The status of justification by faith in Paul’s thought: a brief survey of a modern debate

Ronald Y. K. Fung

Ronald Fung teaches theology at China Graduate School of Theology. He was awarded his PhD from Manchester University in 1975.

It is well known that Martin Luther considered justification by faith to be the article of Christian belief by which the Church would stand or fall. From the Reformation period to comparatively recent times, that doctrine was generally held to represent the content of at least the central tenets of Paul’s theology. Since the mid-nineteenth century, however, some have disputed that estimate of that doctrine and given an entirely different appraisal of its status in the apostle’s thought, while others have upheld, with or without modification, the traditional understanding. The following survey of the course of scholarly research that bears upon this subject, which makes no claim to being exhaustive, will reveal that four broad positions may be distinguished.

The first view regards the doctrine of justification by faith as being of merely subsidiary significance to Paul and considers the centre of his theology to lie elsewhere.

R. A. Lipsius was apparently the first to suggest that there were two trains of thought in Paulinism, the one based on the judicial idea of justification, the other having its starting point in the condition of the new life created by the Spirit, and that what was really efficacious in redemption was union with Christ, brought about by the Spirit, which transformed the believer’s personality. A. Sabatier made the first important attempt to prove the existence of different phases in the thought and life of Paul; his theory was that the apostle advances from the simple doctrine of justification by faith, which occupies a dominant position in his Hauptsprache, to a speculative methodical doctrine, this eschatological orientation being consciously dependent on Jewish conceptions of his time; and ‘justification’ (like ‘reconciliation’) was subserienced to salvation, which Paul conceived of as eschatological deliverance from sin, death and destruction. Thus, as Ludemann had made the criterion of his stance the point in trying to understand the apostle’s doctrine of redemption from a single point of view, so Sabatier took eschatology as his point of departure; both agreed with the interpreters mentioned above, that the centre of Paul’s doctrine lay elsewhere than in justification by faith.


Shortly after the turn of the century, W. Wrede—whom W. G. Kümmler has called ‘the real radical’ in the field of Pauline studies—gave in his study of the apostle what might be considered an elaboration on Weizsäcker’s thesis. Categorically denying the Reformation view of justification by faith as the central point of Pauline doctrine, Wrede claims that ‘the whole Pauline religion can be expounded without a word being said about this doctrine’, the ‘real significance’ of which he finds in the fundamental claim that ‘it is the polemical doctrine of Paul, only made intelligible by the struggle of his life, his controversy with Judaism and Jewish Christianity, and is only intended for this. This doctrine, according to Wrede, had its immediate result in the exigencies of Paul’s mission to the Gentiles and furnished ‘the theoretical support for emancipation from Jewish institutions’, and the true essential Pauline doctrine is not justification, but redemption—redemption from the powers of the present world, flesh, sin, Law, death. How the polemical doctrine of justification is related to the essential doctrine of redemption Wrede does not say.

A similar view of the Pauline doctrine was presented by W. Heimüller in the context of a speech delivered at Philips University in Marburg on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the Reformation. In attempting to demonstrate that Luther’s Christianity was not a reproduction or reversion of Judaism, Heimüller asserted that whereas with Luther justification stands absolutely in the centre for the simple reason that his conversion consisted in the experience of justification, Paul’s conversion was not a matter of sin and forbearance but only the question whether the crucified Jesus was the Messiah.

The doctrine of justification was in his case fundamentally a polemical and apologetic doctrine: it first grew upon Paul the missionary in the course of his mission and served to defend his law-free Gentile mission against Jewish-Christian attacks and perspectives. That the heathen do not need to be brought to the way of the letter, and that the Jewish religion is not capable of leading to salvation, that is its original meaning.

As for Paul’s essential doctrine, Heimüller would find it in the conception of the Holy Spirit as summing up the complex of religious experiences: ‘the Spirit makes the Christian certain of sonship, of salvation.’ A decade later, K. Holl could refer to the ‘low’ view of Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith represented by Heimüller as a widespread but not dominant view of his day.

It was A. Schweitzer who made perhaps the most elaborate attempt at showing the secondary nature of Paul’s doctrine of righteousness by faith. As he sees it, there are in fact three different doctrines of redemption in Paul’s theology: the centre of Paul’s thought is given in the mystical doctrine of dying and rising again with Christ, which replaces by an ‘internal’ one the ‘external interpretation’ of Jesus’ death and resurrection provided by the eschatological doctrine of redemption, while the juridical doctrine of righteousness by faith is only a fragment from the more comprehensive mystical redemption-doctrine, which Paul has broken off and polished to give him the particular refraction which he requires. This judgment is based on a ‘series of facts’: (i) In Galatians, the doctrine is not yet independent but is worked out by the aid of the eschatological doctrine of the in-Christ mysticism; (ii) whether in Romans or Galatians, it appears always only in connection with the discussion required by his scriptural argument: what Paul ‘wants this subsidiary doctrine for is to enable him, realising the traditional conception of the atoning death of Christ, to conduct his controversy with the law by means of the argument from Scripture’; (iii) the doctrine is not brought into connection with the other facts of redemption in the context of the doctrine of the Spirit (God’s common grace), and it is impossible to develop the doctrine of redemption as a whole from the juridical doctrine of righteousness by faith, which is possible only from the mystical doctrine of the being-in-Christ.

