists seem to have no clear church affiliation and accountability, and some churches no commitment to evangelism.

Additionally, there is an urgent need to distinguish between post-denominationalist type of evangelism and an inter-church cooperation type of evangelism. A coherent theology of church and evangelism could avoid some of the contemporary issues in this area. Dr. L. A. Drummond has made significant steps in this direction in his book *The Word of the Cross: A Contemporary Theology of Evangelism*. Evangelism is explored both theologically and practically. From a theological perspective, evangelism is rooted in the being of the Triune God. The Trinitarian perspective on evangelism not only that re-emphasizes the richness of the Trinitarian Gospel, but also offers the perfect ontological foundation for a simultaneous personal and corporate evangelism. Unfortunately, most definitions fail to practically extend the Trinitarian Christian faith to evangelism. A Trinitarian theology of evangelism provides the much-needed balance between personal and corporate approach to evangelism. Evangelism is at the same time personal and corporate!

A definition of evangelism that is both trinitarian and ecclesial could be ex-

¹¹ L.A. Drummond, *The Word*, p. 9.

pressed in the following way:

A concerted effort of the Church, both individually and corporately in the power of the Holy Spirit to confront unbelievers with the truth about Jesus Christ and the claims of our Lord (Acts 2:22-24,31) with a view to leading unbelievers into repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21) and thus into the fellowship of His Church so they may grow in the Spirit.

3. Local church and evangelism

If the Church is simultaneously a divine-human organism and a historical-eschatological community, then evangelism is a central mode of being of the Church. Functionally, the Church was not created to be an end in itself, but to perpetuate Christ's ministry to the world.

Millard Erickson argues that the function of the church is fourfold.

- First, evangelism which is an imperative of the Great Commission: the Church exists to make disciples of all peoples.
- Second, to edify believers through fellowship, teaching and the practice of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Third, worship – praise and exaltation of the triune God. Worship should always precede evangelism and edification.
- And fourth, to demonstrate a social concern for believers and nonbelievers alike.¹²

These functions are not additional activities to the being of the Church, but the mode by which the Church exists. Consequently, all the aspects in which the Church expresses itself are simultaneously divine-human and historical-eschatological, and all leading to the extension of the Kingdom of God.

Not only is the Church the Body of Christ (personal and corporate), but believers are also called to be a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:9). In this kingdom the individual is not swallowed up by the crowd nor is the community threatened by individual members. Although limited and imperfect, the ecclesial community is a historical mirror of the Trinity. The „one“ and the „many“ co-exist in harmony. This is beautifully illustrated in the Book of Acts through the words

¹² M. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker), 1983-1985, p. 1027.

„all... and each and everyone“. The relation between the „one“ and the „many“ in the theology of Acts avoids both extreme: individualism and collectivism. The balance must be kept, for the Kingdom of God is such.

Another aspect of concern is the balance between the „priesthood of all believers“ and those with special callings according to the gift(s) of the Spirit. Some may be inclined to downplay the role of the „many“ priesthood believers in evangelism“ in favor of the „one(s)“ specially gifted evangelist; or alternatively to belittle the ministry of the gifted „one(s)“ in favor of the ministry of the „many“. When such occurs, not only can there be tension in the church, but the witness of the whole body is often impacted in a negative way. In such cases, some gifted believers in the area of evangelism may consider taking an independent route as the best alternative, „going alone“, and leaving the Church behind. This can be a serious mistake.

However attractive such a model appears to be, it must be realized that the apostles did not abandon the churches in time of crises. To the contrary, they worked under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to correct the distorted theology that generated the crisis, in order to heal the Church.

Error must be corrected, because as seen, the Church plays an essential role in evangelism and Kingdom progress. Remember, Christ is the Head, the Holy Spirit indwells the corporate Body and imparts to it divine life. The Great Commission itself is given to the Church. Evangelists must, therefore, relate dynamically to the Church. Scripture demands it. Corporate accountability to Christ can be found only in the Church.

This may sound anachronistic, bearing in mind the fact that the culture of post-modernity breeds individualism and relativistic ethics. Regardless the pressure of history and culture, the Church must be held in its proper biblical position, and the Church must constantly maintain the balance between history and eschatology, between this age and the age to come. Consequently, it can be argued that biblical evangelism is both historical and eschatological, and Church centered.

The Manila Manifesto of July 1998 argues that:

Every Christian congregation is a local expression of the Body of Christ and has the same responsibilities. It is both „a holy priesthood“ to offer God the spiritual sacrifices of worship and „a holy nation“ to spread abroad his excellences in witness (1 Peter 2:5, 9). The church is thus both a worshipping and

a witnessing community, gathered and scattered, called and sent. Worship and witness are inseparable.¹³

Thus, the evangelist must relate properly to a local body of believers. As a pastor and evangelist, I am aware of the fact that pastors, teachers, evangelists, missionaries and local churches are not perfect, yet. However, there is the promise that Jesus „gave Himself for her (the church), that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish“ (Eph. 5:25-27). Such an eschatological perspective is calling upon us to commit ourselves afresh to our triune God, His Church and the Great Commission.

4. Conclusion

Speaking about the relationship between the Church and evangelism, the Lausanne Covenant affirms:

We affirm that Christ sends His redeemed people into the world as the Father sent Him, and that this calls for a similar deep and costly penetration of the world. We need to break our ecclesiastical ghettos and permeate non-Christian societies. In the church's mission of sacrificial service, evangelism is primary. World evangelization requires the whole church to take the whole Gospel to the whole world. The church is at the very center of God's cosmic purpose and is His appointed means of spreading the gospel.¹⁴

May we all affirm it again as have the thousand before us. Then the Church will go forward and the Kingdom will grow until that great day when the Kingdom will come in all its glory at the return of our Lord. „Even so, come Lord Jesus“.

¹³ *The Lausanne Covenant, Manila Manifesto*, p. 8.

¹⁴ *The Lausanne Covenant*, p. 3.

Anatomy of a Reformation: The Southern Baptist Convention 1978-1994

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Why would anyone want to live anywhere close to the San Andreas fault? Yet millions choose to do precisely that and to all appearances lead reasonably normal lives. Perhaps the Baptist kingdom of our evangelical Zion is the San Andreas fault of Christendom. Given the constant rumbles, frequent tremors, and occasional ten point Richter scale seismic earth shifts, some observant evangelicals probably wonder why anyone would want to live among the rowdy Baptists. Others are curious as to why this phenomenon of confrontation in Baptist life seems to erupt with the regularity of "Old Faithful."

One of the earliest tremors leading to the massive upheavals of the decade of the eighties was the publication of an article which appeared in various state Baptist papers in October of 1961 entitled *Death In the Pot*. K. Owen White, then the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Houston, Texas, and soon to be elected in 1963 as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, used the incident from the life of Elisha in 2 Kings 4:38-41 to suggest that a noxious herb had been introduced into the Southern Baptist stew. His immediate target was the work of Ralph Elliott at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and the professor's book *The Message of Genesis* published in 1961 by Broadman Press, the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention. Elliott's book had employed historical-critical assumptions, conclusions, and methodologies which led the professor to question the historicity of some of the narrative portions of Genesis.

If White's immediate target was the work of Elliott, his article was received enthusiastically by many Baptists in Waxahachie, Texas, Yazoo City, Mississippi, Soddy Daisy, Tennessee, Lizard Lick, North Carolina, and hundreds of other towns and its ramifications extended to feature the entire superstructure of Southern Baptist Convention denominational institutions and agencies as a seething noxious pot for which no healing pinch of flower from a prophet's hand had been forthcoming. This perception included two general features - a general

distrust for the pot itself (the bureaucracy) and the suspicion that someone had visited Deutschland and returned with a „Tubingen gourd“ and poisoned the life-giving gospel stew which the pot was supposed to be warming.

This grass-roots Baptist response was in stark contrast to the responses to White's concerns heard by a nineteen-year-old freshman Bible major at a state operated Baptist University in West Texas. Instead the reaction from the portion of the faculty that sallied forth to battle remembered by the writer of this paper was essentially as follows. First, educated and intelligent people virtually all had arrived at similar conclusions with Elliott. Second, in any event, if there were minor shifts away from orthodoxy, „the convention“, (read „the bureaucracy“) would make the necessary corrections. Third, the first two premises accepted, the average Southern Baptist should trust the system, remain silent, and give his tithe, a hefty portion of which would be passed along through the Cooperative Program lifeline to fund the bureaucracy.

I. REFORMATION AND CAPTIVITY

J. B. Gambrell, the „great commoner“, as he was known, served as President of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1917 to 1920. Sagely he had observed that „Baptists never ride a horse without a bridle.“ This was Gambrell's folksy way of focusing on the fierce autonomy of every entity in Southern Baptist life. Believers are priests before God who voluntarily associate with a church of similarly committed saints. Churches are autonomous, voluntarily associating with other churches in local associations, state fellowships (conventions) and a national fellowship (the Southern Baptist Convention). None of these fellowships has any organic connection to the other. In fact, Baptists fear „connectionalism“ the way medieval society feared the plague. Gambrell's observation was intended to caution any entity spawned by the churches that it was not to see itself as a wild stallion roaming the Red Desert Basin of Wyoming but rather a domestic quarter horse carefully bred to work for the churches. Agencies and institutions were bridled with a bit in their mouths and a saddle cinched tight. If they worked well and served the churches, they would eat well from the cooperative program trough. But Baptists would never mount up without the reins in their hands.

But the decades of the fifties and sixties were heady times for denominational bureaucrats. The successful campaign for a million more in fifty-four and other programmatic victories subtly shifted the focus of denominational life from substance to method. Denominational leaders developed skill at defusing

potentially explosive situations. „Tiptoe through the tithers“ became the silent refrain of denominational leaders. This was accomplished through statesmanship where possible, but buy-outs, intimidations, and humiliations were not uncommon. Like practiced matadors, denominational executives and institutional presidents deftly eluded every bullish charge and slaughtered not a few of the angry convention bovines in the process. They were, so it seemed to them – and to everyone else – invincible.

In 1967 Houston attorney Paul Pressler visited the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Pressler, an advocate of the value of education, had joined other concerned Houston business leaders in establishing a scholarship fund to assist conservative students who had need of support to continue in school. Interestingly, only New Orleans Seminary, presided over by conservative Leo Eddleman, showed any interest in assisting such students or receiving funds. Pressler came to the campus to interview prospective recipients. While on campus the two of us met and over coffee and beignets at the famous Cafe du Monde where we discussed the current state of affairs in the convention and its seminaries.

As the evening wore on, several convictions began to take shape which were repeatedly confirmed across the years. First, a large number of Southern Baptists were skeptical about many of the leaders in the denomination. Second, the ecclesiastical arrangement in the denomination made possible a popular movement to correct errant trajectories. Third, while many such efforts had been attempted, they had uniformly failed because they had been attempted either by little-known leaders or else by isolated individuals who knew little of the value of organization or political process. As such, they were novices playing in a league with experienced professionals whose political prowess, and when necessary ruthlessness, rendered such efforts useless. Fourth, the convention constituency was comprised of at least four groups which eventually began to be designated as movement conservatives, intuitive conservatives, denominationalists, and liberals.

The last group included a few classical liberals, but mostly its ranks consisted of neo-orthodox professors and leaders who had imbibed deeply at the wells of historical-critical scholarship. The denominationalists, to the extent that theology and hermeneutics mattered at all, were mostly conservative, but were above all advocates of the status quo. The denomination was overwhelmingly successful and it had been good to them. As they say in West Texas, „if it ain't broke, don't

fix it." Movement conservatives were those who understood at least some of the theological underpinnings of the denomination, grasped the relationship between political process and leadership in a free-church denomination, and believed the whole matter to be sufficiently important to merit suffering for a cause if necessary. Intuitive conservatives represented the largest numerical group. These were sweet believers who believed the best about everything. They were conservative doctrinally but not always sure why. And they tended to believe the best about their leaders, though doubts were growing.

The key was to organize the two groups of conservatives and to educate the intuitive conservatives in the methods available to effect change and the necessity for doing so. We estimated that the two groups of conservatives comprised about 80% of Southern Baptists with the intuitive conservatives being the considerably larger of the two groups. We parted that evening, having covenanted together to study the convention, its bylaws, and the prospects of actually effecting theological renewal in the denomination. Ten years later in the fall of 1978 a group of pastors and laymen from many states convened in the Airport Ramada Inn in Atlanta for a meeting that would launch „the controversy“ as it is now called.

Several agreements developed out of the Atlanta meeting. Conservatives, it was agreed, had a choice. Either they could stand by and watch a 14 million member, 38,000 church denomination be held captive by a coterie of slick religio-political „denomicrats“ or else conservatives could take their concerns to people in the pew and see if the programs and structures of the denomination could not be reclaimed for orthodoxy and evangelism. Most believed that if they did not act immediately, all hope to rescue the denomination from its slow and seemingly inevitable drift to the left would be lost. Already the denominational raft was swept along by the white water currents that propelled American Baptists, British Baptists, United Methodists, and a host of other denominations to a mooring far removed from the havens of their founders.

The participants in the airport meeting were to begin efforts to inform Baptists in their states concerning the state of affairs in the denomination, particularly in its seminaries. They would also attempt to secure commitments to attend the 1979 convention in Houston with a view to electing a conservative president. Because pastors were in sensitive positions in churches, it was agreed that their identity would be protected as long as possible. Pressler, by then a judge, and Patterson, president of The Criswell College at First Baptist Church of Dallas, would draw whatever public attack might come. Meanwhile, anyone with

prospect of becoming convention president had been deliberately excluded from the meeting and the loop for their own protection. The plan had been conceived.

II. REALISM AND RENEWAL

Judge Pressler always believed the plan would work. I doubted it seriously. My father had been Executive Director of the Texas Baptist Convention. I grew up in the denomination and was thoroughly familiar with its self-protecting tendencies. There were several reasons why many believed that this plan, like previous attempts, would fail. We did not, in the final analysis, attempt a reformation movement because we thought it would succeed but because we sincerely believed that we were right about the inerrancy of the Bible and because we did not want to tell our children and grandchildren that we had no courage to live by our convictions. Above all, the conviction that the continued drift of the Southern Baptist Convention could spell eternal doom for hundreds of thousands of people was the principal compelling motivation.

Why The Plan Would Not Work

An enormous bureaucracy consisting of hundreds of state and national denominational employees joined together with the faculties of fifty-six state Baptist colleges and universities and six seminaries to provide most of the denominational leadership. To be sure, not all were drifting left, but almost all were willing to look the other way in order to protect a good system which was kind to them. Many, no doubt, knew of problems but felt sincerely that things were not anything like as corrupt as the conservatives imagined.

These denominationalists were buttressed by an army of journalists who were the major means of communication to Baptists in each state through the official state papers. These were, almost to the last journalist, vigorous in their support of the status quo and often vitriolic in their opposition to the conservative renewal. Several hundred DOM's (Director of Missions) were ostensibly the servants of the churches in local associations but were actually for the most part the servants of the elites in state and national denominational leadership. Their assignment was twofold. First, they were on-site agents to report to denominational state houses concerning local participants in the resurgence. Further, they were the operatives most often used to intimidate local Baptist pastors who dared to buck the system. Add to all of this the apparent and real success of the world's

largest Protestant denomination, and it will be evident why many believed that there was small chance of arresting the leftward drift of the denomination.

Other factors making a conservative triumph unlikely included a history of conservative failures. The *Genesis Controversy* and the *Broadman Commentary Controversy* had reached resolutions, but never the thorough, clean sort of resolutions that would have established new policy. Furthermore, conservatives generally suffered from a paucity of political acumen and sophistication which made it almost impossible for them to outflank the experienced operatives in the higher levels of the denomination.

When the battle was finally joined, conservatives received epithets of opprobrium designed to prejudice the minds of the undecided against the conservatives. The pejorative use of „fundamentalist“ was a favorite with innuendoes that fundamentalism was the same whether Shiite or Southern Baptist. Charges of „Norrisism“ were employed in an effort to link conservatives with the terrifying ghost of J. Frank Norris, the colorful and often despised pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas. Conservatives were labeled as ignorant until debates went badly for moderates, at which time conservatives were alleged to be cold and calculating rationalists. With no official medium of reply, few conservatives could have nourished much hope of success.

Why The Plan Did Work

Astonishingly, the plan worked. How were the almost invincible odds overcome? For those who gave leadership to the conservative renewal the only answer is the intervention of God. This impression grew across the years as the most carefully developed conservative plans were often defeated or radically altered only for conservatives to discover that their „plan“ would have failed; whereas the actual development was the best possible scenario. Sincere opponents of what they called the „take-over“ movement would understandably resist and resent such an assessment. So we leave to eternity the final word. Rather it is possible to identify some of the factors that made it possible to overcome insurmountable odds and prevail in the controversy.

The first element in conservative success is the ecclesiastical arrangement of the convention. With no established hierarchy, no organic connectionalism, and the autonomy of each congregation, the entrenched „good ole boy“ system, in theory, could be overcome by a popular movement. In fact, the Southern Baptists who established the governance of convention affairs in 1845 and those who

refined these processes through the years created a system which made possible, though not easy, the reversal of denominational direction through a grassroots movement.

The system works as follows. Autonomous congregations who give to „convention causes“ elect up to ten „messengers“ to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. Those messengers elect a president of the Southern Baptist Convention who appoints a Committee on Committees which consists of two people, usually a pastor and a layperson, from each state. In turn, the Committee on Committees nominates a Committee on Boards which is subsequently elected by the Southern Baptist Convention in session. This committee also consists of two individuals from each state. The Committee on Boards then nominates a slate of nominees which the Southern Baptist Convention in turn elects to the eighteen agencies and boards of the Southern Baptist Convention.¹⁵ The genius of the system is that it leaves elected messengers in ultimate control while extending to the elected president considerable influence, if he makes his appointments carefully. Since even two-term trustees on the various boards serve no more than ten years, the election each year for ten years of a president committed to a renewal agenda, in theory, should redirect the entire system. This is exactly what happened, beginning with the 1979 election of Adrian Rogers. In the final analysis this ecclesiastical arrangement, allowing maximum freedom and autonomy to all, while not without its liabilities, is nevertheless what makes a populist revolution possible.¹⁶

The second reason for the conservative success was noted by Nancy Ammerman. These leaders were preachers of remarkable ability, able to stir crowds with their words, able to evoke response in their hearers. They had developed a following after years on the revival and Pastors Conference circuit and were

¹⁵ These are the Executive Committees of the Southern Baptist Convention, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Foreign Mission Board, the Home Mission Board, the Christian Life Commission, the Brotherhood Commission, The Annuity Board, the Sunday School Board, the Education Commission, the Stewardship Commission, the Historical Commission, the Radio and Television Commission, and the Southern Baptist Foundation.

¹⁶ Presidents elected by the Southern Baptist Convention committed to the general movement and to the inerrance of Scripture were: Adrian Rogers, 1979; Bailey Smith, 1980-81; James Draper, 1982-83; Charles Stanley, 1984-85; Adrian Rogers, 1986-87; Jerry Vines, 1988-89; Morris Chapman, 1990-91; Edwin Young, 1992-93; Jim Henry, 1994.

broadly admired as the leading pulpiteers of the day, even by people who later joined the moderate cause against them. Moderate leadership, on the other hand, had developed through the normal denominational channels of training and career, with the best among them moving into institutional roles. There, ironically, their very success under the old system proved a liability in their attempt to persuade Southern Baptists that the fundamentalists should be turned back. The pastors who took up the moderate fight were very good preachers, often with polished literary and rhetorical flair. But a Cecil Sherman was unlikely to move a crowd as an Adrian Rogers could. And Roy Honeycut's doctrinal expositions could not match the popular appeal of Jimmy Draper's. Many moderates were relatively remote from the majority of Baptists, having left behind the simple smalltown life. Both their positions as official denominational leaders and their remoteness from their roots diminished their ability to lead.¹⁷

The prowess of eloquent pulpiteers who thundered with almost prophetic authority was a profound impetus in the most pulpit-oriented denomination since the glory days of the Scotch Presbyterians. Criticisms of these pastors and evangelists were frequent, but the evident piety of their lives made the critics sound shrill and their allegations hollow.

