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HOW RIGHT ARE THE JUSTIFIED? OR, WHAT IS A *DIKAIOS?*

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The classic Protestant doctrine of justification rests on a clear distinction between the forensic on the one hand and the ontological or transformational on the other. Not that the transformational is denied. On the contrary, it is asserted.[1] Every justified person is a transformed person and will continue being transformed till the day she is presented faultless in the presence of God's glory (Jude 24). This transformation begins in the new birth, proceeds through sanctification and reaches its climax (conformity to the image of Christ) in glorification.

But the hallmark of the Protestant doctrine is that the forensic (justification) does not rest on the ontological (sanctification). Expressed evangelically, that means that we do not have to be saints to be justified. Expressed lexically, it means that the Greek verb *dikaioo* signifies not to *make* righteous, but to *declare* righteous. It expresses the verdict of a judge, acquitting the person before him, pronouncing him, 'Not guilty!' and declaring him to be in the right.

Some scholars, including N. T. Wright, virtually take for granted the forensic, lawcourt understanding of justification.[2] This may be premature,

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[1] See, for example, the words of Calvin: 'Therefore Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify. These benefits are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond, so that those whom he illumines by his wisdom, he redeems; those whom he redeems, he justifies; those whom he justifies, he sanctifies.' (*Institutes*, III.XVI, 1). All quotations from the *Institutes* are from J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* edited by John T. McNeill, translated and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, 1960).

[2] In his commentary on Romans 3:20, Wright simply asserts that, 'Justification, in this passage, is a lawcourt term ... The language most naturally belongs in the lawcourt.' Cf. the more extended treatment in Wright's Introduction to the commentary: '"Righteousness" was the status of the successful party when the case had been decided.... The word is not basically to do with morality or behaviour, but rather with status in the eyes of the court.' (*The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary and*

especially in view of the dogmatic position of the Roman Catholic Church as set forth in the *Decretum de iustificatione* of the Council of Trent.[3] According to Chapter VII of the Decree, justification includes not only remission of sins, 'but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just, and of an enemy a friend'. This clearly amounts to more than a *declaring* righteous: 'we are not only reputed, but are truly called, and are, just, receiving justice (righteousness) within us, each one according to his own measure ... and according to each one's proper disposition and cooperation.' In this Tridentine definition, justification becomes so comprehensive as to be virtually synonymous with salvation: 'a translation, from that state wherein man is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace' (Chapter IV).

All this may be a fair description of what the Bible means by the adjective *dikaios*: a righteous man. But when we turn to the corresponding verb, *dikaioo*, we find that it is not used to refer to the act of producing such a person, but to the act of declaring someone to be such a person. It is declarative: a statement about an accused person, not a transformation or infusion.[4]

Reflections [*The New Interpreter's Bible,* Vol. X; Nashville, 2002], p. 459, pp. 398-401). Henceforth cited as *Romans.*

[3] See Schaff, *The Creeds of the Greek and Latin Churches* (London, 1877), pp. 89-100. Cf. H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum,* pp. 792-803.

[4] This is conceded by some noted Roman Catholic scholars. See, for example, Hans Kung, *Justification: the Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (New York, 1964), p. 209: 'According to the original biblical usage of the term, "justification" must be defined as a *declaring just by court order.*' Cf. J. H. Newman, *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification* (6th edition, London, 1892), p. 65: 'in logical order, or exactness of idea, Almighty God justifies before He sanctifies; or, in rigid propriety of language, justification is *counting* righteous, not *making*'. (Newman's *Lectures* were first published in 1838, before his conversion to Catholicism. Notwithstanding this, Kung (*op. cit.,* p. 212) describes the volume as 'one of the best treatments of the Catholic theology of justification'. We should note, of course, that what these writers are conceding is not the Catholic doctrine of justification, but merely the meaning of the verb *dikaioo*. The *doctrine,* they would argue, is much wider than the *word.* On the other hand, such textbooks as Ott's *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (4th edition, Rockford, Illinois, 1960) adhere rigidly to the Tridentine position, even to the extent of treating justification under the heading, 'The Doctrine of God the Sanctifier'.

This appears in, for example, Exodus 23:6ff. The core statement is Yahweh's affirmation, 'I will not *acquit* (Hebrew, *atzdiq)* the wicked' (v. 7), but the whole context is juridical. Those charged with the administration of justice are being warned against corruption. They are not to pervert the justice due to the poor, they are not to slay the innocent and, above all, they are not to take bribes, 'for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right'.

The same forensic setting is apparent in Deuteronomy 25:1ff., where to justify is clearly the opposite of to condemn: 'If there is a dispute between men, and they come into court, and the judges decide between them, justifying (Hebrew, *hitzdiq)* the innocent and condemning the guilty, then if the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall cause him to lie and be beaten in his presence.' In Isaiah 5:23 the force of the lawcourt imagery is enhanced by the picture of drunken judges: 'Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, who acquit (justify) the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!'

In the New Testament, the specific lawcourt imagery is much less prominent (the apostles were not, like Moses, laying down procedures for an earthly judicatory), but the basic meaning remains the same. Negatively, justification is the opposite of condemnation, as appears in Romans 8:33, 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?' Positively, justification means to declare someone (possibly oneself) to be in the right. The Pharisees, for example, justified themselves before men, but God passed a different verdict: He knew their hearts (Luke 16:15). Luke 7:29 is particularly illuminating, making crystal clear the gulf between the idea of justifying and the idea of making righteous. The context is Jesus' declaration of support for John the Baptist. The outcome is that the people 'justify God'. He was in the right in sending John.