Schweitzer holds that Paul’s conviction of the essential link between freedom from the law and forgiveness of sins is derived from the mystical doctrine of being-in-Christ, according to which ‘the God who died for Christ is free both from sin and from the Law’. Since, on the one hand, ‘there is no argument against the


5 K. Holl, Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte. Berlin: G. J. Reimer, 1880, pp. 159–162. W. G. Kümmler, ‘Die Frage gegen diesen Ansicht’, in Neutestaments-Studien, 1917, pp. 194–197, also argued against this view. O. Pflieger, while placing the ethical series of ideas alongside the juridical, maintained that both sets of ideas are held to be embedded in the consciousness of the apostle from the first; this emphasis made Pflieger’s view somewhat irrelevant to the criteria to which he belonged. Cf. A. Schweitzer, Paul and his interpreters, pp. 31ff.

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In C. von Weizsäcker’s construction of Paulinism, the concept of ethical renewal is replaced by the notion of divine somnambulism, in which Weizsäcker found the central point of salvation to Paul. For the juridical doctrine of righteousness, Weizsäcker observed that (i) it did not exhaust the whole of Paul; (ii) it was given prominence only in Romans and Galatians and even there only in a setting of conflict with Jewish doctrine; and (iii) in his independent doctrinal system it did not occupy the chief place.3

To R. Kabisch, Pauline theology was eschatological or prophetic, this eschatological orientation being consciously dependent on Jewish conceptions of his time; and ‘justification’ (like ‘reconciliation’) was subservient to salvation, which Paul conceived of as eschatological deliverance from judgment and destruction. Thus, as Lüdemann had made Sabatier’s starting-point in trying to understand the apostle’s doctrine of redemption from a single point of view, so Kabisch took eschatology as his point of departure; both, however, diverge from the interpreters mentioned above, that the centre of Paul’s doctrine lay elsewhere than in justification by faith.4

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The doctrine of justification was in his case fundamentally a polemical and apologetic doctrine: it first grew upon Paul the missionary in the course of his mission and served to defend his law-free Gentile mission against Jewish-Christian attacks and perspectives. That the heathen do not need to be brought to an image of Christ and that the Jewish religion is not capable of leading to salvation, that is its original meaning.

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It was A. Schweitzer who made perhaps the most elaborate attempt at showing the secondary nature of Paul’s doctrine of righteousness by faith. As he sees it, there are in fact three different doctrines of redemption in Paul’s theology: the centre of Paul’s thought is given in the mystical doctrine of dying and rising again with Christ, which replaces by an ‘internal’ one the ‘external interpretation’ of Jesus’ death and resurrection provided by the eschatological doctrine of redemption,8 while the juridical doctrine of righteousness by faith is ‘only a fragment from the more comprehensive mystical redemption-doctrine, which Paul has broken off and polished to give him the particular reflection which he requires’. This judgment is based on ‘a series of facts’: (i) in Galatians, the doctrine is not yet independent but is worked out by the aid of the eschatological doctrine of the in-Christ mysticising; (ii) whereas in Romans or Galatians, it appears always only in connection with the discussion required by his scriptural argument: what Paul ‘wants this subsidiary doctrine for is to enable him, in the light of his fundamental conception of the atoning death of Christ, to conduct his controversy with the law by means of the argument from Scripture’; (iii) the doctrine is not brought into connection with the other facts of redemption in Romans or Galatians, for example, the crucifixion of the Spirit, and it is impossible to develop the doctrine of redemption as a whole from the juridical doctrine of righteousness by faith, which is possible only from the mystical doctrine of the being-in-Crist.

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6 W. Heimüller, Luther’s Stellung in der Religionsgeschichte des Christentums (Marburg: N. G. Elwert’s Verlag, 1908).