A third reason for conservative success was the decision to focus primarily on one issue, the reliability of the Bible. There were a host of other concerns, but the issue of the nature of Scripture was chosen for two essential reasons. First, if the epistemological issue were resolved then the basis for resolving all other issues was in place. Second, most Baptists believed the Bible was every whit true. In some cases, the conviction was not a particularly thoughtful one, but Baptists in the pew almost always grimaced when someone found fault with the Bible. It was an issue that could be explained and understood. Refusal to be sidetracked to other issues frustrated the efforts of opponents but assisted Baptists in the pew in understanding the controversy.

Another major factor in the conservative revival was the presence of a clear goal accompanied by fervent prayer. The goal was far different from that imagined by the press, the opposition, and even some supporters. In a word, conservatives were concerned about the lost of this world - those who do not know Christ. Believing that heaven and hell are the only destinies and that everyone alive will

¹⁷ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 178.

spend eternity in one or the other, and further that Jesus and His atoning death provides the only way to avoid hell and inherit heaven, conservatives were determined to prevent the slide of Baptists into the labyrinth of formerly effective denominations whose evangelistic zeal and missionary fervor had been stripped by rising doubts about the veracity of Scripture. The goal then was to keep the denomination close to a reliable Bible for the sake of evangelistic and missionary outreach.

Often other agendas would suggest themselves. For example, sometimes the desire to win the contest would intrude into discussions. Charles Stanley would inevitably remind everyone, „Gentlemen, let me remind you that we do not have to win. All that we must do is to please God.“ That would end such detours. Throughout the years of the resurgence conservatives agonized for the lost and pled with God to grant conservative leaders purity of heart and motive. Frequent mistakes made by conservatives had to be forgiven. The conservative leadership, consisting of several hundred, generally practiced that forgiveness and hastened to the assistance of a wounded brother.

Another factor in conservative success was abandon to the task. Most conservative leadership had committed themselves to what they understood to be the Lordship of Christ on these issues and were fully prepared to sacrifice reputation, denominational future, and even relatively secure ministries, if necessary, in order to maintain truth as they understood it. Although some leadership of the moderates obviously had those same sincere commitments, though very different convictions, it proved difficult to create much sacrificial commitment among moderates. As Fink and Stark observe,

There comes a point, however, when a religious body has become so worldly that its rewards are few and lacking in plausibility. When hell is gone, can heaven's departure be far behind? Here people begin to switch away. Some are recruited by very high-tension movements. Others move into the newest and least secularized mainline firms. Still others abandon all religion. These principles hardly constitute a wheel of karma, but they do seem to reveal the primary feature of our religious history: the mainline bodies are always headed for the sideline.¹⁸

¹⁸ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1990* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 175.

The gradual emergence of a well-trained, impressively credentialed intelligentsia provided respectability for the conservative resurgence. People like Richard Land, D.Phil. Oxford; Timothy George, Ph.D. Harvard; Al Mohler, Ph.D. Southern Seminary; Ken Hemphill, Ph.D. Cambridge; Mark Coppenger, Ph.D. Vanderbilt; Phil Roberts, Ph.D. Amsterdam; Danny Akin, Ph.D. University of Texas; and not a few others, left the moderates unable to float their usual accusation that conservatives were untutored. The fact that moderates did not fare well in public debates and discussions exacerbated their problem.

Two major events of 1986 and 1987 contributed significantly to the ultimate moderate defeat. The first was the Glorietta Statement issued by the presidents of the six seminaries in 1986. Presidents Roy Lee Honeycut of Southern, Russell Dilday of Southwestern, Landrum Leavell of New Orleans, Randall Lolly of Southeastern, Bill Crews of Golden Gate, and Milton Ferguson of Midwestern, met at the Sunday School Board's National Assembly in Glorietta, New Mexico. They sensed that the only way to defuse the ticking bomb in Baptist life was to issue a reassuring statement. Among other things, the statement affirmed that the Bible contained no error „in any area of reality.“ The response was anything but what they anticipated. Moderate faculties in at least three seminaries descended upon their returning presidents with the charge that they had given away the store. Conservatives, wary because of years of „doublespeak“ were not much more enthusiastic, wondering aloud what this kind of language implied. In the end, however, conservatives took the statement at face value and held the presidents' feet to the fire.

The next year, 1987, brought to the Convention in St. Louis the final report of the Peace Committee which had been meeting regularly for two years. The committee was mandated by the 1985 Dallas Convention which saw a record 45,000 elected messengers almost create terminal gridlock in that city. On the committee was a mixture of moderate leaders including Cecil Sherman, Winfred Moore, William Hull, William Poe, and Dan Vestal; conservative leaders including Adrian Rogers, Ed Young, Jerry Vines, and Charles Stanley; and a fair number of non-aligned. The committee was chaired by the irenic, long-suffering, and fair-minded Charles Fuller, Pastor of First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Virginia.

The findings of the committee confirmed moderate charges of overt political activity within the convention, some of which had been intemperate and uncharitable on both sides. On the other hand, it also confirmed the presence of

liberalism on some seminary campuses. Recommendations included equity in news reporting, cessation of overt political activities and the following four observations about general Baptist theological concerns.

(1) Baptists generally wished to affirm the direct creation of mankind and the belief that Adam and Eve were real persons.

(2) Baptists generally accepted the stated authorship of all the books of the Bible.

(3) Baptists generally wished to affirm the reality of all the miracles mentioned in the Bible.

(4) Baptists generally believed that all the historical narratives written by Biblical authors are accurate and reliable.

At first, conservatives were not enthusiastic about the report. But when it became apparent that moderate leadership was completely morose about the report, conservatives supported the Peace Committee and the report was adopted by about a 92% vote of messengers at the St. Louis Convention. The four concerns listed above became a sort of accepted interpretation of the Baptist Faith and Message, the confession officially adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention. In any event, the approval of the Peace Committee report was, in essence, the coup de grace for convention liberals and moderates.

Some allege that the developing conservative mood in the country provided assistance to the conservative resurgence. I do not question this, although I believe that the mood swing in the American public was also greatly assisted by developments in the largest Protestant denomination in America. Further, I am convinced that it is possible to overstate the influence of the generally conservative mood in America as a factor in Baptist life. If external factors are measured, the work of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was at least an equal influence in Southern Baptist Life.

Finally, the response of the moderates cannot be underestimated as a factor ultimately providing success for the conservatives. At first, many moderates and denominationalists were over-confident, feeling that this conservative assault differed little from others previously squelched. In 1982, the improbable election of James Draper over retired Southern Seminary President and perennial winner of political squabbles Duke McCall established the undebatable evidence that this time conservatives had arrived at the joust with a sufficiently gifted and determined cast to redirect the Baptist kingdom. By the late eighties moderate rhetoric and accusation seemed to many to be much too vitriolic and uncharitable.

Meanwhile, conservatives talked about Jesus and the Word of God, attempted to muzzle their more acid-tongued associates, and confined their attacks to an almost endless litany of quotations from the pens of Southern Baptist Convention moderates and liberals. But most important were the publications of moderates in which they confirmed the concerns and fears of the conservatives.

The first of these was the 1985 publication *Called To Preach, Condemned To Survive* by Clayton Sullivan. This fascinating personal documentary chronicled the pilgrimage of Sullivan from zealous Southern Baptist evangelist to frustrated pastor to agnostic professor, a sojourn which he credited largely to Southern Seminary. As Sullivan himself put it,

As a seminarian, still in my mid-twenties, I found myself baffled. I was more certain of what I *didn't* believe than I was of what I *did* believe. Southern Seminary had destroyed my biblical fundamentalism but it had not given me anything viable to take its place. That's the weakness of the historical-critical method: its power to destroy exceeds its power to construct. The historical-critical method can give you facts and hypotheses but it cannot give you a vision.¹⁹

As a neophyte minister in Tylertown, I experienced reality shock. My seminary training, for which I am still appreciative, had not prepared me for life's rawness and pain. Indeed, I began to think that much of what I had learned in Louisville was not relevant to the pastorate. I had moved back to Mississippi able – at the drop of a hat – to discuss „the Persian background of Deutero-Isaiah.“ I knew fourteen reasons why the last chapter of Romans was a misplaced letter of Paul to the church in Ephesus. But when you are talking to a woman whose husband has been killed in a head – on collision with a logging truck, issues like the authorship of Deutero-Isaiah are beside the point.²⁰

In 1987, Robison James edited *The Unfettered Word*, an attempt to portray the moderate position as one that liberated the Bible from „fundamentalist“ shackles. Unfortunately for James, positions advocated in the book merely demonstrated the truth of conservative allegations. This was followed in 1990 by a Rutgers University Press publication of Nancy Ammerman's *Baptist Battles*. Appendix A is a copy of my review of the book, which appeared in *Christianity Today*. Ammer-

¹⁹ Clayton Sullivan, *Called To Preach Condemned To Survive* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1985), 79.

²⁰ Sullivan, *Called To Preach*, 117.

man, a thoroughgoing, self-confessed moderate, is a thorough and fair-minded sociologist. In many ways this is still the best study of the conflict to date. She confirmed most conservative claims even though she assigned reasons and motives unacceptable to most conservatives.

Also in 1990, Bill Leonard published a short history of the "fragmentation" of the Southern Baptist Convention called *God's Last and Only Hope*. Critical of conservatives, it, nevertheless, inadvertently underscored their concerns. In 1992 *Beyond the Impasse?* appeared, edited by Robison James and David Dockery. It was the result of three debates, two public and one private between four moderates and four conservatives. Moderates were Robison James, Molly Truman Marshall, Walter Harrelson, and John Newport. Conservatives were David Dockery, Al Mohler, Timothy George, and Paige Patterson. In many ways this exchange is the best analysis of the real theological issues in the controversy. Initially, the title of the book was to appear without the question mark at the end. Three debates convinced everyone that the differences were substantive and created a chasm too vast for human engineers to bridge.

Also in 1992 appeared a devastating volume by Ralph Elliott entitled *The Genesis Controversy*. Elliott vented his fury not only toward conservatives but also toward moderates for what he called „doubletalk.“

„Doublespeak“ has become an insidious disease within Southern Baptist life. Through the years, the program at Southern Seminary has acquainted students with the best in current research in the given fields of study. Often, however, this was done with an eye and ear for the „gallery“ and how much the „church trade“ would bear. Professors and students learn to couch their beliefs in acceptable terminology and in holy jargon so that although thinking one thing, the speaker calculated so as to cause the hearer to affirm something else. When I taught at Southern Seminary years ago, we often said to one professor who was particularly gifted at this „doublespeak“ game, that if the Southern Baptist Convention should split, he would be the first speaker at both new conventions. It is my personal belief that this doublespeak across the years has contributed to a lack of nurture and growth and is a major factor in the present problems. The basic question is one of integrity rather than the gift of communication.²¹

Elliott's startling admission that „doublespeak“ was common at Southern Baptist Convention seminaries was astonishing to conservatives only because

²¹ Ralph H. Elliott, *The Genesis Controversy* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1992), 33-34.

Elliott was so forthcoming. Furthermore, the last sentence was precisely the issue. It was, to conservatives, an issue of integrity. Most conservatives actually expressed a degree of admiration for Elliott's candor.

Coupled with crucial conservative publications such as *Baptists and the Bible* by Russ Bush and Tom Nettles, conservatives had more than sufficient evidence to sustain their concerns. A myriad of other factors such as frequent Bible conferences, the work and report of the Peace Committee in 1987 and the Glorietta Statement by the six seminary presidents issued in 1986, all had substantive impact in the success of the conservative renewal. Publication of *The Southern Baptist Advocate* was for several years the only effective communication to conservative Southern Baptists. In retrospect, I cannot help but observe that it now seems to me that moderate efforts to resist conservative gains contributed as much to the success of the movement as the conservatives themselves.

III. REDIRECTION AND HOPE

What are the results? At the end of sixteen years of conservative advance, new executives committed to the resurgence and to the inerrancy of Scripture have been installed in nine of the agencies and institutions. Others will be placed in the next twenty-four months. Almost every Board of Trustees is decidedly conservative. Giving reached all time highs this year and four of the six seminaries showed growth this fall. The mission programs and offerings continue to grow with more than 4,000 career missionaries now under appointment in distant lands, with personnel in 180 plus countries. Dozens of new evangelically minded professors have taken their places on seminary faculties. A new commentary, *The New American Commentary*, was authorized by the Sunday School Board to be written only by those who could sign the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*. Production is about one-third completed.

Moderates have formed a fellowship within the convention called the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Wake Forest, Mercer, Stetson, Furman, Baylor, Richmond, and Samford universities have jumped the traces and declared their independence from Baptist state conventions. State conventions in Texas, North Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri are continuing trouble pockets. Whether the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship will secede from the convention and how a few state conventions settle issues remains to be seen. But no one seriously expects even a schism to deprive the Southern Baptist convention of more than a thousand of its 38,000 congregations.

A word needs to be said about two other developments. In the early days of the controversy, conservatives pointed to the unassailable fact that there was no parity in the six seminary faculties. Some had no professing inerrantists on board, and none had more than a few. Moderates later discovered that conservatives did not desire „parity“ but rather believed that every professor in Southern Baptist Convention seminaries should be an inerrantist. Some moderates felt that they had been deceived. However, conservatives never asked for parity. They simply noted that moderates, who claimed to be inclusive, in fact had been exclusive and doctrinaire. They further expressed the conviction that the two confessions which governed all six seminaries are, in reality, inerrantist documents.

This observation leads to the second misapprehension. Moderates accused conservatives of wanting to diminish seminaries to be „indoctrination centers“ and Bible Institutes. Conservatives, however, stressed the distinction between what is „taught“ on the one hand and what is „advocated“ on the other. For any education to be adequate preparation for ministry, all conceivable options must be accurately and fairly presented. In addition, however, a supporting constituency has every right to expect that the professors in the seminaries advocate historic Baptist positions.

There are regrets. Although conservatives remained true to their word, pledging not to dismiss hundreds from employment (only four have been forced from denominational posts), many – both conservatives and moderates – have suffered hurt, sorrow, and job displacement. Friendships and sometimes family relationships have been marred. Churches have sometimes been damaged even though local church life has proceeded for the most part above the fray and often remains largely oblivious to it. No one seriously confessing the name of Jesus can rejoice in these sorrows. I confess that I often second guess my own actions and agonize over those who have suffered on both sides, including my own family. In addition, there is the realisation that a new generation that knew not Criswell, Lee, Rogers, or Pressler, will now rise to leadership. It is entirely possible, though I think unlikely, that they will squander the gains made. Certainly it remains painfully true that denominations and institutions almost always drift left and seldom, if ever, return.

Would I do it again? Before you can say Mephibosheth! I have children and hopefully someday grandchildren. They deserve a chance to be exposed to orthodox theology, to read a Bible they can trust, and to know Jesus who can save

them. Furthermore, I cannot relieve my mind of the vision of men and women filing hopelessly across the precipice of eternity and into the chasm of hell. I cannot support, or ultimately leave unchallenged, any doctrine or approach that engenders doubt rather than faith. The potential cost is simply too great!

Public images and portrayals notwithstanding, most conservatives do not enjoy controversy. Like everyone else, they wish to be loved and appreciated by everyone. But our understanding of the history of the impact of the uncritical use of critical methodologies upon the churches and their missions have led us to believe that faithfulness to Christ and to the revelation of God in Scripture is more important than human approval. Without belligerence and in painful awareness of our own inadequacies, we, nonetheless, plant our standard here.

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Completing the Reformation: The Challenge of Romans 1:16-17 for Romanian Evangelicals

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The foreigner traveling in Romania is sure to be impressed by the solid construction of many of its public buildings. Concrete, steel, marble, everything has the feel of solidity and permanence. But is the gospel-preaching²² church in Romania, the people of God who know and live the truth of Jesus, as solid as their buildings? Will evangelical Christians prove to be a permanent light in their surroundings? Or, having made a good beginning, will they fade into ritual ineffectiveness? Will they be silenced by an indifferent and unresponsive cultural setting? Will the current generation of eager young students training for Christian witness to Romanian society in education, in literature, in music, in social work, in Christian ministry perhaps manage to work out their own salvation (cf. Philippians 2:12) but never see the light of Christ dawn around them on a large scale?

Societal renewal is God's business. It cannot be ordered up like a Big Mac in one of those new McDonald's springing up in Romania's larger cities. But Christians can and must get ready for such renewal. They can be poised to be tools in God's hands if he grants an outpouring of His Spirit. And how they appropriate the truth of Romans 1:16-17 is a key test of their readiness to serve God, to serve Christ, to serve the gospel, as they are called to do.

Romans 1:16-17: Critical Verses

Let us remind ourselves of what these verses say and then ask: What is so critical about their message?

²² Here and throughout this chapter, reference is made to „the gospel.“ By this is meant the good news of Jesus Christ's coming, life, and atoning death, followed by his resurrection, ascension, and (someday) return, for the salvation of all who embrace that good news by faith.

¹⁶I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: „The righteous will live by faith.“

Several observations and applications are obvious.

1) Regarding verse 16, Paul was sold out to the gospel as all Christ's followers ought to be.

2) Also in verse 16, we are reminded that the gospel was powerful in Paul's day to save as it is still powerful now. 3) Also in verse 16, we see that the gospel has a universal dimension. It is on offer to all who will receive it. Here is an important point of contact between Pauline and Johannine theology. Paul's words „for the Jew“ and „for the Gentile“ are echoed in John's statement, „To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God“ (John 1:12). 4) Regarding verse 17, we note that the gospel is available *through faith*. God's saving favor is not accessed through ethnicity, as some of the Jews of Jesus' day supposed.²³ It does not come through *church membership*, as modern Christians around the world sometimes seem to assume. Many feel that this is a factor in the case of Romania's 85% "Christian" (Orthodox) population. It saving power is not unleashed through *sufficient religio-moral performance*, as some Pharisees in Paul's era taught.²⁴ The gospel's saving power does not come through *secret spiritual knowledge*, as the Gnostics held.²⁵ It does not come by the mystically altered consciousness held dear by antiquity's *mystery cults*. Gospel blessing does not come by *fleshly ascetic self-denial*, a belief that Paul seems to refute in the latter half of Colossians 2.²⁶ It does not come by *libertine self-indulgence*, a view that writings like Jude and 2 Peter seem to oppose.

No! The gospel is *by faith*, according to Romans 1:16-17. It is by trust, by acceptance, by acknowledgment and wholehearted personal reception, of the truth presented in e.g. Romans 5:8: „God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.“ Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6); the Son of Man came to call sinners, not those who thought they

²³ J. Julius Scott, Jr., *Customs and Controversies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 124f.

²⁴ Scott, *Customs*, 124.

²⁵ For extensive recent bibliography see Albert A. Bell, Jr., *A Guide to the New Testament World* (Scottsdale, PA/Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1994), 159-161.

²⁶ On the Colossians situation, which may have involved both mystery cults and asceticism, see Clinton Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

were already righteous (Matthew 9:13). What a grand and glorious truth: God did for us what we could not do for ourselves; as we repent and trust, he transfers us from the domain of darkness to his eternal kingdom of light (cf. Colossians 1:13)!

