Offprint from:

Scottish Bulletin *of* Evangelical Theology

seŧs
theology making a *difference*

Volume 31
Number 2
Autumn 2013

University of the Highlands and Islands
Highland Theological College

Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd agus nan Eilean
Colaiste Dhiadhachd na Gàidhealtachd

ISSN 0265-4539

http://j.mp/SBETOnline

Debating Justification Productively: A Review Essay

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Justification: Five Views. Edited by James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy. London: SPCK, 2012. ISBN 978-0-8308-3944-5. 319 pp. £15.99.

In theology, one generation's conflict means the next generation's clarity. At least we hope so. To ask what the legacy of recent justification debates will be for future debates over the Gospel and the Church's proclamation of it, is implicitly to ask what we have clearly and decisively learned in these debates. This book, consisting of carefully executed essays and responses written by highly accomplished theologians, serves as something of a barometer for real progress in understanding.

Thankfully this is a fairly substantial volume of approximately 300 pages rather than the unforgivably thin hat-tip some 'views' books devote to important topics. And what is more, the contributors largely measure up to the challenging task they are given: Michael S. Horton writes what is termed a 'traditional' Reformed essay; Michael F. Bird contributes a 'progressive' Reformed view (again pardoning the seldom helpful adjective); James D. G. Dunn is an excellent and respected voice for a 'New Perspective' position; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen offers a 'deification' view; and Gerald O'Collins and Oliver Rafferty present a Roman Catholic view.

The lineup of authors is impressive, if occasionally a little curious. Kärkkäinen is eminently qualified to write on a vast range of theological questions, but as an ordained Pentecostal his deification essay—a topic traditionally associated with the Orthodox tradition—reminds us that these 'views' volumes typically (inevitably?) suffer somewhat on the horns of a dilemma: will they be oriented to ecclesiastical and confessional *traditions* (Reformed, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox) or to theological *models* (union with Christ, deification and theosis, new perspective(s) on Paul, justification-centralism)? The difficulty is real, not least because there are no clean lines of demarcation here. As I have noted elsewhere, the confessions of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions overlap extensively on justification, at least when the topic is defined narrowly enough, and within the Reformed tradition one can easily find varieties of both 'old' and 'new' perspectives on Paul alongside, and integrated with, a focus on union with Christ, as well as some highly nuanced forms of theosis. And

then, the actual substance of Kärkkäinen's deification essay further complicates the picture. His contribution expounds deification largely with a view to developments in one pocket of contemporary *Lutheranism*, and this in a book lacking a traditional Lutheran essay.

And that surprising tidbit requires a comment. Ironically it is Kärkkäinen's essay that comes closest to being overtly Lutheran, and yet there are plenty of good reasons to object to his reading of that tradition. (At least many Lutherans would think so.) Why, then, is there no Lutheran essay when that is historically the tradition most readily identifiable with the topic? The editors explain that they did not think it necessary to include a Lutheran essay because Horton's piece made it redundant to do so: his contribution is, they say, 'functionally identical in all the significant theological respects to the traditional Lutheran view' (p. 10). I agree with the editors' evaluation of Horton's essay, and at least they recognized that the apparent omission of a Lutheran contribution would require an explanation. However, it seems rather unfair to Horton who presumably didn't realize his essay was expected to do double service. It is also unfair to confessional Lutherans who have a well-defined and articulated theological system of their own on this topic—one that is arguably more clearly the default mode of (especially popular) evangelical thinking than any of the other views represented in this volume.

But having already criticized the volume as 'collection', let me rush quickly to charity, too: editors of such volumes simply cannot accomplish everything. While one might have hoped for an essay by an Orthodox priest or theologian to represent that tradition (could one ever have enough David Bentley Hart?), and a Lutheran one as well (Robert Kolb? Timothy Wengert?), or perhaps some other scholar's analysis of the historic Orthodox tradition on justification (Gerald Bray? Robert Letham?), certainly one would not have wanted to miss out on Kärkkäinen's essay either. And apart from author selections, it must be noted that the editors' two introductions to the volume—one on justification in historical perspective and one on current debates—are alone more than worth the price of the book. Introductions to collections of this sort are sometimes lamentably, perhaps even infuriatingly, weak. But not in this case. Here are clear, well-articulated maps for getting to grips with the real issues and making the most of the fine essays that follow. More than that, here are helpful tools for cultivating that rare but indispensable feature of a truly Christian debate: a reading that is both informed and charitable.