7 K. Holl, Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte, pp. 18–79; and also Cf. A. Schweitzer, Paul and his interpreters, pp. 31f.

validity of the Law to be derived directly from the atoning death of Jesus; and, on the other hand, according to his doctrine of the mystical being-in-Christ, freedom from the law and forgiveness of sins go hand in hand for Paul, he is 'forced by his mysticism to recast the doctrine of the atoning death of Jesus, in the sense of inserting into it the doctrine of freedom from the law'; in other words, he is forced to formulate freedom from the law, which is founded in his mysticism, also as righteousness by faith. The only way, however, for Paul to bring into close connection two even elements of freedom from the law and the death of Christ is 'by means of logical ingenuity', viz 'by showing by the argument from Prophecy that the only valid righteousness is that which comes from faith alone, and that work-righteousness is incompatible with faith-righteousness'. 'The doctrine of righteousness by faith is therefore, Schwitzer concludes, 'a subsidiary crutch, which has formed within the rim of the Inner and its meta-theological doctrine of redemption through the being-in-Christ'; it is 'something incomplete and unfit to stand alone'.

This evaluation of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith is followed by H. J. Schoeps, who speaks of it as the scheme of Paul's thought 'a fragment of a doctrine of redemption, a polemic doctrine connected with the abrogatio legis and unconnected with ethics, a doctrine which may be understood only against the background of the very inimical past and not as a purely valid truth'. In the English-speaking world, one writer who has espoused a similar position is C. H. Buck, Jr. Largely on the basis of the non-use of the antithesis faith/works in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 Corinthians 1-9 and its prominence in Galatians and Romans, Buck draws the 'inescapable' conclusion that 'justification by faith, while not incompatible with Paul's earlier doctrine, was actually formulated and expressed by him for the first time when he found it necessary to explain the arguments of the Judaizers in Galatia'. Buck thinks it 'not at all likely' that the term justification derived its importance and at least a part of its meaning (as attested in Galatians and Romans) 'not from Paul's theological vocabulary but from that of its opposites'.

In a similar vein, K. Stendahl judges Schweitzer to be 'certainly right in assigning only a limited function to Paul's teaching about justification, and considers that 'it was grappling with the question about the place of the Gentiles in the Church and in the plan of God . . . which had driven him to that interpretation of the Law which was to become his in a unique way. Salvation history, then, described especially in Romans 9—11, rather than justification by faith, is to Stendahl the centum of Paul's theology'.

The heart and endowment of Schweitzer's evaluation of justification as a subsidiary doctrine in Paul has come from W. D. Davies and, most recently, from E. P. Sanders. Davies adduces the following arguments:

(i) in some contexts justification is merely one metaphor among others employed by Paul to describe his deliverance through Christ, and we are not justified in petrifying a metaphor into a dogma;

(ii) in those contexts where the idea of justification by Faith is central, we find that this is so only because of a certain process of exegesis (Iatia), wherein Paul's attitude to the old Torah (he practised obedience to it and urged other Jewish Christians to do likewise) is only understandable when the doctrine of justification by Faith is regarded not as the essential ground of the whole of Paul's thought but as one fragment within a larger transformation which leads to the resurrection and ultimate transformation, in Christ's body and in the Spirit.”

As for the juristic category of righteousness by faith, Sanders holds that (a) it is not a set doctrine with any precise content, or (b) that it has not been the dominant factor in the thought of one who could never have separated religion and life.

Davies therefore has no hesitation in relegating the doctrine 'to the periphery . . . of Paul's thought'. As a result, however, Davies suggests that this is to be found 'in his awareness that with the coming of Christ the Age to Come had become present fact the proof of which was the presentment of the Spirit'. In his attempt to locate a beginning point for the study of Paul, E. P. Sanders notes the debate between E. Käsemann and his critics and makes an observation in the manner of a syllogism: 'the heart of Paul's theology cannot be centred on the individual' (in the sense, Stendahl and others are correct); 'the particular formulation "righteousness by faith" does primarily concern the individual' (so Bultmann, Bornkamm and Conzelmann correctly maintain); hence 'the catch-word "righteousness by faith" is a byway on the path of Paul's thought'. Sanders accepts Schweitzer's arguments against considering the terminology 'righteousness by faith' as central to Pauline thought as, 'cumulatively considered, convincing', and he maintains with Schweitzer that to take that phrase as the central theme of Paul's gospel is to miss the heart of his theology. In Sanders' view, the central place in Paul's soteriology is taken by the theme of participation: participation in Christ's death so that the world is transformed and the ultimate transformation, in Christ's body and in the Spirit. As for the juristic category of righteousness by faith, Sanders holds that it is not a set doctrine with any precise content, or that it has not been the dominant factor in the thought of one who could never have separated religion and life.