Romans 1:16-17: Beyond (Catholic) „Impartation“ and (Protestant) Passivity

All of this may seem obvious. But what is not so obvious about Romans 1:16-17? Not so obvious is the meaning of *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ*, common translated „the righteousness of God.“ The interpretation of this term since New Testament times is a complex story. Historically, Roman Catholics have understood *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* in terms of *imparted* righteousness. As the bread and wine are mystically transformed in the Mass, bringing redemption to those who partake of what the Church with its store of blessing distributes, so our lives and works become means of our salvation. Our religious efforts combine with God’s grace to result in our salvation. We save ourselves in part by our good works. The term for this is *synergism*, man doing his part and God doing his, the two parties together arriving at a redemptive goal. In this view, faith is not trust in the gospel as one’s only hope for forgiveness of sin and eternal life. It is rather a „theological virtue“; it is „infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of *meriting eternal life*.“²⁷ The result of faith, *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* understood as „the justification that God infuses into the believer,“ is conferred by baptism.²⁸ At the Reformation, Roman Catholics like Martin Luther and later John Calvin revolted (thus becoming no longer Roman Catholics) against this high view of human works, even works done with religious sentiment and in obedience to God’s commands. The Reformers understood *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* differently. They saw it not as *imparted* but *imputed*. It is *reckoned* to sinners, as Abraham’s faith was accounted to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6; cf. Rom 4:3ff.). This was a marvelous breakthrough... but it had a serious weakness. As Adolf Schlatter has argued, the Reformers’ formulation did not go far enough.²⁹ It correctly repudiated the merit theology of medieval Roman

²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1994), 1814 (446), emphasis added. This paragraph in today’s authoritative Catechism contains the single reference to Romans 1:17 in the whole volume.

²⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1266 (322).

²⁹ This discussion and quotes in the next few paragraphs are drawn from Adolf Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, Siegfried Schatzmann trans. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), especially

Catholicism. But it failed to move far enough in the positive direction of full-orbed love for God, a love that expressed itself in tangible and joyful obedience.³⁰ The issue centered, Schlatter was convinced, on the meaning of *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* in Romans 1:17. What was and is that "righteousness"?

Schlatter claims that the Reformers' understanding of the verse was controlled by the burning question, since we are hopelessly lost sinners and need righteousness, what kind of righteousness does the gospel give? Their answer: an imputed one, one that will grant to sinners the mercy that nothing else can. This answer is not wrong, Schlatter emphasizes. But it does not go far enough. „The righteousness of God“ cannot be reduced to „the mercy of God.“ If it is, at least three problems result. First, the sinner's need defines the gospel's saving ministry. But this is to return to the very man-centered orientation from which the Reformers were trying to break away. The assertion that God's righteousness is, in the end, simply his mercy „is still closely related to synergism [the medieval doctrine that salvation is part God's work and part man's], for God's relationship to us now arises from what the person is, not from his merit but from his sin and his misery.“ But this formulation does not begin to do justice to Paul's celebrated expression *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ*. Schlatter points out: „For Paul God's work arises from God's work,“ not from human necessity or with human welfare exclusively in view. The gospel ushers in the powerful *positive* presence of God's kingdom-building activity, by his own hand and through his gospel-activated people, not merely the treasured but *limited* effect of conferring mercy on needy souls.

Second, the stress on man's need and what the gospel provided to meet that need had a tragic practical outcome. „Thus in the churches of the Reformation there quickly emerged another righteousness of the individual, not the righteousness of one who works [like the righteous heavenly Father works] but that one who knows, one 'who believes all the articles of the faith.'“ Head knowledge, mere doctrinal assent, substituted for gospel reception and life transformation. Liturgical Protestantism replaced liturgical Catholicism. One creedalism, too often moribund, was replaced by a more theologically correct creedalism. A further downward step occurred when Protestants in effect equated „righteousness“ with „bourgeois virtue,“ or with the „heroic feat“ of ascetic or intensely inward-focused religiosity. The living, active, transformative

22-23.

³⁰ Cf. Robert Yarbrough, "Biblical Authority and the Ethics Gap: The Call to Faith in James and Schlatter," *Presbyterian* 22/2 (1996): 67-75.

force of God's in-breaking kingdom, „the righteousness of God,“ was short-circuited, its power greatly reduced within religious systems sometimes not much superior to those that Luther and Calvin repudiated. Third, the Reformers' explication of *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* led to a passive interpretation of it. *Δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* came to denote theoretical assent to the anti-Catholic teaching that sinners can do nothing to earn their salvation. That is true enough. But does this convey the full weight of Paul's *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* in Romans 1:16-17? Is God's righteousness exhausted in the act of imputing Christ's merit to sinners and holding them back from an otherwise inevitable hell? Is being a Christian mainly rehearsing the truth that we are just sinners saved by grace, with no positive contribution to make to God's kingdom activity except to keep on proclaiming the static glory of being passive recipients of divine mercy? Schlatter rightly states:

It is false to present [*δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ*] only as a thought of God, a thought that does not manifest itself, that brings forth no action, that does not show itself in history. Rather, the divine will that justifies us does all these things by granting Christ to us in such a way that our encounter with him determines the form and the course of our life.³¹

Where a passive view of „righteousness of God“ prevailed, there was the danger of falling prey to practical antinomianism, the head affirming God's commands but the body languishing untransformed in fleshly living patterns. Seen in that light, Roman Catholic rejection of Protestant overemphasis on „faith alone“ had relative justification.

Positive Implications of *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ*

Being a recipient of God's mercy is, of course, no small thing. But Paul's *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* challenges Romanian evangelicals to go beyond the limited understandings of it in the history of the Western churches. Since Romania in recent decades has been influenced by (especially Protestant) groups from Western Europe and North America, they are exposed to the faulty understanding and appropriation of *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* outlined above. For an imbalanced Reformation stress on God's mercy is stress still very much a part of Western

³¹ Adolf Schlatter, *Das christliche Dogma* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 21923), 439.

evangelical belief in modern times. This helps explain, for example, why so many sermons by Western preachers deal solely with how to be saved, how to receive God's mercy. Of course evangelism is important. But what happens after conversion? This is important, too, and too often receives short shrift in evangelical preaching. *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* implies something crucial for the regenerate individual, something beyond the passive reception of saving mercy, something positive and active and calling for aggressive appropriation. It can be stated as follows.

God's righteousness (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) moves those who embrace the gospel beyond the acceptance of God's mercy in Christ to transformation by his grace and embodiment of his love. Receiving the gospel does not mean cowering in timid repetition that I am nothing and Christ is everything. That is an important truth (cf. John 3:30); but while God's conviction of your sin will drive you to the dust, it does not leave you there. Knowing God through the gospel goes beyond the anguished cry for mercy! It extends to the limits of what God's powerful grace can do in the life of God's people in the whole universe over which Christ is Lord.

What, specifically, might that mean for the Christians of Romania? At least five things come to mind.

1) For preaching, *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* means the offer of something more than personal benefit. It means more than the meeting of „my needs.“ It does not promise help with realisation of sinners' fleshly ideals or life goals. Rather, the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* in the gospel invites hearers to build God's kingdom, not their own. It invites sinners into a community (*κοινωνία*; fellowship) of peace (Hebrew *Miv*). Christ's whole purpose in coming was „to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace“ (Ephesians 2:15). People come together, whites and blacks, Americans and Europeans, Romanians and Hungarians, rich and not-so-rich, men and women, young and old. Salvation is profoundly a corporate involvement and commitment and not merely a personal experience. Western individualism, often rampant in Western evangelical churches, has lost sight of this truth. Romanian evangelicals are exposed to this error both because of Western influence and because of the universal tendency of people to make themselves rather than God the center of their religion.³² Paul's formulation of *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* invites evangelicals to recover the truth that their meat and

³² Documenting this phenomenon in Korea, and in segments of Korean religion, is Stephen W. Linton, *Patterns in Korean Civil Religions* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1989).

drink is to do the will of the one who saved them *alongside and for the sake of others*, not to enlist the power of their Savior for their own personal life goals. It is to extend God's interests and the shared goals of other believers, not to promote oneself.

2) For theology, this means missions. Romanian evangelicals have their hands full already, of course, with a challenging domestic setting. It will take decades for the damage of Communism to be undone and reversed. Political and economic difficulties plague the country and dominate discussion. But precisely in this setting one must recall that things were no different, no more stable, no more assured, for the first century Christians. And the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* sent them forth into the harvest that God had prepared for them. If the early Christians had delayed all-out missions efforts until they had overcome all local difficulties, the gospel would never have left Judea and Galilee. The longed-for social stability never came. All theological questions were never resolved. Sufficient means for everyday life, let alone for mission thrusts to foreign lands, were seldom plentiful. And yet churches like the one at Antioch were faithful to Jesus' desire that his people proclaim the gospel not only near but far away. The *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* is centrifugal. It is mobile. It is expansionist. It is confrontational. Churches who live for Christ, it has been said, live for missions. Are Romanian evangelical churches intent on missions, not just to other Romanians but to the broader world? Until they are, an important dimension of the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* is being overlooked. Notice the close relationship between „righteousness“ and God's promise to save the nations, to establish and extend the Christian mission in the Book of Isaiah:

Is. 42:6 – „I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles...“

Is. 51:5 – „My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm.“

Is. 61:11 – „For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.“

Δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ means many things, but foremost among them is a divine

mandate to show forth a „light to the nations.“ Those touched by *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* are therefore a people of God zealous to proclaim and extend the sovereign sway of the gospel’s good news.

3) For ethics, *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* means reaffirming Jesus’ teaching within evangelical theology and personal and social ethics. It is often observed that liberal Protestants preach social action based on Jesus’ teaching and his example. Evangelicals, on the other hand, gravitate toward Paul in their preaching, with occasional references to gospel gems like John 3:16 and with stress on faith, on belief, on doctrinally sound ideas, rather than on practical obedience and tangible care for others. But if *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* is not simply mercy (see above) but active outliving of God’s holy love, then the gospel in the New Testament is a lot bigger and richer than glib repetition of John 3:16. It is Jesus’ command in Matthew 28:19-20 (see previous section). It is Jesus’ invitation to take up the cross. It is Jesus’ insistence that a life devoid of works is also a life without faith. *Δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* results in whole-life response, not theoretical religious talk. It is a challenge to all in the church, the evangelical church, who do little besides attend church services and who leave costly obedience to their ministers or to a highly motivated minority of serious-minded believers in their local congregation.

4) For practical living, *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* means not merely affirming but embodying the tangible outworking of the gospel: *ἀγάπη* (love). Knowing God means being freed to love, to give, to care, to find outside oneself the *raison d’être* for one’s life on earth and in the church. The evangelical’s problem is typically not insufficient true doctrine; it is anemic fervor in the area of love for God. *Δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* is not finished with us until the fruit of God’s sacrificial care for others, his love, begins to characterize his people’s lives before him, toward others, and even towards non-believers. If you love those who love you, what credit is that? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same (Matthew 5:46)?

5) For ministry, *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* is a motivation to return to Christ-centered preaching growing out of careful prayer and scrutiny of Holy Scripture. Too much evangelical preaching is moralism, telling people what to do. „When the focus of a sermon becomes... moralistic... then listeners will most likely assume that they can secure their relationship with God through proper behaviors.“³³ Too much is merely *motivational*, especially by appealing to listeners’ guilt.³⁴ Too much

³³ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 282f.

³⁴ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 208.

is *therapeutic*. An evangelical preacher in America recently began a sermon on Colossians 1:15 ff., one of the loftiest Christological statements in all the Bible, by reading it out loud and then immediately exclaiming: „This is about your problems!“ Too much evangelical preaching is *political*, as if the hope of the church lay primarily in the state or in education or in the economy. Too much is *partisan*, as if Christians' biggest enemy were forces outside their own circles rather than their own stubborn hearts. Too much is pure *intellectualism*, the appeal to mere ideas and doctrines and systems, and too much is *emotionalism*, evoking feelings in a manipulative way to win influence or precipitate decisions. When such emphases are over-stressed, Christ is no longer being preached. But this is the church's major task. This is the primary corollary of *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* applied to the pulpit ministry. The grace of God that sent Christ, that allowed him to be crucified, and that raised him, this completed work of Christ, this gospel, is the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* epitomized. That is exactly why Paul mentions it where he does in Romans 1. „For in it, in the gospel, the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ*, is revealed...“ (Rom 1:17). Romanian Christians face many challenges, and the Word of God has something to say about all of them. But the basis for every message, the core from which all other truths and applications of Scripture are generated, is the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* that the gospel manifests. Understanding and increasing sophistication regarding this truth is utterly essential for Romania's gospel ministers as they seek to shepherd the flock with which God has entrusted them.

Δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ: The Way Forward

Gospel believers in Romania can do better with the gospel, that mighty word that convicts and saves, than reduce it to a tranquilizer to quiet fears of hell. For the gospel rightly lived and preached reveals the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ*. What is God's righteousness like? Like God himself it is living and burning and active. It is dynamic, moving toward a goal and reaching out and changing all it touches. It takes broken hopeless lives, or spiritually indifferent ones, and fills hearts with a new song, eyes with a new vision, lives with a holy purpose, mouths with a heavenly message. It fills souls with a Christ-like love, and it moves bodies to express that love. It transforms not only persons but a people!

Romans 1:16-17 challenges Romanian evangelicals not be content to emulate Western Protestantism. On Judgment Day God will not ask Romanians if they measured up to the standards of Western Baptists or other denominations and

institutions in Great Britain or North America, currently sources of so much aid to the Romanian churches. The Lord will rather ask for an accounting of what was entrusted to them. It is certainly commendable and necessary that Romanian evangelicals challenge the deadness of the Orthodox Church, but *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ*, we have seen, is more than doctrinal correctness, even personal saving doctrinal correctness. It involves more than opposing Orthodox liturgy and its sometimes minimal fruits. Is the power of God unto salvation fulfilled simply in having right („evangelical“ or „Baptist“ or „Pentecostal“) beliefs? Does the gospel which reveals the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* not tantalize us with the possibility of a new plateau of awareness, of devotion, of intensity, of fruitfulness, of effectiveness? Note: *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* does not first of all call Christians to do these things, or indeed to do anything. It rather calls for reflection on what *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* ought to look like unleashed in the distinctly Romanian setting.

One thing is certain. Contrary to a stereotype of evangelical preaching, *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* is not mere assent to a proposition that if I nod a theoretical yes to a gospel „invitation,“ my Christian mission has been fulfilled.³⁵ Rather, the righteousness of God surely looks like expansion of the kingdom of God that Jesus announced, of the good work that God has already begun in Romania in places like Emanuel Bible Institute (now Emanuel University) in Romania, a work of worship, of study, of practical service, of planning for social transformation, of giving of ourselves today for the realisation of kingdom ideals tomorrow, or whenever it pleases God to bring about renewal on a larger scale than any of us has yet seen.

God's righteousness (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) moves those who embrace the gospel beyond the acceptance of God's mercy in Christ to transformation by his grace and embodiment of his love. The *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* that comes through the gospel can propel Romanian evangelicals forward to the glory of the one who loved us and called us to abide in his love. But this calls for Christians to crave not just God's mercy but his righteousness. In this way, building upon but transcending important Reformation milestones, they can perfect the inheritance of academic learning, biblical faith, and transformed lives which as evangelical Christians they have received.³⁶

³⁵ The question here is not whether „faith alone“ saves. Of course it does. The question is whether the passive assent caricatured above is actually “faith.”

³⁶ This article is a revised version of a sermon preached at Institutul Biblic Emanuel din Oradea (now Universitatea Emanuel din Oradea), on 5 November 1997. For the most part the rhetorical features of oral presentation have been retained in this expanded written version.

The Forgotten Trinity

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I. Remembering and forgetting

"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right arm forget her cunning." The psalmist was making a fairly extreme promise or request, for, disabling injury and great age apart, right hands do not forget their cunning. A musical skill once mastered is never forgotten, even though practice may be needed to restore it after periods of neglect. Something truly learned becomes part of us, and never, in one respect, forgotten. But it can be forgotten in other respects, in the sense that it can be crowded out of our conscious minds by other preoccupations and concerns. The title, *The Forgotten Trinity* was chosen by the British Council of Churches' Study Commission largely for reasons of what now, and probably then, would be called marketing: a way of attracting public attention so that the reports were read – or at least, bought. But, unlike many marketing ploys, it contained a good deal of truth. In what way?

My allusion to the impossibility of forgetting a skill was designed to make the point that there are different ways of forgetting. We may never forget the skill of choosing, writing and posting greeting cards, but may need to enter little Mary's birthday on a calendar if we are to remember to employ that skill when it is needed. So it is that the Western Church has each year a Sunday devoted to the Trinity, lest we forget. The Eastern Orthodox Churches do not, because their worship and thought is so steeped in trinitarian categories that they do not need to be reminded. Have we in the West of Christendom effectively forgotten the Trinity, so that we need to be reminded? Or is the trinitarian teaching like a skill, which is there but needs to be revived from time to time? Or – worse – does the difference between East and West suggest that we never really acquired it, and put the thing on a calendar once a year to awaken otherwise forgetful preachers into the realisation that this one Sunday in the year at least they must try to make

sense of a sleeping dog they would rather leave alone? For Eastern Orthodoxy, I think it is true to say that their trinitarian belief is like the skill of a musician. It so permeates their being that they worship and think trinitarianly without, so to speak, having to think about it – rather in the way that musicians don't think about what their hands are doing; their skills are so written into their bodies that they need only concentrate on the music and what it means. The point underlying the illustration is this. Theological teaching is not an end in itself, but a means of ensuring that it is the real God we worship, the real God before whom we live. That is the point of the doctrine of the Trinity above all, as we shall see.

What of the West? Here the story becomes complicated. On the face of it, we once had the same way of living in the Trinity, but have lost it, through a number of influences. Our hymns and blessings are steeped in trinitarian imagery: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit..." – that ascription of glory to God wonderfully described by Erik Routley as the triumph song of the redeemed. Go to the National Gallery, or to places like Florence, and you will see that once upon a time we were a deeply trinitarian culture: a long tradition of representations of the triune God shows at least that. But partly as the result of rationalist criticism, that has come under attack. When the doctrines of the church came under fire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was the Trinity that was most savagely attacked as the most absurd and pointless of the many apparently untenable beliefs of the Christian tradition. Reason, so it was claimed, taught that there was only one God; any elaboration on that was simply priestcraft and superstition. That is surely one reason why we have tended to forget, or have become rather embarrassed by the whole thing. Something of those attacks has entered the bloodstream of even the orthodox believer, so that we feel that there must be something in the critiques.

Yet there is a case to be made that things have never been as they ought, that the West never had its piety and worship deeply enough embedded in trinitarian categories. The Study Commission was often given reason to wonder whether, although trinitarian belief has always been a yardstick of authentic Christian belief, the church had ever really attained the crucial grade 5 at which things are supposed to stick. A number of theologians have commented on various aspects of the problem. Karl Rahner asserted that in Roman Catholic manuals of dogmatics interest was effectively so concentrated on the one God that everything we need to know about God seemed to have been decided before the reader comes to the Son and the Spirit. For practical piety, he said, the Trinity had become

irrelevant. One test is this: Do you think that you know to all intents and purposes who and what kind of being God is quite independently of what you learn in trinitarian teaching? In many cases, that seems to be the case, particularly in the deeply entrenched tendency to begin with philosophical definitions of God. The threeness seems somehow additional, merely a Christian addition to a generally accepted doctrine of God.³⁷

But this is not simply a matter of theological teaching, important though that is. The worship of the church is first of all praise of the God who has created and redeems us; but it is also the way we learn a kind of skill, the art of living. And the same question can be asked again. Is the worship of the church truly informed by trinitarian categories? Do we think it matters? The Study Commission was taught some interesting truths here, particularly by the inestimable privilege of having some fine Eastern Orthodox theologians sharing in our thinking. They enabled us to notice that ASB rarely finds a place for the Holy Spirit in the wording of its prayers, while in its great predecessor, the *Book of Common Prayer*, that handbook of so much English piety, the Holy Spirit scarcely makes an appearance in the collects. Similarly, Western orders for the Lord's Supper have usually omitted the epiclesis, the prayer to the Spirit asking him to bless the bread and wine and the people. If the Spirit is absent from the structuring of the worship, can a rite be truly trinitarian? Is the reason that the Trinity has been effectively forgotten is that it has never really entered the bloodstream of the church, so that there is *too little* to remember? And does this make a difference to that most important of all human skills, the art of living before God, with our neighbour and in the created world?

