



INTRODUCTION

MARK HUSBANDS AND DANIEL J. TREIER

In what sense is the word and action of God's justification of the ungodly a genuinely concrete and present reality?

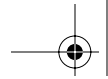
The conference on "The Gospel, Freedom and Righteousness: The Doctrine of Justification," held in April 2003 at Wheaton College Graduate School, took up the question whether imputed righteousness is fictive, forensic or transformative.

The papers in this volume consider the doctrine of justification from four corresponding points of access: (1) biblical theology; (2) dogmatics in the present Protestant crisis; (3) historical theology, with a view to Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed and Wesleyan understandings; and (4) ecumenical considerations.

Robert Gundry defends his winsomely titled "Why I Didn't Endorse 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration'... even though I wasn't asked to" (*Books & Culture* 7, no. 1 [2001]) by arguing exegetically that an imputation of Christ's righteousness is not a valid theological development of biblical teaching. In his essay "The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness," Gundry affirms a negative imputation of our sin to Christ, as a propitiatory sacrifice, while understanding that God does not count Christ's righteousness as ours. He argues that it is *our* faith, rather than the righteousness of Christ, that is reckoned by God as the positive basis for righteousness. With a view toward giving substantial weight to the obedient life of the Christian (sanctification), Gundry hopes his views may contribute to satisfying the "legitimate concerns not only of Roman Catholics but also of pietists" (p. 45).

By contrast, "The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields" by D. A. Carson sets forth an exegetical, semantic and methodological argument to distinguish fields of discourse that bear upon the question of the positive imputation of Christ's righteousness. Against the background of the "new

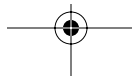


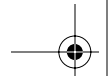


perspective” on Paul and its beginning in the work of Ernst Käsemann, Carson asserts that the meaning of “justification” must be viewed within a “redemptive-historical trajectory” in which God truly acts to justify the ungodly through the death and resurrection of Christ. Carson understands Paul to be saying that Abraham’s trust in the promise of God, “reckoned to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:3-5), is itself an unmerited expression of divine grace. While freely granting that no single passage *unambiguously* states such a view, Carson underscores with considerable effect a traditional Protestant commitment to the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.

Bruce McCormack’s essay “What’s at Stake in Current Debates over Justification? The Crisis of Protestantism in the West” shifts the discussion to a sharply focused dogmatic consideration: Nothing less than the Reformation is at stake in the current debate over justification. “The doctrine of justification is *the* doctrine of the Reformation. . . . The idea of an *immediate* divine imputation renders superfluous the entire Catholic system of the priestly mediation of grace by the Church” (pp. 81, 82). McCormack undertakes an historical analysis and close reading of Thomas, Luther and Calvin to assert the initially counterintuitive proposal that to retain the Protestant insight concerning justification we must actually move beyond the Reformation. The Reformation failed to adopt a theological ontology that addressed the *analogia entis* (analogy of being) and concomitant sacramental system of grace operative within Roman Catholicism. McCormack expounds the justifying work and verdict of God within the context of an ontology of the covenant of grace. Not only is it possible, given this position, to maintain the forensicism of a belief in God’s declaration as the justification of the ungodly, but a covenant ontology of grace, according to McCormack, illuminates how *as Protestants* we may maintain that justification is both judicial and transformative.

In “Justification and Justice: The Promising *Problematique* of Protestant Ethics in the work of Paul L. Lehmann,” Philip Ziegler considers the moral dimension of the doctrine of justification. We find in the primary thrust of Lehmann’s moral theology, according to Ziegler, an account of the radical promise of the gospel of justification. Ethics grounded in natural philosophy must be completely redefined in the quest to delineate what kind of moral reflection and action can be called for in the wake of the divine declaration. Lehmann’s work is deeply influenced by the kind of moral ontology that McCormack finds so important, and it strives toward nothing less than the Reformation in America. “On Lehmann’s view . . . moral agency is liberated from all interest and anxiety concerning the achievement or mainte-

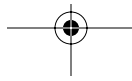




nance of its own rectitude. Rather, the sole concern of Christian moral agency is gratefully to witness to the effective course of God's active righteousness in Christ" (p. 129).

Mark Seifrid's essay "Luther, Melancthon and Paul on the Question of Imputation: Recommendations on a Current Debate" turns our focus to the historical development and understanding of justification in the Lutheran, Wesleyan and Anglican traditions as a means of discerning the relative value of exegetical and dogmatic proposals. Seifrid sets Melancthon's doctrine of justification, in which the contrition of the sinner is an indispensable cause of justification, over against Luther's claim that a person becomes righteous solely by the grace of God and not by virtue or works. The relation of good works to righteousness itself highlights Luther's emphasis upon imputation as a genuinely *effective* rather than a *mere* word of God. According to Seifrid's reading of the doctrine of justification, contemporary evangelicals such as N. T. Wright, Scott Hafemann and John Piper can be placed in the company of Melancthon, while Seifrid displays his affection for Luther's dynamic account of justification in his affirmation that we have "the Son of God who loved us and delivered himself up for us, only in so far as we know and confess ourselves *hic et nunc* [here and now] to be sinners. All progress in the Christian life is found in returning—as sinners!—to its font and source, the crucified and risen Christ" (pp. 151-52).