THE ESSAYS

For those familiar with the debates and the authors the essays themselves are, with a few exceptions, predictable in their arguments. Readers of *SBET* will likely be most interested in the essays by Horton and Bird (and therefore we shall review their contributions in most detail), and possibly Dunn, but it would be a shame to overlook the essays by Kärkkäinen and O'Collins/Rafferty. Both of these latter essays exhibit such clarity and candour that their essays should be high on the list of first reads on the topic, even if their distinctive proposals are ultimately unpersuasive.

For his part, Kärkkäinen winsomely commends a new interpretation of justification prompted by the Finnish Lutheran and Orthodox dialogues which have been dissected extensively in the journals and, at least as a reading of Luther, found wanting. The thrust of this ecumenical endeavour is to bring about a *rapprochement* between Lutheran soteriology and Roman Catholicism by way of the East, and in particular the idea of deification.

I have long wondered if, after all the qualifications and nuances customarily attached to more modest versions of theosis and deification (in order to guard against a range of ontological red flags), we do not end up with something quite close to the most robust and realistic forms of the Reformed doctrine of glorification. The responses to Kärkkäinen's essay by the other contributors, especially Horton's, suggest this may in fact be the case, though it is less obvious that this is due to Western parallels to the distinction of 'essence' from 'energies', a parallel disputed strongly by some in the last few decades in the context of Trinitarian theology. As with Kärkkäinen's essay, ongoing discussions of theosis may serve at least as reminders that glorification remains a severely and inexcusably underexplored feature of Reformed theology. This is ironic since it forms something of a capstone and *telos* to so much of what is distinctive about Reformed theology, and with the resources at hand one can hope the situation will soon begin to improve.

For their part, O'Collins and Rafferty present a Roman Catholic view by means of a historical survey focused on two related notions: (1) humanity as deeply but not irretrievably affected by the Fall; and (2) human freedom to cooperate with divine grace. They explain the ongoing importance of Trent—still the stubbornly defining moment in the official Roman Catholic theology of justification—in the context of variations within the Catholic tradition on the question. This is followed by a rather extensive autobiographical account by O'Collins of the development of his own thinking, including his hearing the great German New Testament scholar Ernst Käsemann lecture on Romans and, thirty years later,

his participation in the well-known 'Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification'. However, as Kärkkäinen points out (pp. 305-6), it would have been helpful if O'Collins and Rafferty had discussed the meaning today of that 1999 Declaration.

HORTON'S ESSAY

Horton's essay, the first in the series, is in many respects a commendable, clearly presented overview of the traditional Reformed doctrine of justification. His goal is not merely 'to repeat the relevant paragraphs in our confessions and catechisms, but to argue that their view of justification is even more firmly established by recent investigations' (p. 83). This includes a fair overview of the historical and biblical materials on imputation and the vocabulary of justification and the righteousness of God.

Though one will quibble (and sometimes argue) with his expressions now and then, Horton's summary is helpful and in most respects accurate. However, as one reads closely there are several lingering questions worth asking, in addition to those pointed out by his interlocutors. (And I raise these questions at some length because, in the big picture, Horton's theological identity—on this question and more generally—is closest to my own.) For instance, it may be overreaching to argue that the heart of the Reformation debate turned on the lexical meaning of the term *dikaioō* (p. 92), and it is at least debatable that in Romans 8:30 Paul intends an *ordo salutis* in the modern sense of the word (p. 101 et al.). Furthermore, Horton takes N. T. Wright to task for saying 'present justification declares, on the basis of faith, what future justification will affirm publicly (according to [Romans] 2:14-16 and 8:9-11) *on the basis of the entire life*' (p. 97, quoting Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* [Lion Books, 2003], p. 129; emphasis is Horton's). However, Horton does not mention here that Wright later clarified his meaning by saying future justification 'will be seen to be *in accordance with* the life that the believer has then lived', rather than on the basis of it. Whatever one might conclude about Wright's restatement, this is a significant clarification and one of which the reader should be aware. Thankfully it is included in one of the introductions to the volume (p. 71). More on this topic below.