The suggestion behind all this is that a truly trinitarian framework for our worship and life has rarely been found in the life of the Western Christian church; that we have forgotten because we never really remembered. The result is that on the face of it, and it is the suspicion of so many Christians, professional and lay alike, the doctrine of the Trinity is a piece of abstract theorising, perhaps necessary as a test of Christian belief, but of little further interest. All that stuff about three in one and one in three tends to leave us cold. Does it not turn God into a mathematical conundrum? All those dreary attempts to show that three can really be one, all those unconvincing illustrations from the natural world or the workings of the mind: do they really contribute to the learning of that skill in

³⁷ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, translated by Joseph Donceel (London: Burns and Oates, 1970).

living that is promised for those who follow the crucified Lord? Can we not get on quite adequately without this piece of theoretical baggage? That defines our problem: the relation between theology and life.

II. Thinking trinitarianly

That this is not a matter of mathematics is shown by the way the doctrine of the Trinity developed. The New Testament shows quite clearly that the first Christians, who were almost universally Jews also, had no difficulty in believing that the God they worshipped through Jesus was the same as the one they had always known. They did not find a new God, but a new and living way of knowing him. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, for those who had been given eyes to see, their Christ was everywhere present in the pages of what we now call the Old Testament, as was the Spirit of God who brought them to the Father through Jesus. The threefold patterning of their relation to God was nowhere more clearly explained than in the Fourth Gospel, though it is to be found elsewhere also. For this writer, as for others, a renewed relationship to God is given to sinful men and women through the action – mediation – of Jesus, the eternal creating Word of God become flesh. After the end of his earthly career, this redeemed relationship is realised by the Spirit, who relates people to the Father through Jesus, now ascended to be eternally with the Father. New Testament trinitarianism is about life; that is to say, about access to God through Jesus Christ and in the Spirit. Through Christ, „we both“ – Jew and Gentile – „have access to the Father by one Spirit“ (Eph. 2:18). One of the things I want to suggest in this lecture is that the crucial missing link in so much of the trinitarianism which has bored us off the doctrine is a demonstration that worshipping and thinking in a trinitarian way makes all the difference to our finding our place in the world. Developing doctrines of the Trinity, though that has its proper place, can only come in the light of what can be called concrete trinitarian thinking.

Let me give three examples of what I mean, the first two fairly brief, the third at greater length. When I was first taught the theology of the Reformers, it was by an Anglican, the late G. V. Bennett. He said something that has never left me: that Calvin is the greatest theologian of the West, Augustine not excepted, by virtue of the thoroughly trinitarian structure of his thinking. What is interesting here is that Calvin's explicit treatment of the Trinity is confined to one chapter of his great work. But everywhere his thought is structured by it, and nowhere

more effectively than in his definition of faith: „a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.“ (3. 2. 7). That tells us on whom faith rests – God the Father – how he mediates it to us – through Christ – and how it is impressed upon our hearts. The trinitarian structure enables Calvin to explore something of the richness of our relation to God, not only in this context, but throughout his work. Indeed, it is when he forgets to think in that way that the notorious flaws in his work begin to show themselves – but that is another question we unfortunately cannot pursue here.

The second example comes from Basil, bishop of Caesarea in the fourth century AD, and was given me in a recent book by Ellen Charry, called *By the Renewing of your Minds*, and, more importantly, perhaps, subtitled *The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine*.³⁸ Basil wrote a quite technical book on the Holy Spirit and his place within the Trinity. And why? It was partly, and only partly, to contribute to the intellectual debates about the being of God that were raging at the time. This author points out that there was a major pastoral problem as well. Despite Basil’s careful preaching, the lives of the people in his churches were not being renewed in the gospel. He was particularly concerned that after feast days, his flock were indulging in drunkenness and the resulting licentiousness and debauched behaviour. To put it simply, Basil wanted to develop the whole worship of the church to embody the reality of the Trinity, so that the people would not just be preached at, but trained in holiness. To this effect, he was concerned to show his readers something of the depth, range and richness of God’s gracious involvement in the world, and so to incorporate in their worship that it shaped them in holiness of life. It is that „range and richness of God’s gracious involvement in the world“ of which Professor Charry speaks that is the demonstration of the fruitfulness of trinitarian ways of thinking.

That is nowhere better demonstrated than in our third example, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon towards the end of the second century AD. Irenaeus too was involved in a struggle that was both theological and pastoral. At stake theologically was the doctrine of creation – something with which we are ourselves concerned in these days of ecological anxiety. Irenaeus was opposing the views of those

³⁸ Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of your Minds. The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

who claimed that this material world of our daily experience was not the creation of, or the concern of, the high god, but at best the bungling effort of an inferior deity, mediated through a world of intermediate and inferior angelic beings. Irenaeus' denial of this is absolute. God cares enough for this material world to become part of it through his Son and to continue to work in it through his Spirit. God does not keep the world at arm's length, for he created it himself: not through intermediaries, but through the Son and the Spirit, who are God himself in action.

Why did all this matter pastorally and morally? Irenaeus was the proponent of a biblical view that we are created to glorify God with our whole persons, body and soul alike. The Christian life was not an escape from the material world, but a calling to live in and through it redemptively. He was in this doing no more than follow Paul's urging of the Roman Christians to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. His opponents believed that what they did in their bodies was an irrelevance, so that, as he pointed out, they were led to contradictory practices, some of them indulging in license, others in extreme asceticism – and for the same reasons. If our bodies are not really ourselves, it matters not whether we crush them under a weight of harsh discipline or abuse them in self indulgence. Are things any different today? The British Methodist theologian, Geoffrey Wainwright, has written as follows:

We live in a very sensate and sensualist society. We are in some ways absorbed in our senses, a people defined by materialism and sexuality. Yet in other ways we are curiously detached from our bodies, as though we are not really affected by what happens to us in our bodies or what we do in them.

He proceeds to draw the conclusion that this is essentially the same as it was for Irenaeus:

If our bodies are not us, then we are not responsible in and for them; and that irresponsibility may assume the character of either license or, indeed, of withdrawal.³⁹

Wainwright has put his finger on the root cause of much of the modern world's sheer incapacity to live in the body, with all the human damage which results. Let me suggest another symptom of the same modern disease. We are in

³⁹ Geoffrey Wainwright, *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997), 16f.

our world subordinating the life of persons to the impersonal demands of market forces. Our world is materialistic, indeed, and yet in a way that completely misunderstands the true being of the material. Instead of living in it as God's gift, we use it in a way that subverts rather than enhances the way in which personal beings are created to live with one another and in God's good creation. I shall return to the theme of the personal later.

What has all this to do with the Trinity? Let us follow through this great theologian's logic. If you were to ask him how God works in the world, what are the means by which he creates and redeems it, Irenaeus would answer: God the Father achieves his creating and redeeming work through his two hands, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Now this is an apparently crude image, but is actually extremely subtle. Our hands are ourselves in action; so that when we paint a picture or extend the hand of friendship to another, it is we who are doing it. According to this image, the Son and the Spirit are God in action, his personal way of being and acting in his world – God, we might say, extending the hand of salvation, of his love to his lost and perishing creation, to the extent of his only Son's dying on the cross. Notice how close this is to the way in which we noticed John speaking in his Gospel. The Son of God, who is one with God the Father, becomes flesh and lives among us. This movement of God into the world he that loves but that has made itself his enemy is the way by which we may return to him. The result of Jesus' lifting up – his movement to cross, resurrection and ascension – is the sending of the Holy Spirit – „another paraclete“, or second hand of God the Father. The Spirit is the one sent by the Father at Jesus' request to relate us to the Father through him. Irenaeus takes this understanding of God's working and uses it to engage with one of the first great challenges to the Christian worldview, a challenge that is with us still. He is important because his trinitarian vision of God's creation and redemption of the whole world, both spiritual and material, has much to teach us both about sexual ethics, and personal relations more generally, and about ecological ethics: on what we do with our bodies in relation to one another and in relation to our world.

In sum, the lesson we can learn from our three examples is this: if you want to understand how God works in our world, then you must go through the route God himself has given us: the incarnation of the eternal Son and the life-giving action of the Spirit. Let me repeat: the Trinity is about life. Irenaeus is the writer of that great sentence, often heard from him: the glory of God is a human being truly alive. The Trinity is about life, life before God, with one another and in the

world. If we forget that God's life is mediated to us trinitarianly, though his two hands, the Son and the Spirit, we forget the root of our lives, of what makes for life and what makes for death. In my third section, I want to take this further, and ask whether we need to do any more than this. Do we need also to go into the complications of whether, and in what sense, God is Trinity, in his eternal being, so to speak?

III. A doctrine of the Trinity?

Irenaeus thought trinitarianly, but did not yet have a developed doctrine of the Trinity. That is to say, he did not spend time discussing in what sense Father, Son and Spirit are all God, yet together are one God. Do we need that? In particular, are all the convolutions into which later theologians were and are led necessary? Perhaps not all of them, but a number of questions remained unanswered. Irenaeus understands clearly that God the Father achieves his purposes in the world through his Son and Spirit. But he has not concerned himself with *the* question which became unavoidable. Who is the God who identified himself in such a distinctive and personal way? It was in approaching questions like this that later theologians developed what we call the doctrine of the Trinity. What is its point? The best way to answer this question is to attempt to outline what the doctrine of the Trinity says. By means of summaries, I shall try to identify the heart of the matter.

1. God the Son – the one made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth – and God the Spirit are as truly God as God the Father who sends his Son into the world and pours out his Spirit on all flesh. That, of course, is a taking of Irenaeus' point one stage further. If God is like this in his action and presence with us; if it is through Jesus and the Spirit that he makes himself known; if they truly are his hands, God in personal action; then that is what he is always like. God does not tell lies. What you see is what you get. If God works among us through his two hands, it is argued, then the Son and the Spirit belong intrinsically to his eternal being. In some way, therefore, God must be Father, Son and Spirit always, to the heart of his being. The doctrine of the Trinity is the doctrine that attempts to do just that: to identify the God who comes among us in the way that he does; to say as much as we are allowed of the nature of our God.

2. All this is done without in the least wanting to suggest that the unity of God is in any way impugned. All the arguments were, and still are, about how to avoid slipping into two equal and opposite errors: of making God so blankly

singular that he loses the richness and plurality of his being – and so that “range and richness of God’s gracious involvement in the world” – or of so stressing the threeness that there seem to be three gods. There is not, that is to say, some divine stuff that is made known sometimes as Father, sometimes as Son and sometimes as Spirit or in some way lies behind them; rather, together they are so bound up with one another’s being that they are the one God. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit together make up all that there is of the being of God. That is another implication of the fact that God’s presence among us is real. What you see is what you get. „Everything is what it is and not another thing“, as Bishop Butler famously remarked. God is this particular kind of being, and not the gods of the heathen or of our human projections about what we think God ought to be like. He is one God only in this way, to be loved, worshipped and praised in the unutterable richness of his being - and it is no accident that so many of our confessions of worship have taken trinitarian form.

3. The relation of plurality and oneness is expressed with the help of one of the most central concepts, and indeed, one invented by trinitarian theologians, that of the person. Each of the three, Father, Son and Spirit, is so described, that, to use the traditional language, God is one being in three persons. That is where our real difficulties, but also our opportunities begin. In our everyday language, three persons seem to mean three separate beings. If this is the case with God, does it mean that there are three gods, linked together as a kind of family? Here we must take a detour to look more carefully at this central notion, which is the unique and indispensable contribution made to the world by the early trinitarian thinkers. I shall look at the matter through a discussion of what we mean when we speak of a human person.

What is a human being? We have already met one answer in the theories of those whom Irenaeus opposed. For them, human beings were bits of soul-stuff imprisoned in a gross material body, which was so unimportant that it did not really matter what they did with it. This is a variation on a very common ancient view. The body is a tomb, said the Pythagoreans, and Socrates appears to have agreed with them. Salvation, true life, therefore, is about escaping from the world of matter into the higher world of spirit. But is that only an ancient view? Is our culture so different? We have already heard Geoffrey Wainwright’s observation on this, and there are two ways in which our continuity with that ancient view can be illustrated. Suppose, it is often asked, that a computer could think. Would it be a person? The assumption in that question is that to be a person is to be a

mind: thought is what makes us human. It is an assumption that is almost universally made in our world. But are we not hearts as well as heads, bodies as well as minds? Could even a thinking machine be said to love? Can we truly relate to other human beings without a body – without eyes, vocal chords, hands and arms? Our civilisation continues to be deeply confused about the nature of life, especially human life, because we are confused about what personal being truly is.

And the second example is this. We live in a deeply individualist culture, marked by the fact that the market likes to think of us as units of consumption rather than as persons who belong together. Think of the everyday use of the word „relationship“. Is it not generally assumed that human beings are individuals who go around seeking relationships; and if one seems not to work very well, giving it up and trying another? Lesslie Newbigin used to say that the idea of self-fulfillment is the myth of the modern world. That, of course, is why children are often the last to be thought of when marriages break up. We are not here to be for others; rather, we use the world and others as the route to our individual self-fulfillment. In our world, it is not much of an exaggeration to say that we have lost the sense that we belong with one another: that we are the people we are because we are the children of particular parents, the wives and husbands of particular people – and, just as important in another way, fellow members of the people of God. We have our being not as individuals but because of what we give to and receive from God and from one another. We are only what God and other people enable us to become, or, indeed, prevent us from becoming. "No man is an island, entire of itself..." To be a person is something more than being a mind encased in flesh or an individual seeking our own self-fulfillment. It is to be one whose being is bound up with other persons. But how do we know and, more important, *practice* this?

Among the great achievements of those who have thought trinitarianly is the concept of the person as a living whole rather than as a mind encased in matter. How it came about is a complicated and difficult matter to describe, but it is one of the fruits of the trinitarian teaching that God is three persons in one being. By thinking about the Trinity, the early theologians came to realise that they had come across an entirely new conception of what it is to be personally. To be is not to be an individual; it is not to be isolated from others, cut off from them by the body that is a tomb, but in some way to be bound up with one another in relationship. Being a person is about being from, and for and with the other. I need

you – and particularly those of you who are nearest to me – in order to be myself. That is the first thing to say: persons are beings who exist only in relation – in relation to God, to others and to the world from which they come.

And there is a second thing to say, a pitfall to be avoided on the other side also. If our relations with each other are to be truly personal, they cannot take the form of coercion either. Being a person is not simply to be a part of a greater whole, of simply existing for the collective, for the nation or for the market. We are not simply „a piece of the continent, a part of the maine...“ Our otherness and particularity is important, too. To be a person is not only to live from and for others; it is also to be uniquely what we are – ourselves and not identical with others. The two aspects are not contradictories that have to be somehow reconciled, as if everything done for another person has to be in some way thought of as contradictory of our own self-fulfillment. That is, of course, the case in our fallen condition. As sinful human beings, we don't want to bother with the other, except as the object of our needs, someone to be exploited. But the order of creation, our personal being, is that we cannot be ourselves without others. Breaches of this order are what we call sin because they arise from a distorted relation to our creator, and so a false relation to one another. The triune God's gracious dispensation is that we need each other if we are to be truly and particularly ourselves.

One of the things of which much has been made in recent writing about the Trinity is that this view of persons as being from and for and with one another in their very otherness contrasts with both of the dominant theories of social order in the modern world: the individualist, that we are like atoms which are only accidentally related to other human beings; and the collectivist, which makes us simply exist for the sake of the whole, as in communism. It may appear, with the collapse of much of the communist world, that the latter danger has disappeared. But that is far from being the case. For all its apparent pluralism, the world of the market that so dominates our lives is actually working to make us all identical: all to drink coca cola and to eat at Macdonald's, those symbols of the homogenising forces of modernity, all to wear the same only superficially different designer clothes. That is simply another way of swallowing us up into a whole, of effectively depriving us of our individuality. Personal being is precisely what is at stake in this modern world. Wherever we look the many – particular people with all their differences – are depersonalised by being swallowed up into the one, the mass, where individuality is suppressed in the interests of efficiency, economics and

homogeneity: where babies with a risk of handicap are killed in the womb because we don't want to bother with those who are different, and where all have cosmetic surgery so that we all look alike. (I exaggerate, but only for the sake of allowing certain trends to come into view).

Over against this, the triune God is a God in whom the one is not played against the many, nor the many against the one. In the words of John Zizioulas – though he is only interpreting the fourth century Greek theologians – God is one who has his being in communion.⁴⁰ Now the word communion, and more especially its associated word community, is on many a lip these days, and therefore has to be interpreted very carefully. Certainly there are supposed „communities“ many of whose members do not know each other from Adam, the very opposite of what is intended here. (I recently saw an advertisement referring to 'the academic community', to take an example at random.) The point about the communion that is the Trinity is that in God the three persons are such that they receive from and give to each other their unique particularity. They have their being in relation to one another. The Son is not the Father, but receives his being from him; the Father cannot be the Father without the Son; and so on. Being in communion is a being that belongs together, but not at the expense of the particular existence of the members. The Father, Son and Spirit are persons because they enable each other to be truly what the other is: they neither assert at the expense of nor lose themselves in the being of the others. Being in communion is being that realises the reality of the particular person within a structure of being together. There are not three gods, but one, because in the divine being a person is one whose being is so bound up with the being of the other two that together they make up the one God.

There are, to be sure, differences between divine and human persons, and we need to spend some time looking at this also. It is one thing to be the creator, quite another to be beings created in the image of God. This means that the differences between divine and human persons are as important as the similarities. First, we are created persons, and created out of the material world – out of the dust of the earth, to which we return. As we have seen, this is not something to be regarded negatively. The Son of God became one of us, thus marking and restoring our proper place in God's purposes. We are therefore

⁴⁰ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985).

made for particular kinds of relationships, those especially that respect the kinds of beings that we are. We are not God, and so not bound up together in the same way, only in a way appropriate to our createdness. The point of the notion of created persons is the immense range and variety of human beings, and the immense range of relationships in which we stand. It is easy to illustrate. Our relationships with our immediate family are different from those with whom we worship, and different again from our relationship with the social worker or the builder. Particularity means precisely that: a vast range of ways of being and of being in relationship, all of which are in different ways personal – or should be. As we have seen, so many of the ways of being in our modern world deny our personal being in ways which distort our relation to each other and the world. Here, God's triune personal being stands as a model for ours: a being in which all accept their need of one another, while enabling all to be truly themselves.

And that takes us to a second point. How that is realised through the saving work of Christ and its embodiment in the church would take another lecture: but the point must be made. We need not only a model of personhood, but the means for its redemption and realisation. As things are, we fail in our relationships, not only with people but with the world in general. Because it is through the eternal Son of God that the world was created and is upheld, it is through his incarnation and reign with God the Father that personal being is redeemed and reshaped. The church as the body of Christ is the human community called so to order its life with and before the triune God that it becomes a school of personal being – a place where, among other things, we learn to be with, from and for one another. Life in communion is one of the gifts of God the Spirit, as again and again is made clear in scripture.⁴¹

4. And that brings me to the fourth and final thing I want to say about the doctrine of the Trinity. The three persons who make up the being of God; who, together, *are* the one God, are bound up together in such a way that only one word can be used to describe their relation: love. God is love says 1 John chapter 4, and the doctrine of the Trinity is that teaching which shows something of what that means. Notice that this chapter is already implicitly trinitarian. „This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that

⁴¹ The person, as John Zizioulas has also pointed out, is an eschatological conception, in the sense that it is something held out in promise, only more or less successfully realised this side of eternity, and only through the mediating work of the Son and the Spirit.

we might live through him... We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit" (vv. 9, 13). In the end the doctrine of the Trinity is only worth remembering if it enables us to know – both theoretically and practically – something of the truth of the Bible's God: of who the God is who meets us in Jesus Christ and his Spirit.

Much is made of the fact that many moderns have rejected God because the God of the church seemed the source of unfreedom and oppression rather than of love. We know, of course, that the God rejected by many an atheist is not the one we know and worship. Yet there is something in the charges, in the fact that our civilisation stands so uneasily towards its religious past. The church has failed to practice the Trinity. There are many ways of forgetting who is the true source of our life, and we are guilty of some of them. Without the doctrine of the Trinity we might have a God of power, or a God in some way identical with the world, but not the God of the Bible, who is a God of love, and whose love takes shape in the story of creation and redemption.