Robert Kolb reflects on his participation in the August 2002 International Congress on Luther Research in Copenhagen in his essay "Contemporary Lutheran Understandings of the Doctrine of Justification: A Selective Glimpse." Presenters Simo Peura and Tuoma Mannermaa (leading theologians in the Finnish school of Luther scholarship) are set in contradistinction to the stream of Luther interpretation represented by Wilfried Härle. The first approach, represented also by the work of Robert Jenson and Carl Braaten, argues that Luther's understanding of justification in terms of union with Christ is fittingly captured in the notion of *Vergottung*, *theosis*, or "divinization"—an ecumenically attractive position even though the historical claim itself has received telling criticism. Härle's presentation at Copenhagen represents, according to Kolb, a distinct and ecumenically important approach to Luther in its own right and bears a family resemblance to the work of Oswald Bayer and Gerhard Forde. The set of exegetical and dogmatic interests embraced by this second stream of Luther interpretation resonates well with a number of other views in this volume. For example, Forde calls for a "radical Lutheran" proclamation of the gospel in which there is a serious engagement with Pauline ma-

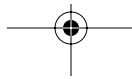
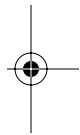




terial on justification *and* the distinct anthropology of Paul's gospel. Similarly, Härle concludes that the "center of Scripture is a living event. Not a doctrine or a doctrinal formulation . . . but what happens in reference to the person of Christ" (p. 166). The radical nature of the gospel means that theology exists in the service of proclamation. In a manner entirely consistent with McCormack's exhortation for evangelicals to recover the tradition of the Reformation, Kolb follows closely the example of Forde and Bayer in capturing the way justification is both "forensic" and "effective." The gospel is God's power or rule in which he gives us "a creative Word which establishes the new reality that this child of God belongs to him and is no longer a sinner because God no longer regards him or her as a sinner. God's view of things, God's Word, determines reality, God stands by his Word, his Word of forgiveness" (p. 168).

Standing in a quite different tradition, Kenneth Collins emphasizes an often neglected facet of the Reformation, namely the events surrounding Canterbury. In "The Doctrine of Justification: Historical Wesleyan and Contemporary Understandings," Collins insists that to see John Wesley as "one of the greatest champions of *sola fide* on English soil" (p. 177) requires an understanding of historical context. Effectively representing the theological significance of Cranmer's composition of the Book of Common Prayer and what eventually came down to us as the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Collins contrasts Cranmer's theology of justification to the reordering of faith and works that emerged in a number of prominent seventeenth-century Caroline divines. All of this, for Collins, is essential for understanding the significance of Wesley's encounter with God under the tutelage of Peter Böhler. One of Wesley's principal emphases was that justification is a sheer unmerited gift of God, apart from human works. Nonetheless, as Collins indicates, Wesley's effective separation of the doctrines of justification and sanctification led to the belief that real, rather than "relative," change in the condition of the soul is found in sanctification rather than justification. Wesley rejects the Calvinist notion of the work of Christ as a formal cause of salvation, according to Collins, in order to account for prevenient grace (in the sense of conscience and a restoration of free will) being given "irresistibly." Collins analyzes Wesley's theological rhetoric to discern the possibility for Wesleyans to affirm both prevenient grace and justification in the Reformational terms of *sola fide*.

Anthony Lane offers a fresh translation of material from the Regensburg Colloquy and a close exposition of its ecumenical significance in "Twofold Righteousness: A Key to the Doctrine of Justification?" Lane attributes the eventual demise

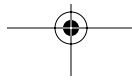




of the colloquy not to a specific disagreement on justification but rather to deep and irreconcilable differences on ecclesiology and sacraments; Article 5 on the doctrine of justification is the sole success in an otherwise problematic endeavor. Readers will be interested in the exposition of its guarded reception by the Vatican, Luther and Calvin. Likewise, Lane's extended consideration of a *duplex iustitia* (a twofold righteousness) as the implicit idea of Article 5 sustains his claim that Regensburg's treatment of justification ought not to be seen as a mere "patchwork of two incompatible views" (p. 209). At some distance from a reading of the Protestant tradition represented by McCormack's essay (chapter three), Lane argues that one of the most promising contributions of Regensburg is its conceptual clarity regarding the juxtaposition of inherent and imputed righteousness. In the end, Lane provocatively claims that not only is the Protestant doctrine of justification retained by an appeal to the *duplex iustitia*, but a proper understanding of Regensburg Article 5 offers us a way of more adequately bearing with the tension between contemporary affirmations of the free grace of God, on the one hand, and calls to faithful discipleship, on the other.