But laborious analysis of biblical semantics is hardly necessary. Although the Christian Scriptures set forth a unique doctrine of justification, the concept of justification is not itself unique to Christians. It is common currency in all civilisations, and the fact that it basically means being declared or proved right can be demonstrated from the Oxford Dictionary as cogently (and as relevantly) as from a Hebrew or Greek lexicon. When human beings speak of justifying someone, they are referring to vindication, not to moral transformation. Indeed, we would do well to heed the words of Matthew Arnold, 'Terms like grace, new birth,

justification ... terms, in short, which with St Paul are literary terms, theologians have employed as if they were scientific terms.'[5]

Take, for example, Robert Burns' use of the word 'justify' in the poem, 'To a Mouse':

I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken nature's social union
An' justifies that ill opinion
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion
An' fellow mortal!

Or take Milton's famous words in Book 1.26 of *Paradise Lost,* where he declares his intention to 'justify the ways of God to men'; or the words of Mark Pattison, 'We no longer have the difficult task of *justifying* science in the eyes of the nation';[6] or the words of a young airman, Pilot Officer V. A. Rosewarne, in his last letter to his mother: 'The universe is so vast and so ageless that the life of one man can only be *justified* by the measure of his sacrifice.'[7]

In none of these instances would it make any sense whatever to understand 'justifying' as referring to inward renewal, infusion of righteousness or the repairing of a damaged soul. Even the proverbial, 'The end justifies the means' clearly bespeaks vindication, not transformation.

But what vital truth do we safeguard when we assert that justification is forensic, not ontological? The obvious point is that the judge's sentence has to do not with character, but with status. The verdict does not make the man in the dock a better person, or a worse. In the human court it merely indicates his relation to the law on a particular charge. In respect of the offence specified, he is innocent and free to go. The verdict itself is totally independent of character. The accused may have a string of convictions. He may even be an evil person. Yet in respect of the particular offence he is liable to no punishment and stigmatised by no guilt. He cannot even make his own evil character a reason for doubting his acquittal: 'I am a criminal,

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[5] Matthew Arnold, 'Literature and Dogma', 1.1. This essay can be found in John Drury (ed.), *Critics of the Bible 1724-1873* (Cambridge, 1989).

[6] Cited by the *Oxford Dictionary* in support of its definition of 'justify' as, 'To show (a person or action) to be just or in the right; to prove or maintain the righteousness or innocence of; to vindicate (from a charge)'.

[7] These words are inscribed on the portrait, 'The Young Airman', by Frank Salisbury, which hangs in the RAF Museum, Hendon. (*Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, p. 408).

a known criminal; therefore the judge must have found me guilty.' The verdict is not itself a moral renewal, and does not depend on moral renewal. It merely says, 'Not guilty!'

In all these respects the analogy from human justice holds good in relation to the divine act of justification. It is not a making righteous, but a declaring righteous. It does not make us God-like, but declares us to be right-with-God. We were held to be guilty sinners. Now we are affirmed as righteous.

FORGIVENESS

In one respect, however, the analogy with the human lawcourt is not complete. In the human court (at least under western judicial systems) the person appearing before the judge is innocent until proved guilty. The one who appears in the divine court, by contrast, is a sinner, and known to be such not only by the Judge but by himself. He knows that his life is indefensible and that if God marks his iniquity he will be swept away (Ps. 130:3). In such a case, the key element in justification is forgiveness; and such forgiveness must be an act of pure mercy.

The link between justification and forgiveness is plain in, for example, Romans 4:5ff., where Paul defines justification in terms of the non-imputation of sin and drives home the point with a citation from the Psalms of David: 'Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered' (Ps. 32:1). Similarly, in Romans 5:1 the result of justification is that there is peace between ourselves and God. Even more pertinent, perhaps, is the statement in Romans 8:1: 'there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus'. There was; but now there is none. The *none* is absolute. All danger of condemnation has been removed. Justified sinners 'lose all their guilty stains'. In the language of Ames, 'Not only are past sins of justified persons remitted, but also those to come ... justification makes the whole remission obtained for us in Christ actually ours.'[8]

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[8] William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (3rd edition, 1629. Translated from the Latin by J. D. Eusden and reprinted, Grand Rapids, 1997), p. 163. Cf. the words of John Owen (*Works*, Edinburgh, 1850-53), Vol. V, p. 146: 'in the first justification of believing sinners, all *future* sins are remitted as unto any *actual obligation* unto the curse of the law ... and although sin cannot be *actually pardoned* before it be *actually committed,* yet may the obligation unto the curse of the law be virtually taken away from such sins in *justified persons* as are consistent with a justified state' (italics his). See, too, the almost Protestant comment of Hans Kung, 'God treats us as though

It was in such terms that Jesus himself gave absolution. To the paralytic in Mark 2:5, for example, he says, 'My son, your sins are forgiven.' Similarly, of the woman who wiped his feet with her hair in the house of Simon the Pharisee he says, 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven' (Luke 7:47). Paul states the point categorically in Colossians 2:13: 'you who were dead in trespasses, God made alive together with Christ, *having forgiven us all our trespasses*'. He cancelled the whole bond which stood against us.

The Old Testament proclaimed the same doctrine in some of its most memorable passages. David, for example, knows that if God forgives him he will be 'whiter than snow' (Ps. 51:7). Isaiah writes (1:18):

"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD.
"Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool."