I began the lecture by alluding to skills and the practice of art. Craftsmen and artists live by their skills, which they have learned so thoroughly that they have become part of their very bodies, their tools and musical instruments extensions of their very persons. The church lives by a kind of skill, if it can be metaphorically so described, or better, by a way of being towards God and in the world. It is called love, and is founded above all in worship, the worship of the Father through the Son that is enabled only by the gift of the Spirit. The point of all this theology is not that it is the whole of what we need, but that it is an indispensable part. If we do not know who our God is, then we shall not know how we are to grow like him - that was Basil's point in his discourse on the Spirit. Without the Trinity, we cannot know that God is love, but we do, for the doctrine of the Trinity is the teaching that God is love, not only towards us, but in his deepest and eternal being.⁴²

⁴² This article was first delivered as the William Hodgkins Lecture, Cardiff Adult Christian Education Centre, 5 June, 1998.

Personhood and Persistent Vegetative State: A Theological Perspective

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What is a person? How do we decide when it is appropriate to call a particular being „a person“? Medical-ethical discussion of Persistent Vegetative State (PVS), generated particularly when cases hit the headlines, compels us to keep thinking about the notion of the „person“. Of course there is a strong theological stake in the matter. It is not that a theological perspective on personhood leads to a clear prescription in every specific case about how we should act. We may ask whether there are distinctions between ordinary and extraordinary treatments. And we may say that our answers to these questions help us to decide what to do in a given instance. A theological perspective on personhood, at least at the basic level on which I shall be operating, does not direct us to all the answers here. But it is a crucial perspective all the same, even as we address matters of detail. From the principle of the sanctity of marriage one could not deduce on every single occasion whether or not we should morally countenance divorce. We might sorrowfully recognize some cases where divorce could be countenanced. But clearly views about the sanctity of marriage would affect our attitudes to every single case and determine our conclusions immediately in a great number of them. So it is in the very different matter of personhood and its application, for example, to treatment of PVS patients.

The Christian notion of personhood is rich and what aspects of it require emphasis depends on the situation in which one is reflecting. One might emphasize different aspects of it according to whether one was discussing, e.g., Christianity and Buddhism or the question of evolution or issues of human sexuality. Yet despite the fact that the following discussion is undertaken in the context of a wider discussion of PVS, there are certain things about the human person that come to the fore in any survey on the biblical and traditional discussions about the nature of men and women. Foremost is the notion of the person as creature.

That is obvious. But to call the person a creature is to say from the beginning that a person can only be understood in terms of a relationship. The relationship to God which is essential to personhood is distinct from that enjoyed by nonhuman animals. Nor is relationship to God something superadded on the notion of the person. It is not a possibility or an option. It is of the essence.

The phrase which has captured the attention of the Christian tradition working on its biblical basis is: the „image of God“. This is a rather tantalizing example of a phrase that seems important in Scripture but it is not defined on the surface. There have been rival interpretations throughout history and it is impossible to go into their detail. But one is sure to be struck by the reference in Genesis to Adam, at the age of one hundred and thirty, siring a „son in his own likeness, in his own image“ (5:3) and Luke’s description of Adam as the „son of God“ (3:38). There is implied an intimate, filial relationship of creature to Creator. While Scripture does not typically use the term „sonship“ to describe the relation of all human creatures to God, it is clear that creaturehood, in the image of God, designates a relationship of special intimacy with God and something close to sonship seems appropriate on the basis of the texts I have quoted.⁴³

Two things follow. The first is that there is a connection between the rights of a person and the very being of a person, the very kind of being which the human being is. Judicial retribution in the form of capital punishment is first instituted precisely because man, as male and female, is made in the image of God (Genesis 9:6). The right not to be killed follows from the nature of one’s humanity. While we may debate whether such an ordinance as capital punishment is permanent, the principle, connecting human kind and human right, is important to keep in mind. But there is a second consequence. Relationship with God does not depend on the stage or the state of the human being. It depends just on the fact of humanity. This takes us in the direction of discussions relevant to PVS, so let us dwell on it.

According to one tradition of interpretation, the image of God in the human person is identified with what we may broadly term rationality or spirituality. (I keep the terms loose because in the Christian tradition there can be variety of terms with overlapping or sometimes identical content: spirit, soul, mind, even

⁴³ Though it is brief, Thomas Torrance’s essay on „The Soul and Person in Theological Perspective“ may be helpful here. See S. Sutherland and T. Robert’s (eds.), *Religion, Reason and the Self* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989). A good treatment of the notion of the image of God is found in Henri Blocher’s work, *In the Beginning* (IVP, 1984).

reason. Distinctions here are sometimes very important both in the tradition and in the present theological reflection, but I shall not be distinguishing or defining tightly.) If one thinks thus of the image of God, it is very tempting to identify the essence of the person with mind or spirit or consciousness. This happened very influentially with Descartes who concluded that the essence is to be a thinking being. This train of reasoning has led in its time to one curious conclusion, for it has been objected that if you equate human essence with thought, a person ceases to exist in the course of a dreamless sleep. The late Professor Hywel D. Lewis, Professor of the History and Philosophy of Religion at King's College, London, accepted this conclusion but said that it did not worry him, for all one would be missing would be a few minutes of low-grade experience! This is what is described in philosophy as deeply counter-intuitive. In reaction to Descartes, subsequent philosophy went in an opposite direction. The question was asked at the end of the seventeenth century whether God could attach to matter the power of thought. In time, humans became regarded as purely material entities, determined in a more or less mechanical fashion. Interestingly enough, in contemporary discussion of bioethics, the language of Descartes is returning in a remarkable way. Hence there is talk on the body „housing“ of the person and in a well-publicised case in the United Kingdom, some years ago, we heard from Judge Sir Stephen Brown of the spirit of the... (Tony Bland) „leaving his body“. When theologians use such language, they are accused of harbouring an outdated notion of the soul!

There is quite a broad theological consensus that one should talk of the human person as a unity of soul and body. This has been given different descriptions: „embodied soul“ or even „ensouled body“. The human person is the unity of body and soul, the whole being subject to the possession and lordship to the divine spirit. The element of truth in the equation of „image“ with „soul“ is that it reminds us of an important distinction between body and soul. A person is related to God in a special way through the soul or spirit. No one denies the distinctive place of soul or spirit here. But that is not the same as equating the person with soul or spirit. It is just to assign the human spirit its special place. There is every reason for keeping up our theological insistence that the person is the whole person, body and soul.

We need to do this in order to get a proper perspective on the crucial notion of consciousness. Peter Singer, for example, has argued that we must accept the absence of personhood in the absence of a functional brain and that what we

claim for persons at the end of their lives we must claim for persons at the beginning. Hence the embryo prior to brain formation is not to be treated as a person.⁴⁴ Of course, PVS is not the total absence of a functional brain. Nevertheless, considerations of consciousness are important in all spheres of bioethical discussion. Now one might quarrel with Singer on his own terms and evaluate differently the distinction between lack of functional brain in the case of brain death and lack of functional brain prior to brain formation. But theologically there is a deeper issue. Of course, humans are designed for communion with God through their conscious spirit. That is the destiny for which, as humans, they are created. But that is not to make personhood dependent on the human ability to realise such purposes. God has established a relation with human persons which constitutes them as persons; human kind is so constituted by that relationship. And such relationship holds between God and the embodied creature irrespective of consciousness. It is not dependent on reciprocity. Since their relation to God makes persons what they are, we are bound to treat them in that light. So when we say that persons are unities of soul and body, we do not mean that one must be at a certain conscious stage of life to count as a person. We are describing the human kind, which is there from the beginning. God is related to such beings in a personal relation to persons and is so related even when reciprocity is not possible.⁴⁵

It is worth indicating further two rather wider aspects of personhood which we need to get right so that we promote a certain ethos and a set of attitudes in our discussions of persons. The first is in relation to what has been termed the „self-defining subject“. Even those who hold to a strongly deterministic account of the human person face the fact that there are choices humans make; there is the making of decisions and so at any rate the appearance of freedom. The modern self-defining subject probably originates with late Renaissance society. He or she as an individual defines and determinates what to believe and what to

⁴⁴ Teresa Iglesias, in an extract published in *Ethics and Medicine*, offers a convicting critique of Singer (7.2, 1991, pp. 8 ff).

⁴⁵ There are those who deny that „person“ and „human being“ are to be treated as equivalent terms. My own conviction is that these terms are substitutable in some contexts but not in others and can be interchanged in the present case. In regard to the question of persons and relationships, it is one thing to hold that persons are created to be in a dialogal relationship with God, quite another to hold that if they lack that actual relationship they are not related to God as persons. The second proposition does not follow from the first and it is theologically important to deny that second proposition.

do in life. Anyone who imposes a law destroys self-definition. Hence God must go. There is now freedom. And this is jealously protected in the talk and affirmation of individual rights.

From a theological point of view, the bid for freedom comes up against at least two obstacles from the outset. Firstly, whatever people may be free to do, they are not free to define themselves out of existence as creatures of God. The project of self-definition in its most radical form is therefore plain impossible. Secondly, as will be admitted by secularists, action breeds habit and habit breeds character so that the character that does the choosing is in fact moulded by previous choices. And there may be little freedom to change character. But quite apart from these two factors, the dignity of freedom is misunderstood if people just celebrate the dignity of freedom in itself. Humans may be free in some ways and this may contribute to the dignity of humanity. But what truly dignifies humans is the use to which they can put any freedom they have. Goodness, not freedom, gives their dignity to human persons and if there is freedom it is dignified as a means to that goodness. It is what we do with our freedom that glorifies God.

The second aspect has to do with our relation to others. The self-defining subject goes his or her own way, tied to others in a social and political order, bound perhaps by some broad moral agreement, but not destined for some common end. At least that is the tendency of self-definition by its nature. The Christian understanding of personhood is quite different. When Christ was asked by a lawyer to identify the neighbour he was called to love, he answered in the parable of the Good Samaritan that the Samaritan was neighbour to the wounded. The neighbour is not the other but me. I am the neighbour, so I am not an individual that happens to be related to others but I am in my created essence a neighbour, a related and relational being. This reflects the being of God, who is not an isolated individual but exists in relationship from eternity as Father, Son and Spirit.

This does not tell me all I need to know about the treatment of the PVS patient. But it tells me that I begin my very thinking about others by seeking to help them toward God and the good just I need them to help me toward God and the good. And the neighbour (because even if I am the neighbour I can still sensibly talk about others as my neighbours) is discerned according to bodily presence and need. The neighbour is body as well as soul. As I indicated earlier, it is not my brief to enter into discussion of particular cases. But what may seem

like a purely theological treatment with no immediate ethical application turns out obviously to have decisive relevance. Vital issues arise in bioethics over the relation of nutritional to medical treatment, the basis of rights and patient autonomy. But if we insist on personhood as a matter of relationship and on the unity of soul and body, there are options that are immediately cut out. They exclude the identification of person with spirit or with consciousness as a basis of legal adjudication. In law, it is not just decision but its grounds which are vital. A properly theological notion of the person, itself the ground of ethical decision, will establish sound grounds and disestablish false grounds for adjudication in a way that places righteousness at the very heart of law. Neither God nor neighbour is properly honoured or loved if we fail to strive for that.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ This article was offered as a presentation to a conference on Personhood and the Persistent Vegetative State sponsored by the Centre for Bioethics and Public Policy, London.

Justification by Faith, the Council of Trent and the Twentieth Century

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Introduction

This far-ranging and general discussion aims to draw attention to the difficulties which the doctrine of justification created for the Counter Reformation of the Roman Catholic church in the 1540's and, in particular, the Council of Trent. It will be shown that having labeled this doctrine an invention of the Reformers in 1530, the Roman Catholic church, in reviewing both the Biblical evidence and the theological challenge derived from it by the Reformers moved subsequently to „own“ it. Within a decade it declared that the Roman Catholic church had always taught it. Having asserted this, it was left to session six of the Council of Trent the complex task of formulating their doctrine of justification. It will be suggested that they did so only after a great deal of discussion some 450 years ago finally reaching agreement on 13th January, 1547. In the session of the Council that followed, this Biblical doctrine was further obscured by Trent's sacramental system into which it was to be firmly set.

It will be suggested in the second part of this essay that the twentieth century has seen a brief renaissance of this doctrine in Roman Catholic theology only to witness its eclipse once again by the other concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Even recent ecumenical discussions such as those with the Lutherans have again been fenced in by Trent's formulations. There are signs that the same thing is happening in some Protestant academic discussions in which the doctrine is being subsumed under ecclesiology.

Part 1. Justification and the Council of Trent

1. *Luther articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*

Martin Luther not only stood on *sola fide* but wrote of the doctrine of justification by faith: „This article is the head and cornerstone which alone begets,

nourishes, builds, preserves and protects the church; without it the church of God cannot subsist one hour."⁴⁷ In stating this he was isolating from Christianity other doctrines which had sprung up after the planting of the apostolic faith in New Testament times. These had obscured, and then unwittingly strangled, the centrality of the finished work of Christ upon which the individual Christian alone can stand (and upon which God meant him or her alone to stand) as the basis of their confidence both now and in the hour of death.

Luther was a Professor of Theology when he made the great discovery that shook his own generation. The Roman Catholic church of his day had drawn attention to the disease of sin, but had applied an inadequate remedy which could never quieten the accusing conscience in this life or provide any confidence as the day of judgement was contemplated.

This was a liberating truth for Luther and those who embraced it. They were released from all the consequences of their failed past, confident that the present moments came to them from the hands of a gracious God, and that there was no fear for the future. This central doctrine of Christianity described how men and women alienated from God can come to know him, by being declared to be right with Him through Christ's work. Upon this doctrine of justification and its implications for Christian confidence, the Roman Catholic church of Luther's day did not stand, but on his reckoning fell.

It was for this reason that Luther "throughout his life devoted more theological work, strength and passion to this doctrine than to any other",⁴⁸ even though he wrote no extended treatise on it. Like the gospel it proclaimed, this doctrine continued to permeate his thinking and his writing.

2. The Roman Catholics' interaction with the Reformers' doctrine

The Roman Catholics declared this Lutheran affirmation to be a newfangled doctrine of the Protestants. In 1530 at the Diet of Augsburg the Roman Catholic representatives said that the doctrine was a „novelty“ and was at direct variance with that which had prevailed in the Roman church. The Reformers were led to believe that unless they abandoned, or at least modified it, they would expose themselves to imminent danger. Melanchthon wrote „It cannot be denied that we are brought into trouble, and exposed to danger, for this one only reason, that we

⁴⁷ Cited R. A. Leaver, *Luther*, 20.

⁴⁸ P. Althause, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 225.

believe the favour of God to be provided for us, not by our observance, but for the sake of Christ alone".⁴⁹

By 1541, however, at the Diet of Ratisbon the Roman Catholics claimed that they had always believed in this doctrine, referring to the „uninterrupted unanimity of the Catholic Church“ on this issue.

The reason for this change was connected to the attempt by Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, to bring about a reconciliation between Roman Catholics and the Protestant Reformers. Erasmus' abortive attempt at this in 1533, „On Concord in Religion“, was replaced by Canon Gropper's articles which Luther declared were crafty, ambiguous and mild, and which Melanchthon called „monstrous“.⁵⁰ However, Charles V was delighted and saw these articles as the basis for discussion.

The essential statement was „since the fall of man all are born enemies of God... and cannot be reconciled to God or redeemed from the bondage of sin, but by Jesus Christ our only Mediator“; that „their mind is raised up to God by faith in the promises made to them, that their sins are freely forgiven them and that God will adopt those for His children who believe in Jesus Christ“; „that faith justifies not, but as it leads to mercy and righteousness, which is imputed to us through Jesus Christ and His merits, and not by any perfection of righteousness which is inherent in us, as communicated to us by Jesus Christ“; and „that we are reputed just on account of the merits of Jesus Christ only“.⁵¹

The Ratisbon article declared „sinners are justified by a living and effectual faith, which was a motion of the Holy Spirit, whereby, repenting of their lives past, they are raised to God, and made real partakers of the mercy which Jesus Christ has promised, which no man attains but at the same time love is shed abroad in his heart and he begins to fulfil the law“. The article adds a rider: „repentance, fear of God and His judgements and the practice of good works ought to be preached to them“.

The articles sounded good but what did the words actually mean, especially the statement „faith justifies not“? Language such as *sola fidae* and the citation „faith working through love“ may actually conceal totally divergent theological points of view. In Ephesians 2:4 Paul says „by grace you have been saved

⁴⁹ J. Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, 142-3.

⁵⁰ Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, 144.

⁵¹ Cited J. Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, 145-6.

through faith“ and he goes on in 2:8-9 to expound τῆ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ἑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον· οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μὴ τις καυχῆσθαι. It is not our faith that saves us, but God who does so. The neuter demonstrative pronoun „this“, τοῦτο does not refer to faith which is a feminine noun, otherwise it would have been αὐτή and not τοῦτο. The continuative use of the neuter demonstrative denotes an action indicated by the use of the perfect periphrastic, „you are saved“ (ἐστε σεσωσμένοι); thus according to this text it is not our faith but the action of God which rescues us.

It would seem the statements of the 1530s and 1540s and the subsequent formulations of the Council of Trent, which we will examine in the next section, reflect the measure of difficulty which the Roman Catholic scholars experienced in relating the Biblical evidence for the doctrine of justification by faith to their own formulations. Ratisbon shows the uneasiness they felt without the inclusion of the doctrine of „sanctification“; in the same way Erasmus' attempt felt a similar uneasiness about the doctrine of justification „without the sacraments“ being included.

3. The Council of Trent's formulation of the doctrine

The compelling evidence of the Bible concerning justification by faith posed difficulties for the Council of Trent.⁵² The issues of salvation, sanctification and the sacraments ended up clouding the Trent's formulations.

Firstly, on 22nd of June, 1546, a commission of theologians set the parameters for the discussion with six questions:

- 1) What is justification and what is to be understood when it is said that „man is justified“?
- 2) What are the causes of justification? What part is played by God? And what is required of man?
- 3) What is to be understood when it said the „man is justified by faith“?
- 4) What role do human works and the sacraments play in justification, whether before, during or after it?
- 5) What precedes, accompanies and follows justification?
- 6) By what proofs is the Catholic doctrine supported?

⁵² For a thorough treatment see A. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 63-86.

The discussions were lengthy but were facilitated by a division of justification into three stages. The first concerned the justification of adults in which the unbeliever is transformed from his state of unbelief into one of faith and grace, the next the increase in righteousness of the justified believer, and the last the justification of lapsed believers.

The discussions began on 22nd June, 1546 and agreement was only reached on 13th January, 1547. The long discussion and the extensive disagreement among those attending are in themselves revealing, not merely because of the way the questions had been formulated, but because of the difficulty in reaching an agreement on a doctrine which they had only recently affirmed they had always held.⁵³

How the decree was formulated is informative. The first nine chapters discussed the „first justification“ in which is achieved an adult’s initial transition from a state of sin to righteousness. The next four chapters deal with the „second justification“ on how a person once justified may increase in righteousness. The last three chapters discuss how a person may forfeit his justification and regain it through the sacrament of penance and how this differs from the first justification.

There is, of course, much in the first nine chapters of the decree which resonates with Scripture and indeed invokes it in support of its argument. Chapter 1 asserts the powerlessness of nature to justify, and chapter 2 cites Scripture (2 Cor. 1:3, Gal. 4:4, Rom. 9:30, 1 Jn. 2:2) on the purpose of Christ’s coming, which is to redeem Jew and Gentile by means of his atoning sacrifice in His blood to be received by faith.

Chapter 3 answers the question „Who are justified by faith?“ It is those to whom the merits of Christ’s passion are imparted for it is by His grace that we become „just“ – language and concepts which the reformers would not have accepted given their view of imputation.

In the following chapters which describe the justification of a sinner, there is reference to the transition to the state of grace and adoption as God’s children. The citation of John 3.5 concerning being reborn by water and the Holy Spirit is related by Trent to baptism and not to the nature of salvation to which Ezekiel 36:25-27 alludes.