In "The Theology of Justification in Dogmatic Context," Paul Molnar (our sole Roman Catholic participant) effects an illuminating conversation between two of the most important theologians of the twentieth century, Karl Rahner and Karl Barth, by mining the inner logic of Rahner's *Theological Investigations* and Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. Over against the otherwise salutary observation that "one of the breakthroughs of the Joint Declaration of 1999 was the fact that the doctrine of justification was placed securely on a scriptural foundation within the context of the Trinity" (p. 225), Molnar sets forth the claim that "any agreement about justification . . . must also be an agreement about theological method, knowledge of God, the incarnation and the resurrection" (p. 227). Precisely this concern leads Molnar to assert that "differences cannot be covered over with ambiguous language" (p. 227). The Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration must be regarded as an exhortation for dogmatic clarity in the service of our common love for and reflection upon the gospel.

In the final essay of this volume, "The Ecclesial Scope of Justification," Geoffrey Wainwright explores the ways in which our understanding of the doctrine of justification is as much affected by, as it shapes, our understanding of the church and ecumenical dialogue. Following closely the work of Lesslie Newbigin, who was responsible for negotiating the union (in 1947) of Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists as the united Church of South India, Wainwright



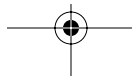


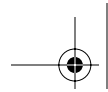
elucidates a biblical and dogmatically conceived understanding of justification with potential for ecumenical reconciliation. (1) Our understanding of justification ought to be extended beyond individualist categories to include the ecclesial. (2) This would underscore that justification places the church under a concomitant life of penitence and faith to protect against its driving a wedge between its spiritual and corporeal nature.

Teasing out the main lines of ecumenical discussion on the doctrine of justification in the late twentieth century, Wainwright indicates (without quite stating the matter so) the relative merit of Roman Catholic concerns that a Lutheran understanding of justification might diminish the reality of the church. He shows little sympathy for Eberhard Jüngel's objection that Newbigin's understanding of the church as "foretaste, sign, and instrument," and hence sacrament, of God's saving work—a perspective that enjoys much ecumenical affection—sacrifices the Reformation doctrine of justification.

The essay closes by setting in relief a "free church" Wesleyan reflection on the relationship of justification and the church. By discussing justification within the context of an ecclesial focus upon ecumenical agreement, Wainwright has, among other things, demonstrated the way in which a Protestant focus upon the individual as *simul iustus et peccator* allows for a fitting recognition of the church as *simul sancta et peccatrix*. Likewise, he identifies the degree to which a Catholic focus on the church as starting point sustains appeals to the work of the Spirit and the character of divine grace as the constitutive means by which genuine repentance and renewal may indeed take place.

We hope this brief introduction, and the essays themselves, convey a sense of the stimulating conversation we enjoyed in April 2003, and the apparent need for more on the doctrine of the church. The integrity and interrelationships of our respective theological disciplines (and concomitant biblical theology and dogmatic commitments) and our respective ecclesial traditions were persistently intertwined, and led to the question how we may persist in our particular confessional insights regarding the gospel without denying the propriety (even necessity) of ecumenical endeavor. Biblical scholars Gundry and Carson differ on how to read the theological implications of New Testament texts and assess ecumenical possibilities in their light. Theologians McCormack and Lane seemingly differ in their historical assessments, whereas McCormack and Wainwright differ on assessments of ecumenical documents and the importance of a contemporary Protestant clarion call. Equally challenging is Ziegler's retrieval of Lehmann and Bonhoeffer, which poses





for us the self-same question raised by McCormack: Have we in America properly encountered the Reformation? Examples of these intertwined complexities could be multiplied, yet we thank our participants for conducting such provocative conversations with a spirit of warm Christian fellowship.

Beyond them, a word of sincere acknowledgment and gratitude is due to all whose gracious support, assistance and encouragement made the twelfth annual Wheaton Theology Conference, out of which this project arises, possible. Thanks to Amanda Holm and Cindy Ingrum for particular assistance.

Many fine papers were given at the conference, only some of which could appear here in our limited space; we extend thanks to R. Scott Clark, Thomas Finger, Paul C-H. Lim and Fred Sanders for valuable contributions. Likewise, we owe thanks to Dennis Okholm, cofounder of the conference, for committing this task to us as his fourteen Wheaton years came to a close. Meanwhile, fellow theologians at Wheaton provided wise counsel and ongoing support of this work in many ways.

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