But we must also keep in view the point made by the prophet Micah: 'Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea' (Mic. 7:19). One of the most specious platitudes of semi-erudite Protestantism is that, 'God forgives the sinner, but the sinner never forgives himself!' Such words have bred untold agonies of self-accusation and self-torture. We have to insist, instead, that God's forgiveness of our sins means that he forgets them. Such, indeed, are the very terms of the New Covenant: 'I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more' (Jer. 31:34). If he does not remember them, he cannot *remind* us of them. Who, then, does? What God has buried, let not our consciences raise. We have no right to go fishing in these waters. Instead, we have to believe in the forgiveness of sins. Such faith, as Barth points out, 'can never be lived except in a Notwithstanding: notwithstanding all that man finds himself and his fellow-men to be, notwithstanding all that he and his fellow-men may try to do'.[9] Neither the guilt of past sins nor the shame of present failure should take that assurance from us.

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we had not sinned. He hides his face from our sins and thus deletes them'
(*Justification*, p. 212).
[9]   *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV.1 (Edinburgh, 1956), p. 634.

RECONCILIATION

The idea of forgiveness shades easily into that of reconciliation (a concept used by Paul alone among the writers of the New Testament). The link is made repeatedly by Calvin, who writes, for example, 'the righteousness of faith is reconciliation with God, which consists solely in the forgiveness of sins.'[10] The identification is explicit in Paul himself: 'in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them' (2 Cor. 5:19). There is a similar ring to his language in Romans 5:9-11, where the statement, 'we are now justified by (ev) his blood' (verse 9) is clearly synonymous with the following declaration, 'we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son' (verse 10).[11]

If forgiveness implies a state of guilt, reconciliation clearly implies a state of enmity: 'while we were *enemies* we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son' (Rom. 5:10). But on whose side was the enmity? Modern exegetes (going back at least as far as J. B. Lightfoot) have tended to limit it to our human hostility to God, as if there were no impediments to reconciliation on God's side.[12] There can certainly be no doubt about humanity's active enmity against God, or about the apostle Paul's clear perception of it. He has spelt it out plainly enough in Romans 1:18-32 (with regard to Gentiles) and in Romans 2:1-3:20 (with regard to Jews). Nor can we doubt that God took the initiative in reconciliation, his love anticipating and preceding not only our faith and repentance, but the very

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[10] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.XI, 21. He writes to similar effect in the following paragraph, commenting on Paul's language in 2 Corinthians 5:19-21: 'Here he mentions righteousness and reconciliation indiscriminately, to have us understand that each one is reciprocally contained in the other... he reconciles us to himself by not counting our sins against us.' Earlier, in defining the benefits conferred by faith, he had declared that the first of these is that, 'being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father' *(Institutes*, III.XI, 1).

[11] Cf. Dunn's comment: 'the close parallel between v. 9 and v. 10b shows that Paul regards the one as equivalent to the other' *(Romans 1-8* [Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, 1988], p. 259). Hereafter cited as *Romans 1-8*.

[12] Noting that the 'universal language of the New Testament' is to speak of man as reconciled to God, not of God as reconciled to man, Lightfoot concludes that although the New Testament writers do use the expression, 'the wrath of God', 'when they speak at length upon the subject, the hostility is represented not as on the part of God, but of man'. *(Notes on the Epistles of St Paul* (London, 1895. Reprinted Winona Lake, Indiana, 1979), p. 288.

sacrifice of Christ itself. While we were hostile, evil, unrighteous, helpless, sinful and ungodly (Rom. 5:8), God demonstrated his love by not sparing his only Son, but giving him to die for us all (Rom. 8:32). This divine initiative is, if anything, emphasised even more clearly in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, which insists that, 'All this is from God'. *He* reconciled us to himself through Christ. *He* was reconciling the world to himself. *He* made him who knew no sin to be sin for us. *He* refrained from imputing sin to us. *He* gave us the ministry of reconciliation. *He* appeals to us to be reconciled to God.

Yet, as both N. T. Wright and J. D. G. Dunn point out, it would be hazardous to adopt an either/or interpretation, as if the fact that there is enmity on our side against God were itself sufficient to prove that there is no enmity on his side against us.[13] God is of purer eyes than to behold evil (Hab. 1:13). He may forgive sin, but he may not condone it. He condemns it. The final proof of that is his treatment of his own Son on the cross of Calvary. Because he was bearing the sin of the world, Christ was, in Paul's terms, 'cursed' (Gal. 3:13). In the immediate context of Romans 5:9-11, the clear impediment to reconciliation is 'the wrath': not our wrath, but an anger specifically emanating from God and directed against 'all ungodliness and wickedness of men' (Rom.1:18).

It is precisely because of the seriousness of this wrath and the gravity of the sin which evokes it, that, according to 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, God does not proceed directly and immediately from goodwill to reconciliation. In between, there lies the momentous *intermediate* step of the cross.

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[13] See Wright's *Commentary* on Romans 5:9-10. Wright acknowledges that Paul clearly sees all humans as being at enmity with God through sin: 'However, Paul has just mentioned the wrath, which (as in 1:18 and 2:5-11) clearly means God's wrath. This wrath stood over against us, and God's love has saved us from it. We should not, I think, cut the knot and suggest that the enmity was on one side only. God's settled and sorrowful opposition to all that is evil included enmity against sinners.' (*Romans*, p. 520). Dunn writes to similar effect, arguing that we should let the translation 'enemies' convey the implication of a mutual hostility (*Romans 1-8*, p. 258). Noting that wrath includes man's active and deliberate rebellion against God, Dunn adds, 'but it is also part of Paul's theology that "wrath" signifies an active hostility on God's part to that rebellion'. Cf. the earlier comment of James Denney, 'To St. Paul the estrangement which the Christian reconciliation has to overcome is indubitably two-sided; there is something in God as well as something in man which has to be dealt with before there can be peace.' (*The Expositor's Bible: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [London, 1894], p. 211).