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The heartbreak of Schweitzer’s evaluation of
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(i) In some contexts justification is merely one aspect among others of what he employed to
describe his deliverance through Christ, and we are
not justified in petrifying a metaphor into a dogma;
(ii) In those contexts where the idea of justification by Faith is central, we find that this is so only
because of the certain presuppositions. (Paul’s attitude
to the old Torah (he practised obedience to it and
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is only understandable when the doctrine of
justification by Faith is regarded not as the essential
giving of salvation and forgiveness but as an
additional prelude (in a way not comparable to the
idea of justification as a subordinate doctrine
of Paul’s thought).

(iii) A doctrine such as justification by Faith, which
has always to be hedged about so as not to
lead to antinomianism, a plague that Paul
dreaded, and which, as Schweitzer has
rightly insisted, is at variance with anything
unparticular about terminology and the definition of
the righteousness of faith varies—and (b) that it
serves a primarily negative purpose—‘as a negative
argument against keeping the law as sufficient
or necessary for salvation’. It is rightly made
once that Paul was not conscious of any bifurcation
in his own thinking: ‘Christ’s death was for
acquittal and to provide participation in his death to
the Gentile; death and acquittal were conceived not
as two different things, but as one.’ Yet, even according to Schweitzer and Schweitzer’s
own admission, the common consciousness of the West, that there is a static coherence
between all this, but it is not systematically worked out. The

Davies therefore has no hesitation in relegating the
decree ‘to the periphery … of Paul’s thought’. As
E. P. Sanders notes, ‘if Davies is right that Paul’s
teaching about justification is not correct; the part
of justification which is in keeping with Sanders’ description of Paul as a theologian and coherent
thinker but not a systematic theologian.’

If Davies, Sanders and others reveal in their
approach a compromise between righteousness by
faith the abiding influence of Schweitzer’s original thesis, Strekker hold(s) (i) that up to the time of 1 Thes-
salians (taken to be Paul’s earliest extant letter)
the Problematical of the law had not yet been fully
discussed through by Paul, since there is in this letter
no reflection on the subject of justification; (ii) that
Paul’s persecution of the churches had not been
motivated by the opposition between a Jewish piety
based on the law and the (Gentile)-Christian fre-
dom from the law, its real cause had been the offer of a
forgiveness of sins that is declared in the name of Jesus Christ; (iii) that Paul’sDamascus
encounter with Christ and the origin of his doctrine
of justification are ‘temporally and materially to
be removed from each other’, since in Galatians 1:12ff., despite the fact that in the letter Paul is
seeking to combat Judaistic doctrine by working out his message of justification, he does not describe
either his conversion or his commission as an approach
through a doctrine of righteousness by faith,
(iv) that according to Philippians 3:4b–11 Paul
originally did not interpret his call in the language
of justification but rather in the Christological
ontological sense, as the beginning of his recogni-
tion of the lordship of Christ, that
the doctrine of justification forms ‘ein sekundäre Redak-
tionsssuite’ over against both the Adam-Christ
analogy of Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 and the
baptismal doctrine of Romans 6; and (v) that in
spite of all this it can be understood only on the basis of Paul’s doctrine
of redemption which temporally and materially pre
ceded it (on the basis, that is), of the ontological
interpretation of the Christ-event as an act of
deliverance from enslavement to the powers sarx,
hamartia and thanatos’.

II

Over against the previous position, the second view
in

10 Ibid., pp. 502, 520, 433.
11 Gebrüder Verlag und Rechtungsführung: zur Stellung der Rechtungsführung in der Theologie des
Paulus, in Johannes Friedrich, Wolfgang Pihlmann und
Peter Seegers (eds.), Paulus als Schriftfaktor (Marburg:
Ernst Käsemann zum 70. Geburstag [Tübingen: J. C.
Mohr (Paulus), 1977], pp. 573–592).
12 E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism (London:
SCPA, 1975), pp. 356, 460, 484, 456, 505, 506.
13 Ibid., p. 456, 456, 505, 506.
14 Ibid., p. 456, 456, 505, 506.

References:
10 Ibid., pp. 222. Cf. Davies in IDB, III, 1100 for the
same view.
11 E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism (London:
SCPA, 1975), pp. 78-96 (484, with n. 10; cf. 258); the latter work also
gives a fresh consideration to the letter of 2 Corinthians 10. 3. 11 (p. 258) for his own statement of this thesis) to E. Käsemann’s
reading of Galatians 6. 14 (his article of 1972 below).
12 W. D. Davies, ‘The Character and Nature of Pauline
upholds the fundamental significance and even centrality of justification by faith in Paul’s theology. Wrede’s interpretation as a tratamultheule in Paul was dejected by G. J. Machen, to whom Wrede’s representation of Paul ‘reverses the real state of the case’.