Furthermore, Horton is rightly concerned to make clear that justification is based not on the righteousness of God's divinity (what or who God *is* as divine) but on the gift of righteousness from God (in the incarnate Jesus obedient unto death). Horton stresses the point over several pages. But he muddies the waters somewhat by suggesting the opposite at times, such as when he argues that the gift of God in Jesus Christ for sinners includes not only the righteousness that the law requires but also

the righteousness that God *is* (p. 96), an affirmation Horton makes more than once.

Also, Horton is perhaps most confusing on the relationship of union with Christ, justification, and sanctification. This appears when he argues (as he has elsewhere) that, on the one hand, 'to "put on Christ" is to derive all of one's righteousness from him, *both for justification and sanctification*' (emphasis mine) and then, on the other hand (and on the same page, p. 108), putting on or 'being clothed with' Christ is only justification language and the basis for the sanctification of daily conduct. Similarly, Horton says justification is the 'basis for the transformative effects of union with Christ'. He later offers a formulation to explain the relationship, saying 'if union with Christ in the covenant of grace is the matrix for Paul's *ordo*, justification remains its source, even for adoption' (p. 110). (I think Horton wants us to read 'union with Christ' rather than the 'covenant of grace' as the antecedent for 'its' in this statement, although I may be mistaken here.) Later, however, in fact on the same page, Horton states that 'Justification is distinct from regeneration, yet both are the effect of union with Christ, which the Spirit effects by his Word. This is why Paul compares justification and its effects to God's creation of the world *ex nihilo* by his Word (Romans 4:17, with Psalm 33:6)' (p. 110).

Setting aside what I see as a misunderstanding of Romans 4, these last two sentences are simply bewildering: both justification and regeneration are the effects (or 'the effect') of union with Christ, a union effected by the Spirit through the Word. Yet it is justification, not the union, that Horton goes on to say in the next sentence has creation-like effects. Further, justification is the *source* of the *ordo salutis* (while union with Christ is its 'matrix'). In his response, Dunn asks in a footnote, 'Does Horton really mean it when he says, "Justification is distinct from regeneration, yet both are the effect of union with Christ, which the Spirit effects by his Word"?' (p. 120, n. 2). If I understand Horton correctly, and I beg the reader's patience if I do not, Horton does indeed seem to want to say exactly that. It would appear he understands union with Christ as in some attenuated sense the 'matrix' for every gracious blessing, including regeneration (which the Reformed confessional tradition has typically understood as a spiritual prerequisite to faith-union with Christ, which may explain Dunn's perplexity), and yet that it is justification that functions as a creative word bringing about, as source, the blessings of the *ordo salutis*, including especially the good works of sanctification, the glories of the new creation, and, as we now note, the disarming of our enemies.

Related to this, then, is Horton's argument that the justification of the ungodly is itself 'the source of the abundant and varied fruit of Christ's conquest', pointing to Colossians 2:13-15 and 1 Corinthians 15:53-56. Yet

it is not clear how either text supports such a focused theological connection. In Colossians 2, Paul argues that the cross of Christ secured the forgiveness of sins for believers (the debt incurred by the Law's demands can no longer stand against us) and was indeed also the event of the disarming of 'the rulers and authorities' over which he triumphed. But Paul does not thereby draw a line from one benefit of the cross (forgiveness) to the other (disarmed rulers) in causal fashion as Horton suggests, making justification or the forgiveness of sins *itself* what disarms the rulers. Paul does not suggest, as Horton states, that 'Christ's conquest of the powers *is based on* his having borne our debt for violation of the law' (p. 98, emphasis mine). For Paul in Colossians 2, it is not justification which accomplished this but the cross, the one cross of Christ which both brought justification and disarmed our enemies. Neither is it clear that it is *exclusively* the *legal* facet of death and the law that is in view in 1 Corinthians 15. The distinction is a nuanced one, yet an important one as well.

Finally Horton, like many before him, appeals to 2 Corinthians 5:21 ('For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God') as evidence of imputation. Here again I will comment more fully below but, in my view, 5:19 (among other passages), with its language of 'not counting trespasses', provides significant biblical warrant for the doctrine of imputation in Paul, properly understood. But it is possible that 5:21 may have a reality inclusive of but also more comprehensive than imputation, not least because Paul has quickly, and otherwise curiously, changed his verb from 'count' or 'impute' (*logizomai*) in 5:19 to 'become' (*ginomai*) in 5:21. A more expansive, ultimate vista for our '*becoming* the righteousness of God' in Christ would also seem to make the most sense against the Isaiah backdrop commentators usually recognize that Paul appears to have in view.