First, there is the divine love, impelling towards reconciliation; then there is the sacrifice of Christ, in which God identifies his own Son with sin and treats *him* as sin deserves; then *we* become the righteousness of God in him; then and only then, there and only there, is the divine love reconciled to us.

That reconciliation denotes no moral transformation or spiritual change in us. It denotes specifically a change in God's attitude towards us: 'not counting their trespasses against them' (2 Cor. 5:19). This carries with it a revolution in our relationship with God. In this sense, reconciliation, like justification, is forensic. Like justification (Rom. 5:1), it brings peace: an objective cessation of hostilities. The divine condemnation is withdrawn, the threat of divine anger is averted, God no longer sees us as his enemies and no longer keeps us at a distance. Instead, we become God's intimates, members of his household and fully-fledged citizens of his kingdom (Eph. 2:11-22). To return to the language of Calvin, God, the stern, threatening Judge, has become our gracious Father.

VINDICATION

But justification is more than forgiveness and more even than reconciliation. It is a vindication: a divine acknowledgement that we are righteous. It is not a mere act of clemency, the exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy, repealing the sentence of eternal death while leaving the 'Guilty!' verdict unrevoked. The verdict itself is overturned. We are 'Not guilty!' We are righteous. The accused is vindicated and the slander of ungodliness removed.

But if justification means to declare someone righteous (*dikaios*) we are still left with the question, 'What is a *dikaios*?' Much of the recent discussion has focused on the alleged antithesis between the classical concept of righteousness (enshrined in the Greek word *dikaios* and the Latin *iustus*) and the Hebraic (enshrined in the adjective *tsaddiq*). The classical notion, we are told, is legal, stressing conformity to a norm; the Hebraic is personal, stressing relationship rather than law.[14] Alongside of

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[14] Dunn, for example, takes this distinction for granted: 'In the typical Greek world view, "righteousness" is an idea or ideal against which the individual and individual action can be measured ... In contrast, in Hebrew thought "righteousness" is a more relational concept – "righteousness" as the meeting of obligations laid upon the individual by the relationship of which he or she is part.' (*The Theology of Paul the Apostle* [Edinburgh, 1998], p. 341). Similarly, McGrath: '*dikaiosune* is a secular term incapable of assuming the soteriological overtones associated with the Hebrew term'.

this has developed the idea, central to the arguments of N. T. Wright, that the basic biblical understanding of righteousness, especially as applied to God, is faithfulness to the covenant.[15]

It is by no means clear that such linguistic contrasts deserve the respect commonly accorded them. The apostles chose to write and preach in Greek and they seem to have taken few pains to flag up the danger involved in using its vocabulary rather then the Hebrew. They certainly attached no health warning to their preaching, telling their audiences to take careful note that they were using the word 'righteous' in its Hebraic rather than its Greek sense. They knew that their Gentile audiences would bring their own conceptions to the word *dikaios*, as they would to the words *hilaskesthai*, *thusia* and *huiothesia*, and even to the words *kalos* and *agathos*. Yet they deliberately chose to communicate in such language, believing that it would enable them not only to say what they wanted to say, but to be heard as they wanted to be heard. The preacher in English runs exactly the same risk. The word 'righteous' cannot be theologically vacuum-packed. Like the incarnate Word, it dwells among us.

In any case, such antitheses between the legal and the personal are more apparent than real. The fundamental Ciceronian principle of justice is *suum*

(A. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* [2nd edition; Cambridge, 1998], p. 10). The scholar usually credited with changing the direction of thought on 'righteousness' is Hermann Cremer (*Die Paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre im Zusammenhange ihrer geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen*, Gütersloh, 1899). Cremer stressed in particular the link between righteousness and salvation, defining *tsedaqah* as *iustitia salutifera*. See further Mark Seifrid's survey, 'Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism' in D. A. Carson, P. T. O'Brien and M. A. Seifrid (eds.), *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (Vol. 1; Grand Rapids, 2001), pp. 415-442.

[15] This appears in, for example, his comment in 'Romans and the Theology of Paul' (in D. Hay and E. Johnson, eds, *Pauline Theology: Volume III, Romans* [Minneapolis, 1995]), p. 38: 'Alongside the fundamental covenantal meaning of the whole *dikaiosune theou* complex, there is, of course, the second-order lawcourt metaphor, derived not least from the Hebrew Scriptures' image of the righteous judge.' See also *Romans*, p. 471 (commenting on Romans 3:24) where he asserts that '"justification" carries both the lawcourt meaning that we would expect from the sustained metaphor of 3:9, 19-20, and the covenantal meaning that we would expect from 2:17-38 – these two being, as we have already explained, dovetailed in Paul'. Cf. *The Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 148: 'the *dikai-* language is best rendered in terms of "membership within the covenant"'.

cuique: giving to each his own. That is a perfectly sound norm for personal relationships, especially in the light of Paul's directive, 'Owe no one anything save to love one another' (Rom. 13:8). It is also perfectly possible to attach the biblical notion of covenant to the classical notion of *suum cuique*. A covenant (for example, a marriage 'contract') can define what we owe to each other and what we owe to God. Hence a *dikaios* may well be understood as one who gives to God 'his own' as defined by the covenant.