The real reason why Paul was devoted to the doctrine of justification by faith was not that it made possible mission, but rather that it was true. Paul was not devoted to the doctrine of justification by faith because of the Gentile mission; he was devoted to the Gentile mission because of the doctrine of justification by faith.

Similarly, G. Schrenk protested against Wrede’s account of the Pauline doctrine on the ground that Paul must first justify himself before his own earlier thinking, and his whole theology is rooted in this radical clarification of the question of the Law... That justification is a militant doctrine and a keypoint in the Christian mission is because there is exposed in it a new insight concerning the relation of the Law and Christ.15

Schweitzer’s assertion of a dichotomy in Paul’s thought between justification by faith and the sacrament of redemption on the one hand and the juridical doctrine of justification on the other, also, was challenged by W. Grundmann, who, while accepting the juxtaposition of the two trains of thought, finds their Einheitpunk in Paul’s interpretation of the law. Paul’s Damascus experience having made righteousness by law an impossibility for him, two inseparable questions arose for Paul out of his situation of legal piety:

1) Since there is no righteousness of God in the law, where then is it to be found? 2) Since the law of man and the power of man belong together, how is the situation with regard to the possibility of freedom from the law after death and the possibility of a new life that does not stand under the domain of law?

Paul answers these questions with his doctrine of the righteousness of faith and his mysticism of being-in-Christ, respectively. Both are based on the act of God’s grace in the death and resurrection of Christ, and both are rooted in the unity, as passages like Romans 3: 24; 6: 7-1-6; Galatians 2:15-21; 2 Corinthians 5: 14-21 clearly show. Grundmann concludes that eschatology, mysticism and justification represent a Dreieinheit in Paul’s theology which realizes itself as redemption-event are its two sides, mysticism of the being-in-Christ and justification by faith, whereby the first provides the presupposition for the last. The Reformation view of justification as the centre of Paul’s preaching was positively upheld by H. D. Wender. He emphasizes the fact that Pauline theology is basically eschatological, and that this holds also for his doctrine of justification: it is a theological fact, and not to be applied or anthropological eschatology.

Justification is also christological in character: ‘In death and new life is Jesus the mediator of justification. There is no other justification-doctrine for Paul than a christological one.’ Nor is justification unrelated to ‘ethics’: ‘Paul turns the relationship of justification and work (as man’s moral behaviour) around: not that the work procures justification, but that by means of justification it can become the power and basis of work, since it is realized in the coming of Christ.’ Justification has also an ecclesiastical character: ‘Reception of the Spirit and baptism as incorporation into the church of God belong together, as also justification and membership in the church;’ justification and the sacraments are connected in that ‘the sacrament is eschatologically-historical sacrament; it has the event of justification in Christ’s death and resurrection as its ground and it is from the concept of justification and the concept of church are finally bound together in Christology.’ On the basis of these observations, Wenden concludes that in Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith is the isolated piece of teaching, after a definite concentration and tapering off of his entire message and theology.16 To M. Dibelius and W. G. Kummel, ‘there is, therefore no doubt that the hymn of Paul of the thinker beats most vigorously, and that it is here that to look for the core of his message’, while J. F. Packer adds five considerations as pointing to the ‘centrality of justification in Paul’s theological and religious outlook’. These are that (1) the doctrine of justification is the Epistle to the Romans, which is ‘evidently the principal address statement of Paul’s gospel’; (2) justification was evidently the root of Paul’s personal religion; (3) it is to Paul God’s functional act of blessing, for ‘whom he saved and secured for the future’; (4) it is the basic reference point in Paul’s doctrine of salvation; (5) it is ‘the key to Paul’s philosophy of history’.17

If the dispute concerning Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith has been largely a problem within Protestant theology, this does not mean that Catholic scholars have been completely silent about it. Thus, O. Kuss has taken issue with Wrede and (especially) Schweitzer, considering that it cannot be conducive to a historical understanding of the Pauline preaching to set the doctrine of righteousness by faith ‘rigorously and one-sidedly’ over against the mystical doctrine of the being-in-Christ.

And K. Kertelge, addressing himself specifically to the problem, bases his conclusion on the twofold consideration that (i) justification is ‘the theological centre of gravity in the chief epistles of Paul’ and that (ii) the theological function of the concept of justification is more than passing, polemical value, even if exchanged for a religious and ethical relation to God—hence the doctrine of justification is ‘the real theology, and certainly the anthropologically inflected theology of Paul’. While, therefore, the doctrine is related to Paul’s actual historical situation that is, its origin, its growth and its gospeI and stands in the centre of his theological reflections.18