In my view, while Kärkkäinen, Dunn, and O'Collins say much of instructive value, the most interesting response to Horton comes from Bird. In reply to Horton, Bird agrees with the lion's share of Horton's presentation though he would take exception to certain assumptions and conclusions along the way. Indeed, it appears that Bird assumes he and Horton agree that justification and transformation (which Bird prefers to 'sanctification', with good cause as he explains on p. 112) are 'linked logically and Christologically, but the latter cannot be subsumed under the former conceptually' (p. 113), but in light of Horton's stress on justification as the source of sanctification or transformation, I suspect Bird may have (charitably) missed how Horton does in fact subsume one under the other conceptually. However, Bird does take issue with the confidence of Horton's lexical survey, noting helpfully how some NT uses of 'righteousness' do not seem to fit Horton's expectations as neatly as one might wish.

Also, although Bird holds to imputation himself, regarding it as a 'theological implicate of the biblical teaching', he does not endorse the kind of merit theology that is often used to support the idea, preferring instead to point to the reckoning that occurs within the context of union with Christ (p. 116). His 'biggest gripe with Horton's treatment,' however, 'is what he does not say' (p. 116), and this concerns the relationship between justification and Paul's social context or, put differently, the Jew-Gentile question which was in fact the primary concern the Apostle had, rather than the Council of Trent. Given the shape of justification debates in the last few decades, this is indeed a curious silence on Horton's part, not least because of the ways I am confident he would want to speak clearly and compellingly to the issue.

BIRD'S ESSAY

Bird's own 'progressive Reformed' essay is both interesting and compelling, and Horton's should not be read without the benefit of Bird's (and, I suggest, vice versa). With meticulous attention to the texts, and with the benefit of having already published an important study of Paul and justification, he develops the Apostle's language of the righteousness of faith in Galatians and Romans, including along the way an important observation on the (temporary, I note) disagreement between Paul and Peter (often overlooked in Reformed discussions of Paul's theology) and, not to be missed, a helpful discussion of what the 'righteousness of God' is *not*. Bird affirms that 'there is indeed a gift of a righteous status from God… but the righteousness of God introduces the entire package of salvation in all of Romans…' rather than justification by faith, a carefully explained observation that rings true. In a clarification worth pondering and repeating, he explains that the 'righteousness of God' is not the gospel, but 'is something that is revealed in the gospel' (p. 141).

Bird follows his survey of Romans with a robust defence of the imputation of Jesus' law obedience as the grounds of the believer's righteousness, and locates this imputation in the context of Jesus' own justification by the Father and our union with him by faith, appropriately noting some blind spots in N. T. Wright's statements on the question (pp. 145-52). Among the last sections in Bird's essay is a valuable discussion of justification by works in Paul and James, including Bird's admission that he is 'acutely uncomfortable' with how Wright has sometimes expressed himself on this matter. Nevertheless, Bird wishes to make clear that justification 'according to' works is entirely biblical, and to explain what that does and does not mean. In this I judge him to have largely succeeded, and in a way that navigates a controversial question with exemplary care.

Incidentally, Bird explains the adjective 'progressive' along the lines of seeing the need to remedy, among other things, a perceived poverty of interest both in *historia salutis* (history of salvation) because of a myopic preoccupation with *ordo salutis* (order of salvation), and in the social context of Paul's writings and all its implications (pp. 131-2). I can hardly agree more strongly and yet, in light of Reformed exegesis and theology in the last generation or two, I'm not sure it is ultimately very progressive to insist on them. In any case, Bird properly urges the importance of reading the Apostle on his own terms rather than the ones dictated by polemics.