Chapter 5, „On the need for preparation for justification“, makes it plain that the reference is to adult baptism and the following chapter deals with the manner of preparation. We are informed that „they begin to love Him as the fount of all

⁵³ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 77-80.

justness. They are thereby turned against sin namely by that repentance which must occur before baptism“.

Chapter 7 deals specifically with the preparation and the causes of justification. According to Trent “the disposition and preparation precedes the actual justification“ and unless hope and charity along with faith are added, it „neither unites him perfectly to Christ nor makes him a living member of His body“. This „faith“ is treated as „the first stage of human salvation“. Five causes of justification are given: the final cause: the glory of God and eternal life; the efficient cause: the mercy of God; the meritorious cause: the passion of Christ; the instrumental cause: the sacrament of baptism; and the formal cause: the righteousness of God. On the instrumental cause Trent affirms „the sacrament of baptism, which is the sacrament of faith without which justification comes to no one“. In the case of adults faith, hope and love expressed in good works are the prerequisites of justification without which there can be no justification.

4. Justification and the Sacramental Setting

In Trent’s theology without the sacraments there can be no justification.

Trent taught a doctrine foreign to Protestant understanding which it designated „the increase of justification received“ (chapter 10). This concept of an „increase in justice“ is not articulated in the New Testament. The impression gained is that the doctrine which is discussed is the New Testament teaching on sanctification which Catholic doctrine at the time confused with justification.

Furthermore we learn that if justification is *lost* it can be regained by means of the sacraments. This was not made clear until the seventh session of the Council which dealt specifically with the sacraments to affirm that they are the means by which justification occurs and grows and is retrieved. This is how it was formulated:

For the completion of the doctrine of salvation concerning justification which was promulgated at the immediately preceding session by the unanimous consent of the fathers, there was a general agreement to treat the most holy sacraments of the church by means of which all true justness either begins, or once received gains strength, or if lost is restored.

For a doctrine that the Roman Catholic church had recently affirmed that they had always taught, the time taken to arrive at a consensus seems somewhat

long in contrast to the next decree, „On the Sacraments“. It was issued less than two months after the decree on justification, and was formulated with short introductions and the canons following all were so different from the lengthy text comprising the sixteen chapters on the decree of justification.

When Trent made baptism the instrumental cause of justification, it was adult baptism to which it referred. What happened in the case of infant baptism which was the norm in the Roman Catholic church? Children travelled the sacramental road from infant baptism to confirmation, holy communion, penance and unction. Progression and not proclamation was stressed.

Trent produced a doctrine of justification which was centred for all practical purposes on the sacraments of the church, confused with the doctrine of sanctification, and for which faith, hope and love expressed in good works were the necessary pre-requisites of justification in the case of adult converts. It was right to ask after Trent whether the Roman Catholic view of justification was in reality about what we must continue to do and not what had been done for humanity in Christ's death described by the English Reformer, Thomas Cranmer as the „one, full, perfect, sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world“.⁵⁴

One highly significant indicator of the effects of Trent's formularies on the church in general is *The Catechism of the Council of Trent* which was published by Pope Pius V soon after it was completed in 1564. This was written by the Fathers of the Council of Trent because they were not satisfied „with having decided the important points of Catholic doctrine against the heresies of our times, but deemed it further necessary to deliver some fixed form of instructing the faithful in the truths of religion from the very rudiments of Christian knowledge“.⁵⁵

The catechism naturally reflects Trent's view that baptism is „the instrumental cause of salvation“.⁵⁶ The index provided makes extensive references to baptism but none to justification.⁵⁷ In the discussion of penance as a sacrament the

⁵⁴ To cite the prayer of consecration from the service of Holy Communion in *The Book of Common Prayer*. The wording indicates the almost extreme lengths Thomas Cramer, its framer, went in order to stress, in the face of what the Reformers saw was the lack of clarity in Roman Catholic teaching on the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. This stress arose because Cranmer saw the liturgy as the means of instruction for the congregation.

⁵⁵ It was completed in 1564. For the English Translation see J. Donovan, Baltimore, James Myres, 1833, 15.

⁵⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 132, 142, 171.

⁵⁷ I am grateful to Mr. B. Sartor, a graduate student at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University

three aspects of contrition, confession and satisfaction are stressed. In the case of the last the catechism reads „Satisfaction, then, is the full payment of a debt, for when satisfaction is made, nothing remains to be supplied... satisfaction is nothing more than compensation for an injury done to another.“ Hence theologians make use of the word „satisfaction“ to signify the „compensation made by man to God, by doing something in atonement for the sins which he has committed.“⁵⁸ The catechism further indicates that satisfaction requires „that the works performed are such as are of their own nature painful or laborious. They are a compensation for past sins, and, to use the words of St. Cyprian, the redeemers, as it were, of sins.“⁵⁹ The Reformers viewed Christ’s death as the only means of satisfaction for sins committed before and after justification were only „satisfied“ by the death of Christ.

Justification arose suddenly in 1540 as Catholic teaching and having been dealt with, it in effect „disappeared“ after Trent’s decrees on the subject. It found no central place in the official teaching of the church. This would support the contention that it was discussed only because of the Reformers’ statement of its centrality. It had to be confronted as part of the Counter Reformation’s brief, and its lengthy and sometimes contentious gestation period by the Fathers at Trent, reveals their struggle with the Reformers’ formulation of the Biblical evidence. The official catechism of Trent makes it clear that part of its role was also to refute erroneous Reformation teaching.

Given the limitations of the essay, the intervening centuries must be passed over in order that attention might be devoted to the twentieth century.

Part 2. The Twentieth Century

1. The silence of the Second Vatican Council

A major discussion of justification is to found in the very intriguing work of Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* which was his doctoral dissertation subsequently published in 1957 in the early stages of the

read the Catechism in full and noted passages dealing with justification, 69, 108-9. While Biblical texts are cited concerning justification by faith, they are obscured by the thrust of the Catechism in terms of baptism and more importantly by „satisfaction“.

⁵⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 265, 267ff.

⁵⁹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 271.

Second Vatican Council. Küng reached the conclusion that there was „fundamental agreement“ between Barth and Trent on the issue of justification. The concern is not how Küng could arrive at such a conclusion but that he did. Barth, in magisterial form, wrote a letter to the author which was published in the introduction to the book – “Did you discover all this before you read my Church Dogmatics or was it during or after your reading?”⁶⁰

If Küng’s contention was that there had been fundamental misunderstandings of the Roman Catholic position formulated at the Council of Trent, one would have expected the Second Vatican Council with its concerns about ecumenism to have grasped the opportunity to discuss the doctrine of justification either in its most important decree *Lumen Gentium* or in the decree on Ecumenism.

Rather in *The Apostolic Constitution on the Revision of Indulgences* the Council declared that:

sins must be expiated. This may be done on this earth through the sorrows, miseries and trials of this life and, above all, through death. Otherwise the expiation must be made in the next life through fire and torments or purifying punishments.⁶¹

The Council was not alone. In a recent papal pronouncement, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, indulgences for sins in the year 2000 can be secured by making pilgrimages to the Holy Land or named shines or visiting the sick and the imprisoned.

In the decree which had the greatest „majesty“ of all its pronouncements in Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, one again would have expected a carefully worked statement on the doctrine of justification. Rather, we have in chapter 8 an important discussion of the role of „Our Lady“ in the plan of salvation and in relation to the church. Would the writer of the letter to the Hebrews who jealously retained the supremacy of Christ over against any human being, even as great a one as Moses, have been comfortable with such a description? The titles given to Mary were „Advocate“, „Helper“, „Benefactress and Mediatrix“?⁶² There was no space given to justification, in spite of Küng’s conclusions and his presence as an advisor at the Council’s deliberations.

Furthermore, would a clear enunciation of the doctrine of justification by faith have enabled the Council to speak so forcefully in the *Declaration on the*

⁶⁰ Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*, xviii.

⁶¹ *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, ch. 1.

⁶² *Lumen Gentium*, ch. VIII, III.

Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions? This particular declaration springs from the papal decree of the nineteenth century asserting „invincible ignorance“, i.e. non-Roman Catholics possess an ignorance which cannot be overcome and thus will not be excluded from the Kingdom of God. In it no place was found for the doctrine which declares the release from „the bondage of the will“ upon which Luther said the church stands or falls. This was a long way from the papal decree *Unam Sanctum* of 1302 which stated there was no salvation outside the church. The previous century’s papal decree on „invincible ignorance“ gave rise in the twentieth century to Karl Rahner’s famous formulation of the „anonymous Christian“.⁶³

2. Joint Roman Catholic and Lutheran Declaration

In recent ecumenical discussions between the Roman Catholic Church and others on the doctrine of justification, there is a general impression created that the Reformation arose as a result of a misunderstanding over this doctrine. The Anglican-Roman Catholic discussion of the subject called *Salvation and the Church* affirmed this.⁶⁴ This may reflect more on the theological methodology of twentieth-century ecumenical discussions than it does on the highly-able sixteenth-century theologians.

„A Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification“ by the Lutherans and the Roman Catholic church has been released. It took over thirty years to formulate, having been begun in 1967 - decidedly a very much longer gestation period than the seven months the Council of Trent took to resolve this issue. It was released as a „Final Proposal“ in 1997 and the declaration’s intention was that „our churches may be informed about the overall results of this dialogue with the necessary accuracy and brevity, and thereby be enabled to make binding

⁶³ It is interesting that Father Leonard Feeney was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church in 1949 for his refusal to subscribe to this doctrine, having taught the traditional view that there was no salvation outside the church. For a reference to this incident and its relationship religious pluralism see D. Wright, „The Watershed of Vatican II: Catholic Approaches to Religious Pluralism“ in ed. A.D. Clarke and B. Winter *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism*, ch. 10.

⁶⁴ ARCIC II. For an excellent assessment of the document and the problems facing Roman Catholic teaching on justification, „merit“ and indulgences see A.E. McGrath, ARCIC II and Justification: an Evangelical Anglican Assessment of „Salvation and the Church“, *Latimer Studies* 26 (Oxford: Latimer House, 1987).

decisions".⁶⁵ It is somewhat difficult to designate it later as a ground-clearing exercise as some subsequent comments have done. One conclusion arrived at in the light of the consensus is „the corresponding doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to today's partner".⁶⁶

It is significant that Pope John Paul II has chosen to respond to the proposal. He declared that there are some contradictions with Catholic teaching in the statement, citing the actual formulations of the Council of Trent. He insists that the church cannot relinquish its insistence on human co-operation and adds that penance and charity are pre-requisites to justification, repeating the language of Trent. This and other divergences noted by the Pope have caused despair for those Lutherans who have laboured to secure this agreement with Roman Catholic divines. However, the Pope is correct in drawing attention to the declaration's departure from crucial traditional Catholic formularies which are enshrined in Trent and which must still constitute the departure point for Luther's successors in order to secure the nature of their church's formulation of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

3. Protestant Scholars on Justification

What is perhaps surprising is the view that has been recently promoted among some Protestant scholars that Luther got the doctrine of justification wrong and that he went overboard when he declared that it was upon this doctrine that the church stands or falls. It is argued that justification

was not so much about „getting in" [to the kingdom] or indeed about „staying in", as about „how you could tell who was in." In standard Christian theological language, it wasn't so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Paragraph 4. The reasons for a convergence of ideas are „recent biblical studies and drawing on modern investigations of the history of theology and dogma", paragraph 13.

⁶⁶ Paragraph 13. There is much in the statement that commends itself especially points of clarification, but it is interesting that Luther's central understanding of the nature of the Christian life is not discussed, i.e., that the person is at the same time „both sinner and just" (*simul justus et peccator*). That provides something of a touchstone in terms of understanding the paradoxical nature of the justified person in the New Testament.

⁶⁷ See most recently N.T. Wright, *What St. Paul really said*, 119, which was published in 1997 by Lion Publishers. The quotation Wright cites approvingly is from E.P. Sanders. One of the ironies of the book whose title makes the claim to explain what Paul said, is the effective dismissal of 1 Cor. 1:30

It is highly significant that the doctrine of justification is said here to be concerned with the doctrine of the church and not salvation, even though, according to Paul, „therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand“ (Romans 5:1). For Luther this was the only place for the Christian to stand.

It should be noted that one of the major preoccupations of Christendom one way or another in the twentieth century has been the doctrine of the church.⁶⁸ It has been turned into a sun that has pulled all other doctrines into its gravitation. *Unam Sanctum* is still with us, wearing a new garb. This theological trend may well be influenced, not so much by theology but by denominations that have become preoccupied with structures, organisation and centralism in the same way that these issues have dominated the secular spheres, both nationally and internationally. This is a peculiar feature of the twentieth century when an emphasis is given to structures in organisations in a way that no other previous century has ever done.

It would seem that the doctrine of the church has begun to assume great „majesty“ not only in Roman Catholic circles, but also in Protestant churches in which some Evangelicals have been vocal in their support for the move of the doctrine of justification away from salvation to ecclesiology. As a logical consequence the latter doctrine and the matter of membership of the church is that on which one alone stands or falls. As a result of this shift, *Unam Sanctum*'s focus that there is no salvation outside the church, assumes a central place for Protestants. Confidence before the living God now and in the hour of death is in membership of the church. The focus thereby shifts away from the focus that his or her acquittal has been secured and is secure in Christ.

The doctrine of the people of God should not be seen as a subset of ecclesiology, but ecclesiology is a subset of the people of God. The Bible unfolds a divine rescue which results in God being our God and we being his people for ever. This is its dominant theme and occurs as a result of the justification of individual

which refers to Jesus Christ who is made to us „righteousness“ as well as wisdom, sanctification and redemption. The comment raises the question how often did Paul need to say something before it became what he “really said”?

⁶⁸ For a brief discussion of this trend see my “The Problem with ‘church’ for the Early Church” in ed. D. Peterson and J. Pryor, *In the Fullness of Time: Biblical Studies in Honour of Archbishop Robinson* (Sydney: Lancer, 1992) ch. 13.

sinner. This in no way denies the important fact that every Christian is „an organ“, rather than „a member“, ontologically linked with other Christians in a believing community where all need each other and none can be dismissive of other believers (1 Corinthians 12.12-26). The issue is how does that ontological link occur. Some will answer „through baptism“ while others will argue that the Christian is first linked to Christ through justification.

The Council of Trent tells us the task it undertook was that of setting out:

for all the Christian faithful the true and sound doctrine of justification which the sun of justice, Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, taught, the apostles handed down, and the catholic church under the prompting of the holy Spirit has always retained.

and it did so at a time when „there has been spread an erroneous doctrine about justification, with resulting loss of many souls and serious damage to the unity of the church“, according to its *Introduction*.

The above examination would suggest that Trent's intentions were not realised but rather obscured at that session and eclipsed at the following session at which justification was set into the sacraments of the church. The problem still remains at the close of the twentieth century in an ecumenical climate of unprecedented dialogue. Such open discussions are to be welcomed but they must come to grips more clearly with the central affirmation of justification by faith, which is a synonymous phrase for „the gospel“. In it we are assured that the Lord's goodness and mercy follows us all the days of our lives and the assurance given that we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:6).

The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Martin Luther: A Sample of Theological Ethics for Romanian Evangelicals

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Introduction

This essay is like thousands of others. Western theology has been flooded with all sorts of scholarly written research articles on Martin Luther's theology of justification. From this perspective, this one is definitely neither a novelty nor a contribution to the development of academic research in the field of Lutheran studies. For Romanian theology, however, it is not a commonplace. It is unfortunately a sad reality that the Romanian theology of the 21st century has been barely acquainted to classical Protestant thought and to Luther's theology in particular. Thus, the purpose of this essay is to present in a simple fashion the fundamental tenets of Luther's doctrine of justification. Whether this is a coincidence or not, it so happens that nowadays Romanian evangelicals are extremely concerned with the moral decay of the Romanian society. More or less subtle voices even whisper informally that we may have run out of solutions for the desired moral renewal. It is as if the appeal to the Holy Scriptures as normative for our daily living were outdated and ineffective. To those who have nurtured such a thought, Luther's almost five hundred years old biblical theology may appear as a fresh insight into their approach of personal morality and everyday life.

In the Lutheran theology of the early Protestant Reformation, the doctrine of justification became an extremely important and urgent matter. Justification proved to be of utter significance not only for the whole doctrine of salvation, but also for the doctrine and practice of the church. For Luther, justification was the summary of the Christian doctrine. The nature of the entire Christian doctrine depends on justification and this is the article on which the church stands or falls. Luther also said that justification was like the sun, which illuminated God's holy church. Justification became of such importance in Lutheran theology that any

misinterpretation of it would implicitly lead to an erroneous formulation of Christology and ecclesiology. The essential element of the Lutheran doctrine of justification is how can we stand before God (*coram Deo*). Justification is the very doctrine that makes a Christian sure of his salvation.⁶⁹

Lutheran theology is extremely careful with terms. The terminology of justification in Lutheran theology ranges from simple biblical definitions to elaborate theological formulations. For instance, justification may refer to one being declared righteous by God. However, it may also refer to an event, whereby man is acquitted, changed and renewed by virtue of divine promise and grace. Thus, justification is a process, which extend throughout the whole life of man and which reaches its climax only at the final resurrection of humanity. The first major aspect of the Lutheran doctrine of justification is the imputation of „alien righteousness“ (*justitia aliena*), which, unlike medieval soteriological formulations regarding the righteousness of justification, is not intrinsic to humanity, but totally external to it. The shift from anthropology to theology, from the righteousness of man to the righteousness of God, is of great importance for Lutheran theology. Justification is no longer a theological reality, which emerges from the qualities of the human being, but is utterly the work of God.⁷⁰

Consequently, the definition of fundamental theological terms like faith and grace underwent a significant change and their origin was placed in the realm of God. The preoccupation of Lutheran theologians was now to remove righteousness far away from the individual believer and the realm of his actions. It is not man who initiates justification and, ultimately, salvation, but God, who acts in a loving and gracious manner, manifested in the work of Christ at the cross.⁷¹

1. The Work of God and the Work of Christ in Justification

It should be noted from the very beginning that the doctrine of justification in the theology of Luther has a strong Christological focus. For Luther, the work of

⁶⁹ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 224. See also Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology. Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 258.

⁷⁰ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology. Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 258.

⁷¹ Cf. Carl Maxcey, *Bona Opera. A Study in the Development of Doctrine of Philip Melancthon* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1980), 92.

Christ and justification are one and the same thing. Justification by faith must be discussed in a close and immediate relationship with the doctrine of Christ. In matters of salvation generally and of justification particularly, man must not trust himself, but Christ only.⁷² Justification must never be separated from faith in Christ. In the theology of Luther, justification is construed christologically. Ultimately, justification depends on the faith in Christ. In other words, faith in Christ is constitutive to justification. It is very important to notice that Luther used the terms „to justify“ (*justificare*) and „justification“ (*justificatio*) in more than just one sense. Justification often refers to the judgment of God, whereby he declares or he reckons man to be righteous:

The other righteousness is that of faith and consists not in any works, but in the gracious favor and reckoning of God. See how Paul stresses the word reckoned; how he insists on it and repeats it and enforces it [...] declares that righteousness is not *reckoned* to him that works, but is reckoned to him that works not, if only he believes.⁷³

On the other hand, justification often refers to the entire even through which a man is essentially made righteous, namely both to the imputation of righteousness to man, and to the very process whereby man becomes righteous. In this sense, justification is incomplete on earth, but will be perfected in the Last Day. This complete justification or righteousness is an eschatological reality only. The most basic meaning of justification refers to God's act of crediting, imputing or recognizing (*imputare, reputare*) as righteous, that is the act whereby God grants a man value in relationship to him.⁷⁴

As far as the gospel is concerned, justification is the act whereby God

⁷² Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 225.