The same emphasis is found, not surprisingly, in the works of other German, Protestant scholars. There, a subject which covers various passages where Paul ‘cites and expounds stereotyped doctrinal formulae’ to a formgeschichtlich analysis, concludes that ‘where Paul expounds the tradition of the church is it his consistent intention to work over and develop with his gospel the connection of justification and not in relationship to mysticism’. To Conzelmann, the doctrine of justification is the central theme which holds together and normalizes other themes of theology: ‘in it the criteria for the present tense in theology will have to be sought’, and the correct approach to the ethical problems and crises of today is, he suggests, ‘to strive ever more intensively for the doctrine of Jesus Christ as the article of a standing and falling theology’.19

But perhaps the stoutest defence in recent years of the centrality of justification in Paul is that which has come from G. Bornkamm and E. Käsemann. In Bornkamm’s view, ‘the unmistakably personal and peculiar factor in Paul’s understanding of the primitive kerygma’ consists in the fact that he ‘expounds and develops the Christian gospel as the gospel of justification by faith alone’: ‘to set out the gospel concerning Christ as a gospel of justification, as faith and vice versa, is a decisive concern of his whole theology’, and ‘his whole preaching, even when it says nothing expressly about justification, can be properly understood only when taken in closest connection with the context of salvation’.

As for these ‘schemes of classification not directly stemming from his doctrine of justification’, such as sacramental statements and existential terms, ‘they are not to be played off against his gospel of justification, or separated from it or ranked above it. Influential as these mystico-ontological concepts and expressions are, Paul hardly uses them unqualified by his doctrine of justification’.20 In contrast, but of course in no way less helpful, terms, Käsemann affirms—largely in criticism of H. Stendahl—‘that justification is not a playing off against his gospel of justification, or separated from it or ranked above it. Influential as these mystico-ontological concepts and expressions are, Paul hardly uses them unqualified by his doctrine of justification’.21 In contrast, but of course in no way less helpful, terms, Käsemann affirms—largely in criticism of H. Stendahl—‘that justification is not a playing off against his gospel of justification, or separated from it or ranked above it.'
upholds the fundamental significance and even centrality of justification by faith in Paul's theology. For this reason, the doctrine of "Friedenslehre" in Paul was deprecated by J. G. Machen, to whom Wrede's representation of Paul 'reverses the real state of the case':

The real reason why Paul was devoted to the doctrine of justification by faith was not that it made possible mission, but rather that it was true. Paul was not devoted to the doctrine of justification by faith because of the Gentile mission; he was devoted to the Gentile mission because of the doctrine of justification by faith.8

Similarly, G. Schrenk protested against Wrede's account of the Pauline doctrine on the ground that Paul must first justify himself before his own earlier thinking, and his whole theology in rooted in this radical clarification of the question of the Law... That justification is a militant doctrine and a keypoint in the Christian mission is because there is exposed in it a new insight concerning the relation of the Law and Christ.9

Schweitzer's assertion of a dichotomy in Paul's theology between redemption on the one hand and the judicial doctrine of justification on the other, also, was challenged by W. Grundmann, who, while accepting the juxtaposition of the two trains of thought, finds their Einheit in Paul's interpretation of the law. Paul's Damascus experience having made righteousness by law an impossibility for him, two inseparable questions arose for Paul out of his situation of legal piety:

(1) Since there is no righteousness of God in the law, where then is it to be found? (2) Since domination of law and duration of life belong together, how is the situation with regard to the possession of freedom from the law after death and the possibility of a new life that does not stand under the domination of law?

Paul answers these questions with his doctrine of the righteousness of faith and his mysticism of being-in-Christ, respectively. Both are based on the act of God's grace in the death and resurrection of Christ, leading to the claim of God's righteousness in the unity, as passages like Romans 3: 24, 6: 7, 7: 1-6; Galatians 2: 15-21; 2 Corinthians 5: 14-21 clearly show. Grundmann concludes that eschatology, mysticism and justification represent a Dreieinheit in Paul's thought, a relationship which realizes itself as redemption-event are its two sides, mysticism of the being-in-Christ and justification by faith, whereby the first provides the presupposition for the last. The Reformation view of justification as the centre of Paul's preaching was positively upheld by H. D. Wendland. He emphasizes the fact that Pauline theology is basically eschatological, and that this holds also for his doctrine of justification: it is therefore "the Christianisation of the eschatological theology to the position of man before God; it is the 'applied' or anthropological eschatology'. Justification is also christological in character: 'In death and new life is Jesus the mediator of justification. There is no other justification-doctrine for Paul than a christological one.' Nor is justification un-related to 'ethics': 'Paul turns the relationship of justification and work (as man's moral behaviour) around: not that the work procures justification, but that the work comes into existence as a result of it. Anthropologically the position of the Law as it can become the power and basis of work, since it is realized in the coming of Christ.' Justification has also an ecclesiological character: 'Reception of the Spirit and baptism as incorporation into the church of God belong together, as also justification and membership in the church'; justification and the sacraments are connected in that 'the sacrament is eschatologico-historical sacrament; it has the event of justification in Christ's death and resurrection as its foundation and in the concept of the church are finally bound together in Christology'. On the basis of these observations, Wendland concludes that in Paul 'the doctrine of justification by faith fits isolated pieces of teaching', 'so that it has to be subjected to a definite concentration and tapering off' of his entire message and theology.10 To M. Dibelius and W. G. Kühlem, 'there can be no doubt that in Paul there is a center, a core of his message', while J. F. Packer adds five considerations as pointing to 'the centrality of justification in Paul's theological and religious outlook'. These are that (i) the doctrine of justification is the first Epistle to the Romans, which is 'evidently to be understood as the address statement of Paul's gospel'; (ii) justification was evidently the root of Paul's personal religion; (iii) it is to Paul 'God's fundamental act of blessing, for which all save those who set it aside are saved and secure for the future'; (iv) it is the basic reference point in Paul's doctrine of salvation; (v) it is 'the key to Paul's philosophy of history'.11