In his response, Horton objects to Bird's criticisms of the notion of merits with an appeal to the antiquity of this language. He does this, first, by referring to the 'merit of the fathers' among rabbinical teachers, though, with others who have written on the topic, I'm not confident this rabbinical language is necessarily reflective of biblical usage. Horton also appeals to covenantal substitution in Isaiah 53 which, I think, is more compelling, though it also clarifies how merit language is a theological construct designed to capture a feature of the biblical witness in a way the text itself (i.e., explicitly) does not. There is nothing illegitimate about employing such a construct, of course; it is the task of theology to articulate these features of the text in order that the coherence of biblical teaching might be grasped by faith. For this reason, I appreciate Horton's subsequent remark that merit asks, in essence, 'to what purpose' was Christ's obedience as the uniquely faithful Adam and Israel? I might subtly modify the question to 'of what quality' is that obedience in order to include Horton's focus but also accent what seems to me to be the continuing value of properly nuanced merit language.

Horton also disagrees with Bird on Paul's language of 'becoming' sin and righteousness, explaining 'In my estimation, Romans 5:19 (like 2 Corinthians 5:21) does not refer to a transformative "becoming" as Bird suggests, any more than Christ's "becoming" sin for us refers to a degenerative process rather than imputation.' Horton is with the majority of interpreters here, yet I have my doubts, particularly with what Horton sees as an obviously incorrect consequence: Christ's 'becoming' sin in a way that goes beyond imputation to something more personally substantial. I find just such a feature of the atonement when I read of the suffering Servant as one who becomes, in the heights (or is it depths?) of his becoming sin for us, one 'from whom men hid their faces' (Isaiah 53:3), so disfigured or, to use Horton's term, degenerated was his appearance. Here is something distinct from the legal condemnation, something of a piece with the monstrosity that the land had become—substantially—as cursed under Israel's disobedience (pace Deuteronomy). Here is an extensive description of consummate judgment which suggests that here, at

the cross being anticipated, sin comes finally and climactically to fully embodied expression in a way that is not captured by the language only of a guilty status, and also goes beyond all the dark yet hitherto restrained expressions of the curse's horror in Israel's history.

Further, Horton demurs from the idea of a final justification by works yet he—astutely, charitably, and correctly, in my view—acknowledges that a distinction between judgment *according to* rather than *through* or *on account of* works is 'well attested in classic Reformed treatments', and that he himself is indeed 'open to Bird's interpretation'. Not simply because I happen to agree with Bird's construction on this point, I regard this is as among the finest of many encouraging moments in Horton's contributions to this volume. It exhibits a spirit of honest and patient inquiry which makes all the difference not only in these 'views' volumes but in the wider discussions of which it is an example.

SOME OBSERVATIONS

Each of the essays in this volume deserves a close reading and detailed interaction and I regret that I cannot devote that kind of space to them here, especially in the case of Dunn's essay which should be read carefully before more is published at the popular level regarding the 'new perspective' model. I would like, however, to note a few features of the essays that may serve to advance discussion still further. As my point of departure, I note Horton's observation, correct in my view, that the differences between his view and Bird's, while in some cases deep-running and significant, are in other cases more inflated in appearance than they are in reality. Certainly, as I think is clear so far, I find I agree with most of what Horton says, yet in those places where I differ from Horton it is Bird that I look to in this volume to press those matters, which he does admirably and persuasively. But before noting an example of how their models might be brought closer together, I offer a few brief observations on the essays as a whole.

Firstly, many of the contributors refer to the importance of the 'faith of/in Jesus Christ' debate in Pauline studies, a debate over whether the underlying Greek construction should be understood as referring to Christ's own faith/faithfulness (the 'subjective' genitive) or to the believer's faith in Jesus Christ (the 'objective' genitive). In fact it appears to me that this question is even more pertinent to the justification debate than the attention given to it in these essays suggests. The reader should note that Bird co-edited a valuable collection of essays on this question that should be thoroughly digested. His own somewhat mediating stance also seems to me the most judicious in handling the evidence.

Secondly, an unsettling feature in several of the essays and responses is the talk of justification as but one of many available and biblical ways of speaking of the reality of salvation, a term we may use alongside other concepts such as 'union with Christ' and 'reconciliation'. Granted that the truth of this theological complementarity is important to affirm, and granted that the language of this kind of terminological interplay goes a long way toward avoiding myopia, it is also important to affirm the distinctions between, and the nature of the relationships among, these terms and concepts. In fact, to a significant extent the differences among the essayists reduce down to the question of just that relationship. Despite how some writers write and some readers read, it is quite important to note that neither in Scripture nor in tradition is 'faith' characteristically a synonym for 'justification', nor is 'justification' a synonym for 'reconciliation' or 'salvation'. Certainly 'justification' is not a synonym for 'the Gospel' or 'union with Christ'. The ideas all belong together, undoubtedly, but they are distinct as well. For Reformed theologians in the Westminster confessional tradition, at least, union with Christ and justification are not simply two ways of speaking of one reality. The latter is an aspect of the former—manifesting it, we should note, in an irreversible relationship (cf. Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. & A. 69).