Yet only occasionally does the Old Testament link the idea of righteousness to the concept of the covenant. Righteousness is a creational concept before it becomes a redemptive one: modified, indeed, by special revelation, but already clearly revealed in general revelation, and as such part of the religious and metaphysical inheritance of the whole human race. From this point of view, a survey of English usage would again be just as revealing as surveys of the Greek or Hebrew.

What is never far away is the concept of a norm. Righteousness is conformity to some standard, although that standard is seldom spelt out. The Greek word *dikaiosune* clearly bespeaks conduct that conforms to some norm or *dike*, whether personal or social, legal or theological. The same relation to a norm is apparent in the Hebrew *tsaddiq*, although, again, the actual norm is seldom spelt out.

The first biblical attribution of righteousness to God is in Genesis 18:25, where Abraham is pleading with God to spare the lives of any righteous people found in Sodom: 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' However historic the moment may be semantically, the narrative does not specify either the norm by which men might be deemed righteous or the norm by which the judge of all the earth might be deemed to do right. It is assumed that in both instances the meaning will be self-evident, emerging not as a conclusion from some recondite lexical argument, but as a matter of natural law, or at the very least of social consensus.

Even in the historic moment when faith is credited to Abraham for righteousness (Gen. 15:6) there is no mention of the precise norm. We are simply told that Abraham believed God and that it was credited to him for righteousness. In the circumstances, faith was both appropriate and magnificent. God had made a mind-blowing promise: the still unborn descendants of the aged Abraham and the barren Sarah would be more numerous than the stars. However impossible (cf. Rom. 4:19), it was God who had said it; and because God had said it, you owed it to him to believe him, just as, if God made a threat, you owed it to him to fear him. At this point, there was as yet no covenant as such. That came later (Gen. 15:18).

Neither in God's case nor in Abraham's, then, could righteousness be defined at that point as faithfulness to the covenant.

Even more interesting is the case of Noah, the first figure in the Bible to be described as 'righteous'. Here, again, the criterion is left unexpressed. It was certainly not the covenant. The Noahic covenant was not instituted until after the Flood (Gen. 9:8-17). Noah's righteousness was a matter of the way in which he was perceived in the community: he was a righteous man, 'blameless in his generation' (Gen. 6:9). He was also a man who, like Enoch, walked with God (Gen. 6:9).

The justification of people like Noah and Abraham clearly occurred in a pre-covenant setting where judgements as to what constituted righteousness rested on conscience and on social consensus rather than on special revelation. This reinforces the claim that righteousness as such is a creational rather than a redemptive concept. Echoes of this can be heard even in the New Testament. Take, for example, the words of Paul in Romans 5:7: 'Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man – though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die.' It is interesting that N. T. Wright ventures little by way of elucidation of *dikaios* here, apart from dismissing the idea that it connotes 'the cold, legally correct person'.[16] Dunn attempts to be more specific, looking for the source meaning in Maccabean martyrology before opting for an Aristotelian distinction: the *righteous* man is the man who is scrupulously just, the *good* man is the man who is prepared to make allowances.[17] The very fact that the final appeal is to Aristotle, however, is significant. 'Righteous' and 'good' are not concepts unique to special revelation: nor, on this precise issue, is there any chasm between the perceptions of the 'natural man' and those of the 'spiritual man' (1 Cor. 2:14, 15). This is confirmed by the way that Paul in his Letter to the Philippians directs the Christians of this Roman colony to pursue a specific cluster of virtues, using for the purpose the characteristic terms of classical philosophy (Phil. 4:8). Among these are truth, purity and righteousness, as well as virtue (*arete*) itself. Clearly, righteousness did not mean one thing to Aristotle and another thing to Paul.[18]

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[16] Wright, *Romans*, p. 519.

[17] Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, p. 255.

[18] Cf. Peter T. O'Brien: 'the apostle has taken over terms that were current coin in popular philosophy, especially in Stoicism. He wants his Philippian friends to develop those qualities which are good in themselves and beneficial to others, and so he has pressed those terms into service'. (*The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, [Grand Rapids, 1991], pp. 502ff.).

This is not to say that Paul or any other biblical writer is content with pagan ideals or prepared to endorse the presuppositions of classical philosophy. But it is to say that we should pause for serious reflection before adopting the assumption that there is a wide chasm between biblical and classical notions of righteousness. What the Torah did was not to replace the old norms, far less to contradict them, but to clarify them. It provided a clear standard, expressed summarily in the Decalogue and amplified in the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:1 – 23:33). This Torah, the Law, would henceforth serve as the benchmark for the righteous man. It would not, however, contradict the norms of the pre-covenant community, who recognised the righteousness of Noah. Nor would it contradict the instincts of the Gentiles, who 'do by nature what the law requires' (Rom. 2:14).

It was in relation to this Torah that David, for example, defined his own righteousness:

> The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness;
> according to the cleanness of my hands he recompensed me.
> For I have kept the ways of the Lord,
> and have not wickedly departed from my God.
> For all his ordinances were before me,
> and from his statutes I did not turn aside.
> (2 Sam. 22:21-23)

Here the criterion by which David deems himself righteous is clearly the Torah. There is an implicit parallel to this in Psalm 1: implicit because the subject of the psalm is the blessed man rather than the righteous man. The two are brought together in the closing verse. Yahweh knows (approves) the way of the righteous, who, it is fair to assume, are also the blessed. If so, then the righteous man is the one who loves the Torah, meditates on it day and night, walks in its way and brings forth its fruit.