If the dispute concerning Paul's doctrine of justification by faith has been largely a problem within Protestant theology, this does not mean that Catholic scholars have been completely silent about it. Thus, O. Kuss has taken issue with Wrede and (especially) Schweitzer, considering that it can be conducive to a historical understanding of the Pauline preaching to set the doctrine of righteousness by faith 'rigorously and one-sidedly' over against the mystical doctrine of the being-in-Christ. And K. Kretzsch, addressing himself specifically to the problem, bases his conclusion on the twofold consideration that (i) justification is 'the theological centre of gravity in the chief epistles of Paul', and that (ii) the theological function of the concept of justification is more than of passing, as it is here excluded of its relationship to God—hence the doctrine of justification is 'the real theology, and certainly the anthropologically undercut theology of Paul'. While, therefore, the doctrine is related to Paul's actual historical situation, it is less determined by the history of his gospel and stands in the centre of his theological expressions.12

The same emphasis is found, not surprisingly, in the works of other German, Protestant scholars. The theme of justification is variously placed, where Paul cites and expounds stereotyped doctrinal formulae to a formgeschichtlich analysis, concludes that 'where Paul expounds the tradition of the church it is his consistent intention to work out on its own the concept of justification and not in relationship to mysticism'. To Conzelmann, the doctrine of justification is the central theme which holds together and normalizes other themes of theology: 'in it the criteria for every use of language in theology will have to be sought', and the correct approach to the ethical problems and crises of today is, he suggests, 'to strive ever more intensively for the doctrine of justification both as the article of a standing and falling theology'.13

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The emphasis thus placed by Bornkamm and Käsemann on the centrality of Paul's doctrine of justification is not to be understood as the result not only poliemenal situations is regarded by F. F. Bruce as properly given; against the view of C. H. Buck and W. Wrede referred to above, Bruce maintains that 'the essence of justification by faith
was more probably implicit in the logic of his conversion." 24

III

A third view dissents both from We rede and Schweitzer's estimate of justification as of merely subsidiary significance in Paul and from the opposite view which accords the doctrine a central place. This view is represented by J. Jeremias, to whom the formula 'justification by faith' is but one of 'a multitude of illustrations' which Paul uses to show to the newly converted what the rite of baptism means to them.

It is the description of God's grace in baptism using a figure taken originally from the judicial sphere: God's grace in baptism consists in his unreserved pardon. It is that formulation of the grace of baptism which Paul confronted in conflict with Judaism. Therefore it is not a 'subsidiary crater', but it occupies a place of equal importance with all the other descriptions of the grace of baptism—e.g. being 'washed' and 'sanctified' (1 Cor. 6:11). Hence the doctrine 'should not be isolated'; rather, 'we must include justification in all the other sayings interpreting baptism in order to put it in its proper setting'. 25

In this connection we may note that E. P. Sanders also understands 'justification by faith' to be 'only one formulation among many'; he treats 'justification and righteousness' as part of Paul's 'transfer terminology' together with 'participation in the death of Christ', 'freedom', 'transformation, new creation' and 'reconciliation', and concludes from the study of several Pauline texts that 'justification' as a 'transfer' term can be paralleled either with 'sanctify' and 'reconcile' (referring to past transgressions), or with 'set free' (referring to sin as an enslaving power). 26 This should not, however, mislead one into thinking that Sanders' position as a whole is similar to that of Jeremias, since, as we saw above, Sanders does not regard the participationist and the juristic categories as of equal significance but unequivocally gives priority to the former as representing the heart of Paul's thought.