Thirdly, I have complained about this elsewhere and will spare the reader a repeat performance, but we would benefit, I think, from more careful attention to the ways the relationship between justification and sanctification/transformation is articulated using language of 'cause' or 'source'. There is a world of difference between saying on the one hand that the *fact* of justification—or, put differently, the *knowledge* of our justification—provides great motivation for the life of sanctification, and on the other hand that justification *itself* is the cause of sanctification. The former, I have to think, is uncontroversial and carries with it the weight of many forefathers in the Faith besides the testimony of Scripture in many places.[1] The latter notion, however, is quite controversial and, as I have argued before, problematic theologically.

Usually this connection is put forward as a way to explain why the life of good works is necessary, particularly in view of the old Roman Catholic charge that justification by faith alone opens the door to licentiousness. But, theologically (rather than experientially) speaking, it is not justification itself that provides the rationale for this necessity but, as Calvin and others have tirelessly insisted, union with Christ that does so. Indeed,

[1] It is also, incidentally, how Calvin's 'justification as the main hinge of *religion*' language ought to be understood, in keeping with then-traditional uses of *religio* for the Christian life.

the reason justification cannot exist independently of transformation is not due to what justification is *in terms of itself* but because of the reality of which justification speaks in its own distinct way: that we are 'in Christ.' As Horton himself notes, the Heidelberg Catechism rejects moral licentiousness by arguing that 'it is impossible for those *who are engrafted into Christ by true faith* not to bring forth the fruit of gratitude' (p. 89, emphasis mine), which is quite different from arguing that it is impossible because one has been *justified*, unless one means that if one is justified it is because one is in Christ, and anyone in Christ is also sanctified.

To put it in other terms, the peace of conscience that the fact of justification affords is invaluable as a motivation for a life of holiness. In fact, we cannot have the pursuit of real holiness if we believe our justification is in question and that we thus need to earn it in some way. Justification necessarily comes with and alongside a host of realities and blessings, and it entails a range of ethical conclusions as well, particularly in the area of communion or fellowship. But to note the *experiential benefits* of knowing our justification is secure is not the same as noting the *theological* relationship between justification and sanctification, and the writers in this volume occasionally blend the two together. We must take great care in our language of justification as a cause of sanctification not to suggest that it is justification itself but our knowledge of it that, in a limited sense, may be understood as a 'cause' of a life of good works. Speaking immoderately on this point suggests something false about justification, viz., that it is not in fact a purely forensic declaration but something inherently generative, along the lines of what God's Word is in the very different context of his act of creation. At issue, then, are assumptions about the nature of God's speech and whether or not it is *always* the same *kind* of act, but we cannot explore them here.

IMPUTATION OF THE ACTIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST AND FUTURE JUSTIFICATION

Finally, and more extensively, as noted above, Horton affirms the imputation of the active obedience of Christ (IAOC) whereas Bird does not, and Bird affirms a form of not-yet (final) justification *according to* (but not *on the grounds of*) works which Horton denies, at least for now. Here are two ideas not usually considered together, yet I suggest they ought to be and that it might be a fruitful and interesting relationship to explore. I can only be suggestive here, of course, yet I would offer the following thoughts.

With regard to the eschatology of justification, the nature of the final judgment has regretfully faded from view in current debates in favour of

interest in other questions, but it has long been a key area of discussion within and outside the Reformed tradition. And while there have been some who have denied a final justification altogether, believing it to be a danger to the reality of an 'already' (present) justification in Christ by faith alone, such a danger is not necessary. Readers of these essays will discover, I think, that for all the real risks of abuse it involves (as does justification 'by faith alone', for that matter), talk of eschatological justification in some non-meritorious relation to works does not itself make one a Catholic, as Bird rightly reminds us. This much should be known already by those familiar with the pertinent texts rather than only popular presentations of the question, but the reminder is always timely.