⁷³ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1999), 296. As a result of his exegetical work on the writings of Paul, Luther reached the conclusion that we cannot be righteous through our own works. Only our faith in the God who justifies the godless is reckoned as righteousness. Within this context, the terms *reputare* and *imputare* are ultimately significant. Their first significance must be understood in the light of the Holy Scripture. The text in Romans 4:5 reads: „However, to the man that does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited (*logizestai*) as righteousness.“ The Greek original *logizestai* was rendered in the Latin Vulgate by *reputatur*, the passive form of the verb *reputare*. Thus, *reputare* refers to the acquittal of the guilty one and to the promise of the grace of God. See Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology. Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 258.

⁷⁴ For more details, see Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 226-227.

considers and receives the sinner who is unrighteous before him as righteous. This implies that God does not impute sin, but he forgives sin. God deals with sin, as if it were not present. The forgiveness of sins or the non-imputation of sins is actually the very imputation of righteousness. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner. God sees the sinner through the righteousness of Christ, as if the sinner were one with Christ. God forgives sin and considers the sinner to be righteous for the sake of Christ (*propter Christum*).⁷⁵ Accordingly, the righteousness imputed to the sinner is not produced by the sinner, but is an alien righteousness, which does not belong to him. This alien righteousness belongs to Christ. Righteousness is not a quality of man, but a quality of Christ; righteousness is a quality that is imputed to sinful man by the grace of God. The sinner cannot earn this righteousness for himself and by means devised in his mind. This alien righteousness of Christ is imputed, namely freely granted and given to him by the grace and mercy of God for the sake of Christ (*propter Christum*). Man is ultimately passive in justification. Something happens with the sinner and he can only let it happen. God is the one who is active in justification. The sinner only receives justification or the righteousness of Christ from God, who actively gives it to him. At this point, the doctrine of the union of Christ with the believer is very important. When Christ unites himself with man, when he becomes one with the sinner, his alien righteousness becomes the sinner's and this makes the sinner righteous before God. This happens throughout the whole life of man. Luther argued that man, including the Christian man, remained a sinner for his whole life. The very life of a sinner, now a Christian, has worth before God only because of the alien righteousness of Christ, which becomes the sinner's by its imputation realized by God.

2. The Importance of Faith

God's mercy and grace are the ultimate source of Christ's righteousness and of its imputation to the sinner. Righteousness and thus justification comes to man from outside himself and is not an intrinsic quality of the human heart. Nobody is justified by his own works. Should justification happen at all, it is only for the

⁷⁵ Luther is very careful to note that man is not justified on the account of his faith (*propter fidem*), but on account of Christ (*propter Christum*). Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei. A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification from 1500 to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 14.

sake of Christ that it happens (*propter Christum*).⁷⁶ God considers the sinner to be righteous, only for the sake of his Son, Jesus Christ. Justification is entirely the work of God, who is actively involved in granting it to sinners. But in order that justification should be effective, man has to receive it. Man receives justification only by faith, that is by believing in Jesus Christ:

He begins to teach the right way by which men must be justified and saved and says they are all sinners and without praise from God, but they must be justified, without merit, through faith in Christ, who has earned this for us by his blood, and has been made for us a mercy seat by God, who forgives us all former sins, proving thereby that we were aided only by his righteousness, which he gives in faith, which is revealed in this time through the gospel and „testified before by the law and the prophets.“ Thus the law is set up by faith, through the works of the law are put down by it, together with the reputation that they give.⁷⁷

Faith in Christ presupposes many aspects. For Luther, to believe in Christ means to recognize and grasp the love of God the Father in the history of Jesus Christ. The essence of justifying faith is that it is *fides apprehensiva*, the faith which seizes Christ in order that his righteousness should be ours and our sin his. This exchange is termed by Luther by means of the phrase *commercium admirabile*, the wonderful exchange between our sins and the righteousness of Christ.⁷⁸ From the perspective of the sinner, faith also entails the acceptance of God's gracious judgment over him. When the sinner has faith in Christ it means that he believes justification and the whole work of Christ happened for the sinner's sake. Faith is not merely historical, but fundamentally personal. The death of Christ on the cross in order to secure our salvation is a historical fact, which must be appropriated by the believer. Faith is not merely an intellectual fact; it also involves trust (*fiducia*) in God, trust in the mercy offered by God in Christ. The content of faith is Christ, so Christ and faith must be treated together, as two things which are not different from one another and which are not in opposition to each other. Faith is powerful only because of Christ and because is grounded on the righteousness of Christ. The promise of the grace of God is received by faith, which is

⁷⁶ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 228-229.

⁷⁷ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976), xix.

⁷⁸ Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei. A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification from 1500 to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 12-13.

not a work of man, but merely a response to the divine word of forgiveness. The alien righteousness of Christ is the righteousness he earned by his death at the cross. Thus, justification is connected to the work of Christ. We receive this alien righteousness of Christ by faith.

When we do this, we are justified, because faith justifies as it takes possession of the righteousness of Christ, namely of Christ himself. Christ is present in our faith, which justifies. Justification is also firmly connected to the person of Christ. This is why justification has both an objective and a subjective aspect. The objective aspect of justification refers to the real forgiveness of the sinful world. The subjective aspect of justification is related to the appropriation by the individual of this forgiveness. By the work of Christ, the world was reconciled with God, regardless of the fact that anyone should acknowledge this or not. The judgment of God is pronounced on Christ first of all, in a complete manner, because Christ represents the new creation. The judgment of condemnation had been pronounced on Adam, as the representative of the old creation. Accordingly, the people who are justified are in Christ and the people who are condemned are on Adam. Thus it becomes clear that for Luther Christ himself is our justification, because he is our righteousness. Justification is not a sort of transaction between God in heaven and the individual on earth, which requires that the individual should do something prerequisite in order to be given the righteousness of Christ, with the purpose of being justified before God. *Commercium admirabile* is a wonderful exchange because of the person of Christ, which is seized by the believer through faith. Christ himself is our righteousness, he is our justification; we do nothing for our salvation, because only God can do anything in this respect. Christ is not a means of justification. Christ is justification itself.⁷⁹

Faith makes man righteous only because it grasps Christ. Christ is present in faith and this is why we are justified. In Luther's theology, the doctrine of justification is relevant in the light of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In this respect, faith is a human attitude worked by the Holy Spirit. Such an attitude presupposes that the believer is no longer satisfied and pleased with himself. Thus, he expects nothing from God, because he cannot do anything to please God. He entirely trusts God for his salvation and is ready to receive the righteousness of

⁷⁹ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 230-231; Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology. Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 261. See Carl Braaten, *Justification. The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 23.

Christ from God. One can easily notice the active involvement of God in this entire process, because it is the Holy Spirit who works the meek attitude of faith within the sinner, who passively receives the active imputation of Christ's righteousness by God. Faith is not a work in relation to justification, but it is the source of all good works. Faith is the beginning of a new righteousness, which man possesses because he is really righteous. Faith justifies through Christ and brings Christ in the heart of the believer, which is an active work done by the Holy Spirit. The divine nature of God is revealed to us through faith. Accordingly, our heart becomes righteous not only because of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, but also because of the very fact that the Holy Spirit of God was poured into our hearts. Christ, who is brought within our heart by faith, is not only our alien righteousness, but also the power of God himself, working within our heart in order to bring into his own life and being.

In relationship to us, Christ fulfils the law in two ways. Firstly, he fulfils the law outside of us (*extra nos*) through his alien righteousness, which is imputed to us. Secondly, Christ fulfils the law within us, through his Holy Spirit who enables us to become like God. Christ is for us and our faith does not only appropriate to us the alien righteousness of Christ, but faith is a powerful presence within us. Christ is not only within us, but also before God, lest we should be condemned.⁸⁰

Faith gives us both the forgiveness of sins and the triumph over sin. In Luther's theology, the primary aspect of justification is the forgiveness of sins. The individual or the subjective forgiveness of sins is totally based upon the objective reality of the complete forgiveness in Christ. Braaten wrote that „the actuality of forgiveness in Christ, who has objectively reconciled the world to God, is the presupposition for every individual apprehension of God, as the forgiver of sins.“ This appropriation or apprehension is done by faith alone. In this respect, justification as forgiveness of sins is fundamentally a gift, not an achievement. Forgiveness of sins is an objectively realized event, worked out once and for all in Christ. The possibility of being subjectively forgiven is always dependent on the already realized objective justification. The objective forgiveness of sins is prior to the human act of faith, which comes as a gift from God. Justification is a divine act *propter Christum*, realized for the sake of Christ, and is

⁸⁰ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 232-234. True justifying faith acknowledges that Christ appears before God for us, or in Luther's words, *Christus apparuit vultui Dei pro nobis*. Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei. A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification from 1500 to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 13.

always prior to repentance. Although an objective reality, justification might be described as the forgiving heart of God, which reaches out itself in order to meet the predicament of sinful humanity by means of free grace.

3. The Relevance of Good Works

The subjective aspect of justification, namely the personal appropriation of the work of Christ and the inward reconciliation of our heart with God does not occur because we initiate the connection with Christ, but because Christ establishes a relationship with us. The priority of Christ in justification is the core of Luther's soteriology. It is not man who makes the first move towards his own salvation, but God, who graciously works out our salvation by means of the death of Christ, which must be appropriated personally by every believer. Nobody can do it for somebody else. Confessing, believing and repenting must be faced personally like death itself.⁸¹ By faith, the sinner becomes a new man. Faith has an ethical dimension. Anyone who has faith is willing to serve God, by engaging himself in the battle against sin. Good works are the necessary sign that somebody has faith. Works are not important in justification. The essential fact that must be known is that justification is *sola fide*, by faith only, not by works. When man's status before God is involved, works are not important. Justification by faith is against justification by „works righteousness“. Good works, however, must necessarily follow justification by faith. The faith in Christ must dwell in our hearts and this faith is not dead.

This kind of faith is necessarily accompanied by good works, which are the indicator of the presence of grace within us. Love, which is the spring of all good works, must be a witness to faith and should give us confidence. All these make us stand securely on the mercy of God. Good works do not justify, but they strengthen our calling. When works follow our justification, it is clear we have faith. If works are not present, it is clear our faith is lost. For Luther, justification is both *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, by faith only and by grace only. Works do not count for justification. They are important for our salvation, but not for our justification. The scope of Luther's doctrine of justification was to direct the sinner towards Christ alone, who is the source of our justification.⁸²

⁸¹ Carl Braaten, *Justification. The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 24-25.

⁸² Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology. Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 264-166.

Thus, faith in Christ has two effects. Firstly, faith receives the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. An aspect which is not totally clarified in Luther is whether faith is a work or not. What is clear from Luther's theology is that, in justification, faith is objectively prior to works. Faith itself is the subjective impact that God's acceptance has upon the sinner. One may say that faith justifies only in the sense that it becomes aware of the forgiving love of God whereby he assured our justification based on the death of Christ. Justification precedes faith, but faith is the acknowledgement of justification as the free gift of God for the sinner. Faith is not the cause of forgiveness, but the very element which makes the sinner aware of the gracious act of God.⁸³ Secondly, faith establishes a new being and makes the sinner righteous in himself. Justification consists of both these effects of faith. It has been shown that in Luther's theology, justification has primarily a christological dimension, whereby the alien righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner. Then, justification has an ethical dimension, whereby the imputation of Christ's alien righteousness by faith must necessarily produce a new life in the believer, who will produce good works out of his obedience to God.

There is also a third dimension of justification, which relates to the final judgment of God. The eschatological dimension of justification is the perfection of the previous two dimensions. The believer does not rest securely on the forgiveness of his sins, although he knows this is real and true, but he is actively involved in the everyday battle against sin, with the settled goal of doing this until the end of his life. Present righteousness is a promise of the righteousness that will come in future. Present righteousness is both complete and partial, depending on the viewpoint from which it is approached. It is complete when seen as acceptance by God and as participation in Christ's righteousness. It is partial in regard to man's new being and new obedience. The completion of our new being and obedience will come future.⁸⁴ It is in this context that Luther's famous formula *simul iustus et peccator* becomes clear:

Hereby now we may see how faith justifies without works and yet how imputation of righteousness is also necessary. Sins do remain in us, which God

⁸³ Carl Braaten, *Justification. The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 26.

⁸⁴ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 235-236.

utterly hates. Therefore, it is necessary that we should have imputation of righteousness, which we obtain through Christ and for Christ's sake, which is given unto us and received of us by faith. In the meanwhile, as long as we live here, we are carried and nourished in the bosom of the mercy and long sufferance of God, until the body of sin is abolished and we raise up as new creatures in that great day. Then shall there be new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness shall dwell. In the meanwhile, under this heaven, sin and wicked men do dwell and the godly also have sin dwelling in them.⁸⁵

This double character remains throughout the entire life of the Christian. *Simul iustus et peccator* reveals the double condition of Christian life: from the standpoint of God and of his divine nature, the Christian is righteous, but from the standpoint of his human nature, the Christian is still a sinner. This duality of justification is true in regard to the inner movement of the Christian life. On one hand, the Christian must be involved in a daily renewed surrender of himself in faith to the merciful judgment of God, whereby he gives to the Christian his justification, which must be appropriated by faith. On the other hand, this constant renewal of the Christian's surrender to God works the progressive death of the old man and the resurrection of the new man within the Christian believer.⁸⁶

Conclusion

Luther was a teacher of human self-awareness. It has been the case that too often Romanian Evangelicals promoted the necessity of spotless daily living, which

⁸⁵ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1979), 133. It is very important to notice that, for Luther, justification implies both the forgiveness of sins and acquittal, and the renewal of the individual. Although genuine, the renewal is not complete. Sin remains in man for as long as he lives, so the believer is, in the same time, righteous and sinner. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology. Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 262.

⁸⁶ Further bibliography on justification in the theology of Luther: Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 269-305; Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), 121-137; Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther. Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 451-459; Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career 1521-1530* (London: Darton & Todd, 1983); Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* (Collins: Fontana Library of Theology and Philosophy, 1972), 110-124; Carl Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 63-85; Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 3-24.

though desirable proved to be impossible. Luther is very real about how the believer should look at himself in the light of the Gospel. Christianity has no room for perfectionism but it has all the room in the world for spiritual growth. As in the rest of the world, Romanian Evangelicals face the difficult task of calling sinful people to a life of faith, purity and good works. In doing this, they should always stress that doing something does not trigger God's favor. It is human nature to attempt an immediate recovery from sin and set up towards the performance of good works hoping that God will appease his wrath towards us. This is a burdensome challenge but also vital to the life of the church. Following Luther, Romanian Evangelicals should realize that preaching faith and good works as proof of faith will influence people who come to their churches. Nothing has been achieved if anybody comes to church to earn God's favor. People must be taught from Scriptures that God has already done everything for their salvation in the death of Christ. They must, however, place their faith as trust in God as he is the only one capable of justifying them in Christ. Thus, Romanian Evangelicals should learn to preach realistically and urgently about the reality of God's justification in Christ and about the life of faith as means of the moral recovery of all Romanians.

Book Reviews

Timothy J. Wengert, *Law and Gospel. Philip Melanchthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, and Paternoster Press, Cumbria, UK, 1997, 232 pages.

This book is a reliable study of a controversy which struck the Lutheran Reformation in a period of apparent calm, between the two Diets of Speyer and before the religious conflicts fought in the name of true Christianity – the controversy over the meaning of *poenitentia*, which makes a significant difference to soteriological issues. Although the roots of the debate may be traced much earlier, by the time Luther and Melanchthon struggled with the theology of Erasmus, its outburst is somewhat surprising, mainly because the attack on Melanchthon's definition of *poenitentia* came from a relatively unknown scholar, John Agricola of Eisleben, one of Luther's former students and a colleague of Melanchthon.

The difficulty of the controversy lies in the very definition of the word at issue: *poenitentia*, a term that was used by Luther in his Ninety-Five Theses. Because the debate itself focuses on the variety of meanings that *poenitentia* has, Professor Wengert uses in his book a very challenging methodology. Instead of suggesting a certain meaning of *poenitentia*, which might illuminate the dogmatic aspects of the controversy, he rather leaves the word untranslated, so that *poenitentia* becomes the key term for the debate that rises in the mind of the reader. What *poenitentia* is and why such a controversy originated are some of the many questions that must be given an answer by the reader himself. Is *poenitentia* the German *Buße*, which might be translated „repentance“, „penitence“, „penance“, „remorse“, „contrition“, or should we understand it some other way? This difficult task entails an earnest study, which Professor Wengert offers in a classic historical fashion.

In the Introduction, after the roots of the controversy over *poenitentia* are revealed, we are shown the historical setting of the entire affair. A brief but helpful analysis of the secondary literature concerning the debate follows the same historical pattern which characterizes the whole methodology of the study.

The first chapter displays a useful insight into the very heart of the debate,

and the description of Agricola's biblical exegesis between 1525 and 1527, when the controversy developed, is preceded by a careful survey of the early relationship between Melanchthon and Agricola. Whether or not this particular relationship was decisive for the course of the debate is a matter which again concerns the reader, whose task it is to integrate it into the wider theological context. Agricola's low estimation of the law and its function is clearly revealed in his translation of Melanchthon's annotations on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians. What actually makes the Christian's life begin is the gospel itself, understood as promise, and not the law which terrifies his conscience and drives him to repentance.

The second chapter explores the need for catechisms in the Lutheran church, because the poor instruction of both laymen and clergy prevailed as an inheritance of prior Catholic influence. The catechetical contributions of Melanchthon and Agricola are briefly mentioned along with a wider analysis of how the Wittenberg catechisms made use of *poenitentia* and law. A learned exposition of the use of *poenitentia* in Agricola and Melanchthon follows as an attempt to sketch the theological difference between the two reformers. Although we should not trust in the works of the law, Melanchthon wrote, the knowledge of the law is absolutely necessary because the Christian cannot discover and experience the Gospel without it. According to Agricola, however, the law is ineffective. The law discloses sin and tames or restrains our lusts, instead of killing them. The performance of such a „murder“ is the action of the gospel only.

The third chapter focuses on Melanchthon's first attack on Agricola, as it appears written in three major works: *Entliche Sprüche*, *Scholia* of 1527 and the *Visitation Articles* – the latter became the focal-point of the conflict, as it contained the definition of *poenitentia* which was defended by both Melanchthon and Luther. Theologically, Melanchthon tied *poenitentia* to the law's function, so that God's wrath, which is revealed in the law, is normative for faith. Accordingly, there is a tight connection between the law, which actually discloses *poenitentia*, and the gospel as a revealer of faith: the anxious heart clearly sees that our merits are too small to reconcile us to God and thus we must trust Christ for the forgiveness of sin. Any downplaying of *poenitentia* as contrition over sin out of fear of God's wrath and any dismissal of it as denial of the law and its terrors proved to be sufficient ground for Melanchthon to start a war with anyone who dared uphold such views. This is to say that for Melanchthon the doctrine of faith must not be taught without the doctrine of law, because if anyone does so, the common folk becomes secure and they only imagine they have the righteousness

of faith. But genuine faith is alive only in those who have contrition in their hearts by means of the law.

Chapter four examines the public dispute between Melanchthon and Agricola, which lasted for barely three months. Professor Wengert very keenly analyses the whole of it, and it will be a fulfilling opportunity for the readers to take delight in a careful scrutiny of all the historical and theological aspects pertaining to the controversy. Nevertheless, the first and the second use of the law in Melanchthon's argument against Agricola must be emphasized. Realising that Agricola's attack was motivated by the fear that the doctrine of justification by faith alone was being undermined – the Eisleben theologian took no pride in boasting the law – Melanchthon plainly launched his own attack by saying that the law was given for two purposes: first, to coerce the flesh with carnal righteousness, and second, to terrify the conscience. Choosing the first for himself, while ascribing the second to Luther, Melanchthon left no room for Agricola, who appeared to be trying to distort the Wittenberg consensus over theological matters such as *poenitentia*. Luther's theological diplomacy brought the entire dispute to an end. While acknowledging that *poenitentia* and the law have always belonged to the common faith since there is a God who terrifies us, Luther nevertheless said that for common folk it was better to leave all these matters under the name of *poenitentia*, command, law and fear. This is, for Luther, a much clearer way of understanding the „justifying faith“, by which the apostles meant the means of both making a person righteous and forgiving sin. Describing the dispute as being a war of words, Luther said that the Christian life moved from law to gospel or, in this particular case, from *poenitentia* to faith.