Yet (at the risk of repetition) the Torah does not bring in a new standard of righteousness. It merely clarifies the norms by which righteousness was defined before the giving of the Law. From this point of view the relation between the Torah and the patriarchal ethic is similar to that between the Torah and the Sermon on the Mount. The Torah no more came to abolish the pre-Sinai norms than Jesus came to destroy the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17). Creation came before the Torah, and with creation came both human language and divine norms. This means, adopting the terminology of Wittgenstein, that the Torah does not use 'private language', as if it

were the first speaker on ethics or the founder of its own speech acts.[19] The Torah neither invented a new language nor revealed new moral principles. The obligation to love God with their whole hearts and their neighbours as themselves lay as clearly upon Noah and Abraham as it did on Moses and David. It also lay, both before and after the giving of the Torah, on Gentiles, who had the works of the Law written on their hearts (Rom. 2:14).

This is the background to Paul's argument in Romans 5:12-14. Sin was in the world, and men suffered its doom even when, from Adam to Moses, there was no Law; and they suffered its doom because while there was no Law (Torah) there was 'law'. Otherwise, sin would not have been marked against them because 'sin is not counted where there is no law' (Rom. 5:13). Conversely, to justify a man would mean declaring him a keeper of the Law; a declaration which also implied that he was a keeper of 'law'.

There is no reason to assume that the giving of the Torah meant abandoning the idea of righteousness as a personal relationship. Even less did it mean dispensing with the notion of the covenant. The Decalogue was itself the covenant,[20] and the covenant defined not a merely legal

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[19] I owe the Wittgenstein link to an observation made by David Novak in the context of arguing that philosophy often forgets its theological origins and assumes it is speaking a 'private language'. Novak goes on to make a point similar to the point I have made above: 'Since creation precedes revelation, the method for understanding the Torah itself must come from the world itself. This is so, as Maimonides insisted, because the Torah, like the world, is a creation by God. The Torah itself, though, is not divine. Because the Torah is a more specific creation by God than is the world as a whole, *the methodology for understanding the more general created entity, the world, must be applied to understanding the more specific created entity, the Torah*' (italics mine). Novak also makes the associated point that 'the primary Jewish polity, the covenant,' is not something the Torah itself introduced into the world: 'It was already present in the world as a form of relationship between a sovereign and his subordinates.' See pp. 50, 54, 55 of Novak's essay, 'Theology and Philosophy: An Exchange with Robert Jenson' in C. E. Gunton (ed.), *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson* (Grand Rapids, 2000). All this accords perfectly well with the traditional Reformed insistence that without general revelation the scriptural ('special') revelation would be neither 'intelligible, credible or operative' (B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* [Philadelphia, 1948], p. 75).

[20] See, for example, Exodus 34:28, 'And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.'

relationship (whatever that means), but a personal one: 'I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people' (Lev. 26:12). Walking with God and being the friend of God therefore meant, simultaneously, keeping his Law, observing his covenant and having a personal relationship with him.[21] These are the characteristics which defined the righteous man. He behaved in a way appropriate to humanity's relation to God, and under the Old Testament that meant keeping the covenant. For God to justify a man, therefore, meant declaring him a Covenant/Law-keeper.

PAUL

How does all this relate to the apostle Paul, the arch-exponent of the doctrine of justification? What is his conception of the righteous man?

N. T. Wright first faced this issue in an essay which appeared in a symposium entitled *The Great Acquittal*, published in 1980,[22] and he has returned to it repeatedly in the course of a prolific publishing career. His most mature thought to date is set forth in 'New Perspectives on Paul', a paper (not yet published) presented to the Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference in August 2003.

According to Wright, justification is God's declaration that someone is in the covenant, but before looking at the details we should first note two remarkable features of the setting in which Wright operates.

First, there is its peculiar polemical edge. Already in *The Great Acquittal* (p. 14) Wright felt it necessary to write that justification 'is not how someone becomes a Christian, but simply the declaration that someone one *is* a Christian'. The precise target of the rebuttal becomes clear in 'New Perspectives on Paul'. There has been a general trend, Wright argues, to make 'conversion' and 'justification' more or less continuous (p. 10). This trend has been particularly marked since the 16th century and it has been 'sped on its way by the tendency to portray conversion as the establishment of "a personal relationship with God"' (p. 10). The result is that Christian dogmatics has come to use the word *justification* in a way

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[21] This should not be taken to mean that God and I are pals who might meet for coffee. But God and I have a relationship; and both God and I are both personal. Therefore, what we have is a personal or inter-personal relationship, analogous to that between the Father and the eternal Son.

[22] G. Reid (ed.), *The Great Acquittal: Justification by Faith and Current Christian Thought* (London, 1980), pp. 13-37. Wright's essay is entitled, 'Justification: The Biblical Basis and its Relevance for Contemporary Evangelicalism'. Henceforth cited as *The Great Acquittal*.

that is totally at variance with the usage of the apostle Paul. The tradition has used 'justify' and its cognates to denote conversion, that initial movement of the Christian life whereby one becomes a Christian. By contrast, Paul's word for the initiatory moment of the Christian life is 'call' and he uses the word 'justify' to denote something that comes *after* the call (pp. 10, 11).