In these debates it is often assumed, I think, that it is the idea of justification in Christ at the *end*, rather than justification in Christ *now*, that is in need of defence. Yet the situation is actually quite the reverse, biblically. The weight and pull of the biblical witness, especially in the Prophets, is on the *final* Day of the LORD and all that that Day will bring. So the problem, so to speak, of NT theology is the explanation of the ways in which the realities of that long-awaited Day have now been brought forward in history in the person and work of Christ—yet not in whole but provisionally, and in full expectation still of that Day of consummation to come. The fact of a justification secured and real *now* need not require that it have *no* future dimension any more than our sanctification or adoption now requires that we do not look forward to our final sanctification or adoption. Instead, as aspects of what it means to be united to Christ, our union is itself, in *all* its varied ways, including justification, an already and not-yet blessed reality. So, as Geerhardus Vos noted many years ago with characteristic acuity, 'In Gal. v. 5 Christians "through the Spirit by faith wait for the hope of righteousness" (that is for the *realization* of the hoped for things pertaining to the state of righteousness conferred in *justification*).'[2] The question, of course, is how to articulate this eschatological *realization* of justification in a way that does justice to the full scope of the biblical witness to it as something already truly (and wonderfully!) secure now, and yet also anticipated as the *telos* or end of a life of perseverance, obedience, and suffering. Each of the writers in this volume addresses the question in some way and their differences on this point are instructive.

[2] Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; repr. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1994), p. 30 (emphases added); original publication, 'The Structure of the Pauline Eschatology', *Princeton Theological Review* 27/3 (1929), 403-44 (quote on p. 432).

What, then, about the relationship I am suggesting between final justification 'according to' works and the idea of the IAOC? To speak simply, it is a matter of coordinating one idea with the other in light of union with Christ. For those who, like Horton (and myself), affirm the IAOC, Christ was justified by the Spirit in resurrection from the dead (1 Timothy 3:16) because of and only after the life of Torah obedience that culminated in his suffering and death on the cross. He is the uniquely faithful second and last Adam (and Israel). Those united to Christ by faith and the Spirit are justified as they are included in him, and thus in the verdict passed over him by the Father in resurrection from the dead. On the other hand, for those who, like Bird (and myself), affirm a carefully nuanced view of final justification 'according to' but not on the meritorious grounds of obedience or perseverance, we note how believers are frequently encouraged to perseverance in view of this final legal prospect, very much in keeping with the testimony of the OT prophets. In Paul's prayers for the Thessalonians, persevering obedience in love is prospective and not only retrospective (as in a gratitude-*only* construct), belonging productively and indispensably to the Christ-path of the Christian life which will culminate in *final blamelessness* on the coming Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 3:12-14; 5:23).[3]

Yet we should note that, as Paul unpacks the dynamics of our union with Christ, it is rather clear that this union entails a Christ-storied form for the Church's life in Christ—that the obedience 'material', if you will, of Christ's submission to the Father's will (his 'active' obedience) is the 'material' of the believer's obedience to the Father's will in union with Christ (as recognized, e.g., in Reformed expositions of the so-called 'third use' of the law). For instance, against the highly relevant backdrop of law, obedience, Spirit, and life in Romans 8:3-13, we note the Christological shape of the closely articulated if-then relationship in Romans 8:17, '…and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, *provided* we suffer with him *in order that* we may also be glorified with him'. The theology of Paul's matter-of-fact connection here, far from unique to Romans 8, extends well beyond the suffering-obedience of Christians as *merely* a thankful reflex of justification. To put the matter more concisely, in the NT, there is a relationship between Christ's positive Torah obedi-

[3] Such a construction is well represented historically and long familiar in biblical studies, yet it could use development; the recent monograph by Matthew D. Aernie, *Forensic Language and the Day of the Lord Motif in Second Thessalonians 1 and the Effects on the Meaning of the Text* (West Theological Monograph Series; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), should, I hope, put the biblical question quietly to rest.

ence (his active obedience) under the long shadow of the cross *which was prospective of his own justification by resurrection*, and the believer's own positive obedience in cross-bearing *which is prospective of his own finally-realized justification by resurrection*. It would appear that those who argue for either IAOC or for final justification in accordance with (not on the basis of) non-meritorious works are in the best position to do full justice to the other side of this same picture.