In chapter five, an unfortunate historical reality is given proper heed: although the dispute over *poenitentia* had been formally brought to an end, both Melanchthon and Agricola went on with their own definitions, so that the controversy was carried on informally. Even if he revised his Visitation Articles, Melanchthon ended his attack against Agricola's definition of *poenitentia* only in his Scholia on Colossians printed in 1528. Melanchthon's position was clear: Jesus preached the law, so faith arises from the gospel; it has nothing to do with contrition, which is ascribed to the law. Thus the preaching of the law is necessary for the Christian life. As far as Agricola was concerned, the gospel set the Christian free from the law understood as ceremonies, traditions and even the Decalogue. To fight such a view, Melanchthon introduced the two offices of

the law: first, to teach civil righteousness (the gospel alone teaches the righteousness of the heart), and second, to show sin and terrify the conscience. Melanchthon's subtlety in defining theological matters is shown in his reasoning which concerns the relationship between the law and the gospel. Because the gospel contains the preaching of the *poenitentia* (that is, the law), it is necessary to accuse and show sin. Accordingly, the definition in this case is crucial: the gospel is no longer understood simply as the mercy and goodness of God, but as the New Testament itself. Following this line of thought, Melanchthon was able to prove that there was a strong tie between law and gospel, because the law itself was preached by the gospel. This means that the Decalogue is used for preaching *poenitentia*, for the revealing of sin. In conclusion, for Melanchthon – and also for Luther – the Christian life moves from death to life, from law to gospel, and from *poenitentia* to *fides*.

In chapter six and also in the final chapter of the book, we see that in 1534 Melanchthon produced another edition of his Scholia on Colossians, which contained an important shift in his understanding of justification. We should not lose sight of the fact that the 1534 edition of his Scholia was issued after *The Augsburg Confession* (1530) and *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (1531), in which Melanchthon tried to offer a clear and peaceful statement of faith in the debates with the Catholics. The faith that in the 1534 edition of *Scholia* was still the result of the preaching of *poenitentia* is now attributed a new characteristic, which is the necessity of good works. The believer's life must necessarily be framed by good works, which show the genuine character of his faith. Melanchthon chooses to explain this by means of the forensic nature of justification. Accordingly, justification is not a matter of inner change of virtues, but a matter of divine acceptance. In his *foro divino*, God actually pronounces us righteous, so that *justum pronuntiar* becomes the essence of human salvation.

Melanchthon emphasizes the forensic nature of justification in relation to the accusing law by arguing that only on account of Christ God imputed his righteousness to the believer. The language of obedience lies at the heart of forensic justification. Melanchthon made a sharp distinction between the person accepted by mercy and the good works which must be done out of obedience. Christians are free from the Decalogue as far as justification is concerned, but not as far as obedience. As justification is now an action of God, this means that the Ten Commandments must not be followed in order to obtain justification, but they must be observed in order to demonstrate our obedience and our genuine

faith. From now on, the dialectic law-gospel and the meaning of *poenitentia* take a different course.

We must remember that in 1527 Melanchthon said that God had given the law for two purposes: to coerce the flesh and to terrify the conscience. But in 1534, the Wittenberg theologian altered this by adding a third purpose or use of the law which concerned obedience. According to Melanchthon, the third use of the law pertains to the righteous, in order that they should practise obedience. Nevertheless, the gospel preaches the law and *poenitentia*, so the required obedience is part of the true *poenitentia*. After dealing with the reasons for and the effects of Melanchthon's new formulations, Professor Wengert ends his study by indirectly drawing attention to the importance of *poenitentia* and to its various theological and practical implications. He notices that the debate over *poenitentia* did not end here; the differences between Luther's and Melanchthon's definitions of *poenitentia* caused their heirs countless divisions over such very important doctrines as justification, good works and the uses of the law.

Following the historical methodology that Professor Wengert so keenly works with in his obviously complex study, one might consider a further analysis. Professor Wengert's book urges towards a contemporary ecclesiological application of the entire debate between Melanchthon and Agricola. Accordingly, the submission of the importance of *poenitentia* for the church today to a close scrutiny appears as a demanding but much needed theological enterprise.

Corneliu C. Simuț

M. Fiedler and L. Rabben (ed.), *Rome Has Spoken: a Guide to Forgotten Papal Statements, and How They Have Changed Through the Centuries*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998, 243 pages.

Drs. Fiedler and Rabben have assembled a group of seventeen authors who, including Fiedler, have penned eighteen chapters about subjects ranging from papal infallibility to usury. The text is intended for both reference and easy to read history in summary form. Fiedler is a Roman Catholic nun who co-directs the Quixote Center for international justice and peace located near Washington, D. C. She is also a commentator on National Public Radio in the United States. Rabben, who is not Roman Catholic as is a Jew, is an anthropologist and researcher as well as co-founder of Human Rights Umbrella that is part of the

Quixote Center.

The chapters in this text read easily because of the research that had been assembled by Rabben. That effort was largely undertaken using secondary sources, but only after primary sources have been located. Much of her work took place in the archives of Catholic University of America, Washington. Thereafter, invited authors apparently redacted material and wrote summary reports commenting on the breadth of information in a specific chapter. Fiedler wrote an introductory chapter pointing the way to those that are subject bound, while Rabben wrote a concluding chapter entitled, „The Case is Never Closed“. The text includes chapter by chapter citations of referencies, as well as a subject index.

Some of the commentary by the various authors, given their assignment to write in summary form, appeared uneven. However, a few, such as Robert McCleary (professor of journalism at Northwestern University near Chicago), wrote incisively without sweeping away salient issues outlined from two millennia about claims of papal infallibility. McCleary was joined by Charles E. Curran („Separation of Church and State“), Rosemary Rueter („The Church Isn't a Democracy, but Shouldn't It Be“), and by Richard McCormick, S. J. of Notre Dame's Theology Department („From Heresy to Dissent“). Fr. Curran, it will be recalled, was removed by papal demand from his teaching post as Theologian at Catholic University of America. Still a very active Catholic, he is now a faculty member at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

If there is an overacting theme stated in Fiedler's introduction and carried through the text, it is that papal pronouncements over the centuries have been anything but consistent. In spite of Roma's tendency to focus attention upon consistency by saying, „As the Church has always taught...“, some papal statements have not risen to the level of inconsistency; rather, as the authors have show, many pronouncements contradicted other pronouncements. Without benefit of computers in the past, but armed with a theological clique of like mind-cronies, Rome could get away with those contradictions since research sources were not available to local clergy while dissemination of information and pronouncements was slow. Today, reversion to like-minded cronies called the *Magisterium* seems to be the style of John Paul II. One of the authors concluded, frankly, that the cronies sat back all the while during Vatican II debates and pronouncements regarding democracy and inclusion with the deposit of faith supposedly residing in the priesthood of all believers (sound similar?), waiting to take control after the cardinals had gone home! Historically minded readers will remember that popular elections gave way to clique control in Rome in past

centuries. Representations of the faithful through the councils as demanded at Constance in 1417 to rescue Christendom from having multiple popes stood but for forty-three years before Pius II centralized power anew in 1460. This last paved the way for excess so great that Luther was forced to take his stand. Whatever John XXIII had hoped for in terms of decentralizing Roman power in favor of more local control will have to wait for future popes. Indeed, John Paul II seems to have repeated 1460: it remains to be seen if future bishops reform in earnest Roman-Catholic church polity.

In addition to chapters regarding papal pronouncements concerning married clergy, divorce, family planning, the role of women, the Jewish people, scriptural interpretation, evolution, and war, the chapter on usury is timely. It will be recalled that Durkheim has written of the complement between the rise of capitalism and Protestantism. What the church had been for Roman Catholics, corporation became for Protestants. Hand in hand, both Catholics and Protestants, as well as the Orthodox and Anglicans, seem to be moving toward „corporate“ church (just as Catholics have replaced White Anglo-Saxon Protestants – WASPs – as the power brokers in corporate America). What was called usury now is called stewardship, the point being that money has taken on an all important role for institutional support.

Once down that road, churches run the risk of evaluating themselves against the „bottom line“ familiar to corporations: how many new congregants do we have?, how much money will we require for our building campaigns?, and on. There is evidence to show from the National Opinion Research Council and other sources that congregants, especially well educated believers, are in the process of renouncing corporate institutions in favor of religious experience. Whether leaders from the various denominations recognize this trend and do something about it remains to be seen.

Evangelical Christians and other readers will be interested in this text as an outline to consult for research purposes as well as for speculation about possible future trends. For example, the chapter on ecumenism reminds the reader of the collegial work undertaken by representatives from various denominations concerning a unified definition of grace (1983). That effort convinced Evangelicals such as Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell that ecumenism was not just a word but a possibility. The chapter on scriptural interpretation might convince even ardent anti-Romans that, despite centralization trends today - trends put into place perhaps to deal with the fears of the cronies that all will be lost without their tight fistness, many Roman-Catholics use a papal statement from Pius XIth in

1923 to guide themselves (p. 106): „In those matters in which there is a division among the best authors at Catholic schools, no one is to be forbidden to follow the opinion which seems to him (or her) to be nearer to truth.“ The editors and authors of this text have done just that, emphasizing once again – as my Jesuit teachers taught so well – that the most biting criticism of all (e.g., Luther, Zwingli, Newman, and Küng) usually comes from the inside.

Dr. James McMahon

James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 1999.

Old Testament scholar James Barr has taught at Edinburgh, Princeton Theological Seminary, Manchester, Oxford, and Vanderbilt, where he now holds emeritus status. He has also distinguished himself over many years with voluminous publications primarily in such areas as Old Testament history and exegesis, semantics and linguistics, and hermeneutics. In this new book he takes up questions concerning biblical theology, centering on but not limiting himself to issues of Old Testament theology. Since Barr has been a major contributor to discussion in this field since the 1950s, it is not surprising that this volume has the scent and heft (over 700 pages) of a magnum opus.

Barr proceeds in a topical fashion, not exactly randomly but still without an immediately transparent organizing principle. He subjects various themes, issues or scholars to analysis, interacting and correcting and sometimes setting forth his own view of the matter. Ten sample chapter titles (out of a total of thirty-five) will suffice to glimpse the range of coverage.

Chapter 2 – The Origins of Modern New Testament Theology

Chapter 3 – A Typology of Old Testament Theologies (Koehler, Eihrodt, Vriezen, von Rad, Childs)

Chapter 8 – Difference from History of Religion

Chapter 11 – Connections with the New Testament

- Chapter 14 – Opposition to Biblical Theology
- Chapter 18 – Jewish Biblical Theology? (Tsevat, Levenson, Goshen-Gottstein, Japhet, Sweeney)
- Chapter 21 – Story and Biblical Theology
- Chapter 22 – Gese and the Unity of Biblical Theology
- Chapter 26 – Some Recent Theologies (Kaiser, Gunneweg, Preuss)
- Chapter 27 – Natural Theology within Biblical Theology

If the book has a single purpose, it is to show that and why „the concept of biblical theology is a *contested* concept“ (p. 605; cf. p. xiii). Barr hopes to contribute to the conviction among biblical scholars and theologians that „biblical theology has proved itself as something that will be a part of the scene, both as a fully academic level within biblical studies and as a participant in the considerations of doctrinal theology“ (p. 607).

For some this will seem a surprising volte-face: wasn't Barr's *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (1961) instrumental in bringing the Biblical Theology Movement to a grinding halt? Readers as various as John McKenzie, Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, and Gerhard Hasel have understood Barr to be hostile toward the whole enterprise (cf. p. 235f.). But Barr insists he was never averse to biblical theology itself, just to its „aberrations“. Far from wishing to denigrate biblical theology as a decreet discipline stretching back for generations, he asserts, „The whole thing has been a vastly creative undertaking, without which biblical scholarship would have been very incomplete“ (p. 236).

The pace of the book is brisk and the tone often brusque. It is brisk in the sense that Barr strides rapidly across vast subject areas, confidently pointing out this or that feature of the landscape and assessing its importance before resuming his lively and wide-ranging course. It is brusque when certain people come into view, most notably Brevard Childs, but also e.g. James D. Smart, Karl Barth (p. 71: his exegesis was „conducted in a peculiarly contemptuous and superior way“), Philip Davies, and Francis Watson (whose thoughts on Krister Stendahl are called „a grosser and more serious misrepresentation“ and „rubbish“, p. 200f.). „Fundamentalists“ targeted in other Barr publications generally get off easy (but see reference to Walter Kaiser on p. 678). This is not because Barr has changed his assessment of them but because in this book he tends to ignore them (though there is a favorable reference to F. F. Bruce on p. 368, and he does get in a jab at D. Guthrie, G. E. Ladd, and L. Morris: p. 649, n. 4). And it is not only a few

individuals, or, say, evangelicals as a block, who are dismissed by Barr: he finds that in fact the whole lot of „biblical theologians have not generally been strong in logic or in philosophical reasoning“ (p. 17). Those accustomed to the *Barr contra mundi* tone marking some of Barr’s other writings will find themselves on familiar turf here.

Few books of such length and breadth of coverage can have had so brief a conclusion as this one: only three pages. The laconic ending serves notice that here, as in other works, Barr’s forte is analysis and critique, not sustained positive presentation of his own synthesis of biblical material. This is not a book that will deepen a reader’s understanding of the theology of the Old Testament itself. Its value lies rather in the running commentary it furnishes on the last half century of discussion in the field, highlighting especially Barr’s own definite and well-argued opinions of where things have gone wrong and how work might proceed along more fruitful lines. In that sense, as Barr’s discussion shapes and sharpens the thinking of readers whose passion is to grasp and present a synthesis of Old Testament theological reflection, the contribution of this book to progress in the field should be warmly welcomed.

Robert W. Yarbrough

C. Sugden and V. Samuel (eds.), *The Church in Response to Human Need*, Grand Rapids/Oxford: Eerdmans/Regnum, 1987.

In the 1970s, international evangelicalism seemed to be in a state of significant transition. The movement often known as the „Lausanne Movement“, named after the Lausanne Congress of World Evangelization, had brought into focus social action as a vital component of mission. To many, it looked as though the tension between advocating evangelism and advocating social action would now be largely a thing of the past: both were important – there was no need for tension.

In fact, however, it is surprising how often arguments that many thought should have been settled in the 1970s, still persist. The reasons for this are important to examine and are deep. Here we cannot go into them. But one thing is clear: evangelicals often did not engage in the kind of rigorous analysis of concepts that was necessary. Looking back on it now, we could illustrate this in a

variety of ways, but it might be helpful to focus on one example. The Wheaton consultation of 1983 on „The Church in Response to Human Need“ was an important landmark in evangelical social reflection, at the time. The papers from it were eventually published four years later in C. Sugden and V. Samuel (eds.), *The Church in Response to Human Need* (Grand Rapids/Oxford: Eerdmans/Regnum, 1987). These dealt with a key area of contemporary theology and were earthed in commitment to full-orbed mission. Reading them now is in some ways like returning to an older era; in some ways, however, it is a significant reminder of what still has to be clarified and what still has to be done. So our example serves a wider purpose than simply revisiting one collection of essays.

A common goal united the various contributions on world development and culture or on theological foundations for social responsibility and the practical suggestions that were included. The goal was to summon the church to seek the transformation of the world in the name of the Gospel. So a concluding statement was titled: „Transformation“. It is a word that could be misunderstood. It did not imply that we try to build the Kingdom of God on earth. Rather, people were being called to participate in God’s transforming activity, which includes every single sphere of life and society. „Transformation“ can mean different things in different theologies; to see what it has meant in the evangelical theology of the last quarter of the twentieth century, one has to read the literature, not guess at its meaning.

This collection was a good example of that literature and was accessible to laity, pastors and teachers of theology. It contained much fine material and the best way to read its fifteen essays now is to read one per day for two weeks, with an extra one fitted in somewhere. If we have to be selective, perhaps the contributions by Wayne Bragg, Robert Wall, Sugden and Samuel, David Bosch and Maurice Sinclair are the best ones to try. All credit to the contributors and contributions; what they said was noteworthy and helpful. Yet the volume is a good example of the price to be paid for insufficient detail in thought and argument.

To begin with, we note that the opening and closing essays talked about „the Enlightenment“. Generalisations about the Enlightenment abound these days. But what is „the Enlightenment“ meant to be? Were the Scottish, French and German Enlightenments all the same? Was Rousseau – the opponent of Voltaire, the darling of some French revolutionaries – an „Enlightenment“ figure? On analysis, is it satisfactory to say that the Enlightenment was uniformly optimistic

about progress, a judgement that often occurs in evangelical (and non-evangelical) statements about the Enlightenment? For all its faults, was not much in the „Enlightenment“ a legitimate reaction against ecclesiastical authoritarianism? For all its frequent superficiality on „reason“ was it not exposing the difficulties with appeals to revelation, when these seemed arbitrary? These are among the questions that need to be answered when vague reference is made to „the Enlightenment“. But the essayists who make such reference here do not engage with them.

This might appear to be a trivial criticism until we see the implications of this neglect. The Enlightenment is supposed to have brought in a bad thing called „dualism“. In contrast, appeal is made to a biblical „holism“ (Sinclair’s essay furnishes an example). Now there may indeed have been something called „dualism“ in some Enlightenment thought, to be contrasted unfavourably, from a theological point of view, from something called „holism“ which underlies the biblical witness. But there are difficulties with the way this was interpreted in this volume. It is misleading to claim that the liberation proclaimed in the gospel „never divorces“ the spiritual from the economic or social or political and then proceed to put cure from physical infirmity on the same level as the forgiveness of sin (see Paredes’ essay, pp. 77-79). For if we put everything on the same level, then there is no significant difference between living in physical health with a diseased soul and living in physical difficulties with a healthy soul. Yet that is a clearly unbiblical position. Of course, we must not misunderstand. Care for the body is at the heart of the Christian’s concern: love your neighbour as yourself. We need to believe that more and more, not less and less. Yet we cannot abolish the distinction between soul and body or the spiritual condition and the socio-physical condition.

If we are unclear on this point, it is no wonder that we are unclear on the question of priorities. Here again, this volume exhibited a very common type of unclarity on this point. So, for example, in his essay, Edward Dayton appeared to agree with the Lausanne Covenant’s affirmation of the logical priority of evangelism over social responsibility (p. 54) but then went to say that „the question as to which has priority, evangelism or social responsibility, is of philosophical interest only“ (p. 58). This looks like a contradiction. But if we take the second statement, the question that comes to mind is: where does philosophy come into it? It is certainly true that in many contexts, the question of priority does not arise. We are committed to both evangelism and social action. But take

the following example. A community is poor, but not destitute – people can live on what they have. It has little democratic power, but it is not oppressed – the ruling authorities are benign, not cruel. Of course, the Gospel summons those who have possessions or who have power to compassion and equal regard for all people. That is extremely important. But if that community has no belief or interest in God, will the church say: „Improving the standard of living and granting political power is equally as important as evangelism“? It should not. So the issue is not merely „philosophical“.

The point of my criticisms is not to suppress the argument of this collection, or others like it in the evangelical literature of the last phase of the twentieth century. On the contrary, these papers are examples of a summons to the church that is desperately important. Scripture is concerned for social transformation much more than many evangelicals are willing to admit, although so many in the world’s population are disempowered minorities who can not engage in those activities that are possible in Western societies. Saying what I have said in this piece carries the danger of being interpreted as demeaning social action. God forbid! But clear and informed thought is not an academic luxury. It is a vital instrument in the mission of the church as it attempts both to interpret and to apply aright what it believes to be the mind and will of God. Of course, debate will always happen about that mind and will. The exegesis and hermeneutical principles that surround the question of the Jubilee is one example that emerges from this volume (see Wall’s essay). However, as we expound and discuss, preach and apply, let us preserve the highest standards of accuracy and clarity in thinking, discerning and distinguishing carefully, not in order to avoid action and indulge in intellectual gymnastics, but in order to understand principles and priorities in the Kingdom of God.

Dr. Stephen N. Williams

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