IV

The fourth position may be described as a modification of the Reformation view of Paul's doctrine of justification as the centre and content of Paul's gospel.

An outstanding proponent of this view is H. N. Ridderbos, who in general stands firmly within the Reformed tradition. His objection to the Reformed view of this matter is not that it attaches too great an importance to justification by faith; over against We rede and Schweitzer he affirms that the doctrine 'unmistakably belongs to the very heart of Paul's preaching'. But, he observes, by approaching Paul's doctrine exclusively from the standpoint of justification by faith there is a danger of depriving Paul's preaching of its redemptive historical dynamic and of making it into a timeless treatment of the vital question: how is one justified before God? Justification by faith as proclaimed by Paul is rather one aspect, although a very central aspect, of the great redemptive event of which Paul knew himself to be the herald, and which he described as the fulness of time in which God has sent the Son (Gal. 4:4), . . . so that it can now be said, old things are passed away; behold all things are become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

Ridderbos sees 'the dominating perspective and foundation of Paul's entire preaching' as that of 'recognition before everything else, he was the proclaimer of a new time, the great turning point in the history of redemption, the intrusion of a new world aeon'; he maintains that such a perspective 'alone can illuminate the many facets and interrelations of his preaching, e.g. justification, being-in-Christ, suffering, dying, and rising again with Christ, the conflict between the spirit and the flesh, the cosmic drama, etc.' 27 This view is shared by F. F. Bruce, who, while agreeing (with Bornkamm and Küstenmaier, as noted above) that justification by faith is central to the Pauline gospel, at the same time recognizes 'that it does not exhaust that gospel', but that 'Paul sets his doctrine of justification, together with his other doctrines, in the context of the new creation that has come into being with and in Christ'. 28 It is espoused also by G. E. Ladd, who expresses agreement with Ridderbos (and W. D. Davies) to the effect that the unifying centre of Paul's theology is 'the redemptive work of Christ and the new and redemptive history'; to him, Paul's conversion meant a recovery of the sense of redemptive history that Judaism had lost: Paul's experience of Christ forced him back beyond the

Mosaic law to rediscover the promise given to Abraham and to see its fulfillment in the recent events in the person and work of Jesus. 29 The same geschichtsphilosophie emphasis underlies the proposition of R. B. Gaffin, Jr., that 'not justification by faith but union with the resurrected Christ by faith (of which union, to be sure, the justifying aspect stands out perhaps most prominently) is the central motif of Pauline soteriology'. 30

By way of conclusion, we may perhaps make three observations and one suggestion. (i) It is clear that the primary issue in the modern debate on the status of justification by faith in Paul's thought is, in the words of K. Kertelge, 'whether the doctrine of justification plays only a subordinate role in the totality of a doctrine of redemption which proceeds on a multiple track, or, whether, from its basic intention, the central place in Pauline theology belongs to it'. 31 (ii) With the possible exception of the works of H. D. Wendland and K. Kertelge, there has appeared since Schweitzer proposed

his thesis no monograph which takes up the issue in a fundamental and comprehensive way, although various scholars have expressed their own position with regard to it. (iii) The debate has been carried on primarily among German scholars, and their counterparts in the English-speaking world have by and large taken little part in it. It would seem that a thorough study of the issue by a scholar from the English-speaking world might make a welcome contribution to the debate. (iv) If theological judgments, to be sound, must be firmly rooted in careful exegesis of Scripture, then one of the best approaches—not to say the best approach—to the dispute in question is by way of patient exegesis of Paul's letters, at least those parts of his letters which are pertinent to the subject. Such a study, we submit, will make it abundantly plain that the last of the positions in the above survey approximates most closely the Pauline perspective. At least that is how it has turned out for one student of Paul.

26 Sanders, op. cit., pp. 493, 463-472 (especially 472).
28 F. F. Bruce, Romans, p. 40.

Mercy triumphs over justice: James 2:13 and the theology of faith and works

William Dyrness

William Dyrness is Associate Professor of Theology at the Asian Theological Seminary in Manila.

(a) Introduction

Ever since Luther's Prefaces to the New Testament (1522) the book of James has suffered a great deal of abuse at the hands of Bible scholars. Some have come to the point of doubting whether the book is Christian. Bullmam says of James in his Theology of the New Testament: 'Every shred of understanding for the Christian situation as that of "between-ness" is lacking here. The moralism of the synagogue has made its entry.' At the same time recent advances in New Testament studies have illuminated many aspects of the setting and character of the epistle. M. Dibelius pointed out in 1920 the indebtedness of James to the Greek and Jewish parastic traditions. He claimed that James is best understood as a 'text which strings together adomnitions of general

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