The Church's Gospel-defining insistence, of course, is that Christ's obedience is uniquely meritorious and the Christian's is a non-meritorious participation in him by the Spirit. Our obedience and Jesus' obedience are not on any kind of a meritorious continuum (the 'material' commonality of Christ's obedience and ours referred to above is, crucially, not of this kind) and the Church cannot insist on this too strongly.

The language of merit reminds us of this. Bird, I think, is correct to shudder at much of the use of 'merits' in theology (note the plural in my use of the term here). I agree that the notion of a pool or bucket of merits is foreign to the testimony of Scripture and a step or two away from how 'Christ our righteousness' should be understood. Yet I hasten to add that the Gospel very much depends on affirming that there is a *qualitative* (what it is), and not only *quantitative* (how much there is), difference between Christ's obedience and my own, and I believe this can be well captured by the traditional language of 'merit' (note now the singular). Use of merit in the history of theological reflection from Tertullian forward has been, in its finest moments at least, a valiant and sometimes imperfect attempt to do justice to that crucial distinction between Jesus and me, particularly in view of that Christological shape of Christian obedience I just referred to above. Speaking of the uniquely meritorious quality of Christ's obedience, as the obedience and righteousness of the one who is alone the second and last Adam, safeguards the Church from some of the wrong-headed ambiguities of the old 'imitation of Christ' traditions of piety, while preserving its authentically biblical instinct. Surely the talk of 'merits' is subject to abuse and misunderstanding, but we likely have a baby and bathwater situation here rather than something obviously and necessarily requiring excision from our vocabulary. And to speak more pointedly, the less capable we are of accounting for the positive, biblical role of obedience and perseverance in salvation within a Reformed theological model, the more attractive the alternative positions of the New Perspective, Rome, and Constantinople will appear.

In sum, perhaps there is something here worth exploring, particularly among Reformed theologians. Horton and Bird, I think, have readers in different places on the right track, though as you can see I would like to press a matter here and there.

FINAL REMARKS

What, then, to return to my opening observation, about the legacy of the justification debates? What does this volume suggest that we have truly learned? Even a cursory read should put to rest a range of fictions common in the popular arenas of the debate, such as the idea of a (singular) 'new perspective' on Paul that can be responsibly addressed as such, or that Roman Catholic theologians merely repeat Trent and do so as a monolithic group. The essays by Dunn and O'Collins/Rafferty should alone put to rest such oversimplifications, and one should hope they will.

Furthermore, we have been reminded of the importance of the social implications of justification in the New Testament, and despite some overambitious and misguided uses of this reminder, it remains important not to lose sight of it. The social and theological Jew-Gentile challenge of the first century may not have been the sum-total of the justification question as Paul addressed it, but it was the principal historical context for his working that question out. Neither is this observation the invention of New Perspective writers; the history of Pauline exegesis bears out that we may have indeed lost sight of something only recently reemphasized.

Lastly, despite the easily defensible dominance of Paul's writings in this volume, I expect the contributors would agree that we must take care not to give the impression that justification is something the Apostle invented rather than part of the Gospel the apostles proclaimed on the basis of the witness of Israel's Scriptures (which are ours). I trust it is not too adventurous to suggest that we will understand the NT teaching on justification to the extent that we understand exactly how the NT writers argue the case for the Gospel, including justification, from the OT Scriptures in the light of the coming of the Christ.

Some may be weary of the justification discussions, but we should rather be quite excited about what is going on, especially in biblical studies. Advancing in our theology of salvation will require not only a skilled and responsible retrieval of the invaluable work done by fathers of the Faith but also the critical engagement with solid, pioneering work being done today. In my view, this volume encourages confidence that it is within the Reformed tradition that the best justice can be done to the biblical breadth and scope of this eminently important theological topic, and listening in on the critical engagement among these contributors shows how that work might continue to be done. Indeed it bears repeating that Reformed theologians will do their best work *as Reformed theologians* when interacting carefully with the contrary voices of history and reality, inside and outside of one's own tradition, rather than of myth and caricature. In the end, Horton's essay clearly and admirably reaffirms the most

important features of the doctrine of justification while including, in my view at least, a few less persuasive features, while Bird's essay—and Bird's work more generally—provides a needed, astute, and largely persuasive complement to Horton's essay which deserves serious consideration by theologians of all traditions who, with Paul, commend Christ alone as the Church's hope in this age and in the age to come.