It is difficult to understand what provoked this particular critique. The word 'conversion' is nothing like as prevalent in Protestant dogmatics as it is in the discourse of evangelical religion.[23] The nearest biblical equivalent is 'repentance', especially that aspect of it captured by the Hebrew word *shubh* and the corresponding Greek noun *epistrophe*, both emphasising the idea of 'turn' or 'return'. Even in discussing repentance, however, the classical theologians portrayed it as but one half of conversion. W. G. T. Shedd (who does have a separate chapter on Conversion) put it succinctly: 'Conversion consist of two acts: 1. Faith; 2. Repentance.'[24] The evangelical preoccupation with conversion did not derive from Protestant dogmatics. Its probable source was the emphasis on testimony and conversion-narrative (particularly in connection with admission to church membership) which arose in the wake of the eighteenth-century Evangelical revival.

On the other hand, the concept of (effectual) calling, which Wright proposes as the proper alternative to justification/conversion, was extremely prominent in Protestant dogmatics, where it is invariably treated as prior to justification.[25] This emphasised the primacy and sovereignty of the divine initiative in applying redemption and brings out very fully the fact that calling comes before faith, which itself comes before justification. A glance at the *Shorter Catechism*, the most influential of all the documents of the Westminster Assembly, would have been sufficient to

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[23] In Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology,* for example, there are chapters on Vocation, Regeneration, Faith, Justification and Sanctification, but no separate chapter on Conversion (C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* [London, 1873], Vol. 2, pp. 639-732; Vol. 3, pp. 3-258). This safeguards the very point Wright is concerned to make, namely, that justification is consequent upon a sovereign and efficacious divine call. Cf. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, 1978), where the Application of Redemption is covered by three chapters on Calling, Justification and Sanctification.

[24] W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Grand Rapids, n.d.), Vol. 2, p. 529.

[25] Besides Hodge and Heppe see, most recently, John Murray's *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, 1955). Murray treats, successively, Effectual Calling, Regeneration, Faith and Repentance [one chapter] and Justification.

make this clear. There the decisive initiating step is taken by God, who in effectual calling 'persuades and enables' us to 'embrace Christ as he is freely offered to us in the gospel'. In this context, justification, far from being confused with calling, is a 'benefit' which 'flows from' calling. Even as such it does not stand alone. It is one of three 'benefits': justification, adoption and sanctification. One of these, sanctification, is ontological or transformational (at least in traditional Protestant dogmatics). The other two, justification and adoption, are forensic. But all three are benefits which flow organically, invariably and inevitably from that union with Christ brought about by the sovereign action of God in effectual calling. Whatever the confusions of which Protestant theology has been guilty, a confusion between justification and calling is not one of them.

The second curious factor in the setting of Wright's definition of justification is his assumption that Paul's is fundamentally a covenant theology.[26] This may be music to the ears of lovers of Federal Theology, but it is extremely doubtful whether Paul will fit comfortably into such a bed. Dr James Stewart was probably nearer the mark when he described union with Christ as the heart of Paul's theology.[27] But the safest view is that this theology, hammered out on the mission field and elaborated only in a series of occasional compositions, is not ruled by any single architectonic principle. The concept of the covenant certainly has little claim to being such a principle. The word scarcely occurs in the Pauline corpus. In the Epistle to the Romans, the most comprehensive statement of the apostle's thought, the word *diatheke* occurs only twice, and far from being pivotal to the development of the letter both references occur so late in the composition that it is hard to regard them as fundamental to Paul's

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[26] See, for example, his criticism of Dunn in the Edinburgh paper, 'New Perspectives on Paul', p. 3: 'he never understands what I take to be Paul's fundamental covenant theology'.

[27] 'The conviction has grown steadily upon me that union with Christ, rather than justification or election or eschatology, or indeed any of the other great apostolic themes, is the real clue to an understanding of Paul's thought and experience.' (J. S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ* [London, 1935], p. vii). Something may be more fundamental, of course, without being more prominent. Cf. the remark of 'Rabbi' Duncan, 'There are fundamentals beneath justification. The person of Christ is fundamental ... justification by faith is the meeting-point of many doctrines, a rallying centre of theology; but it is not the foundation doctrine.' (J. Duncan, *Colloquia Peripatetica* [Edinburgh, 1871], pp. 58, 59). Duncan added, 'It is true that scarcely any of us in Scotland give due prominence to the Incarnation.'

plan (if he had a plan, which I doubt); and neither reference amounts, in any case, to much more than an allusion. In Romans 9:4, for example, possession of the covenant is one of the advantages enjoyed by the Jew: 'They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.' In the other reference, Romans 11:27, Paul is merely quoting from the prophet Isaiah (59:21; 27:9): 'and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.' The one reference to covenant in 1 Corinthians occurs in Paul's account of the institution of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:25) and simply repeats the words of Jesus himself, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.'

In Galatians there are three references. Two of these (Gal. 3:15 and Gal. 3:17) occur in the same context and make the same point: the Sinaitic covenant cannot annul or replace the Abrahamic, because it was made over 400 years later (even a human covenant or testament cannot be simply set aside once it has been made). The remaining reference is in Galatians 4:24, where Paul allegorises the story of Hagar and Sarah, the former representing the Sinaitic covenant of bondage and the latter the Abrahamic covenant of grace. This clearly indicates that to Paul the covenant concept itself was neutral. It could be an instrument of grace or an instrument of law.

These Galatians references are of enormous theological significance when it comes to discussing two important issues: first, the relation between the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Christian dispensations; and, secondly, (along with Romans 11:17-19) the relation between the Old Testament church and the New Testament church. But the covenant was no more fundamental in Galatians than it was in Romans. When Paul pronounced a solemn anathema on those who preached another gospel (Gal. 1:8) what he had in his sights was not a group who denied the covenant, but a group who preached justification by works. The only way to elevate the covenant to the status of a controlling principle in Galatians would be to link it inextricably to the idea of righteousness. This, of course, is what Wright tries to do by defining righteousness as 'God's covenant faithfulness'. But Paul himself never links *dikaiosune* and *diatheke* in this way. To link them by bare assertion is to beg one of the key questions in the New Perspective debate. This is not to say that covenant is not important or even that interpreters of Paul cannot put it to good use (in explaining, for example, fundamental concepts such as promise and inheritance). But covenant itself is not a concept which figures prominently, far less controllingly, either in Paul's thought or in his vocabulary.

On the specific issue of the meaning of justification, Wright, as we have seen, firmly endorses the traditional Protestant view that it is a forensic act.[28] It is God's favourable verdict on the sinner: a declaring righteous, rather than a *making* righteous. Almost invariably, however, he subordinates the forensic nuances of justification to the covenantal, with the result that when he fleshes out this 'declaration' his language is far from traditional. Justification, he says, is, 'God's declaration that someone is a Christian' or that 'someone is a member of the covenant community' or that 'certain people are within the covenant' [29] or that they are 'God's true covenant people'[30] or 'members of his covenant family'[31] or 'reckoned to be within the people of God'.[32]

It is to Wright's credit that he has wrestled with the question of the meaning of 'righteous' in the context of justification. Theologians in general have devoted remarkably little attention to it, contenting themselves with repeating the statement that justification means 'to declare righteous', but apparently holding themselves under no obligation to define what 'righteous' means. Wright at least faces up to that obligation. It is difficult, however, to rest in his answer.

For one thing, it is hard to see how this definition accords with the fundamentally forensic nature of justification, particularly the insistence that justification is a vindication. Vindication implies a charge and the charge against human beings is not that they are not in covenant with God. For Paul's 'Gentiles' in particular that was not a crime: God had not offered them his covenant. The charge was that they are sinners. It can be no vindication, then, to declare them to be members of the covenant family. The only vindication would be a declaration that they are *not* sinners: that they are innocent.

Even more important, however, is the fact that a major Pauline concept (justification) is being defined in terms of another concept (covenant) which is virtually invisible in the apostle's writings. Even more invisible is the phrase 'in the covenant', which never appears at all in Paul.[33]

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[28] See, for example, the 'bare definition' offered in *The Great Acquittal*: 'justification is *the declaration that somebody is in the right*. It is a term borrowed from the lawcourt – that is what people mean when they say it is forensic' (*The Great Acquittal*, p. 14. The italics are Wright's).

[29] Wright, *The Great Acquittal*, pp. 14, 15.

[30] Wright, *Romans*, p. 471.

[31] Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 203.

[32] Wright, 'Romans and the Theology of Paul', p. 38.

[33] Mark A. Seifrid observes that the phrase 'in the covenant' is rare even in the Old Testament and that when it does occur 'it signifies the entrance into

Paradoxically, it would have made much better sense if Wright had defined justification as 'God's declaration that one is a covenant-keeper'. This would have accorded well with his own starting-point,[34] since he consistently defines God's righteousness as his covenant faithfulness (or his loyalty to the covenant). By analogy, human righteousness must be *our* faithfulness to the covenant.

It would not be at all difficult to assimilate this latter definition into the orthodox Protestant doctrine of justification: when God justifies us he declares us to be, in Christ, covenant-keepers.[35] The problem is that, as we have seen, Paul makes such little use of the covenant concept. He does, however, repeatedly use the related term 'law' *(ho nomos)*. In almost every instance the law, in Paul, means the Mosaic Law[36] and the Pentateuch associates this Law (the Torah) so closely with the covenant that it sometimes uses the terms interchangeably. This is especially true of the Decalogue. According to Exodus 34:27, for example, Moses 'wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.'

The reason for such metonymy is that the Torah is the *dike* or norm of the covenant. As such it is also the norm of righteousness and therefore of justification. The forensic and judicial *dike* by which God as judge pronounces people to be either in the right or in the wrong is the Law. When God justifies, he pronounces a man to be *dikaios,* a righteous man; and that has to mean pronouncing him to be 'a keeper of the Law'. In Romans 5:19, for example, Paul describes the righteousness of Christ as 'obedience'. Our righteousness must be the same. And when, in Romans 8:1 he declares that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus he means that the Law does not condemn them. In Law they are innocent. The Law is satisfied. They have met its demands and it is, absolutely, on their side. The question how this can possibly be said of the

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covenant responsibilities, not the enjoyment of saving benefits' (Carson, *et al.* [eds.], *Justification and Variegated Nomism,* p. 434).

[34] It would also accord with the definition of 'the righteous man' advocated by E. P. Sanders: 'the righteous man is one who has been *faithful* to the covenant' *(Paul and Palestinian Judaism,* [London, 1977], p. 205).

[35] It might, however, be difficult for Wright in view of his aversion to the idea of the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

[36] This is obviously a complex issue, but we can acquiesce provisionally in the conclusion of Cranfield: 'It is safe to assume that in Paul's epistles *nomos* refers to the OT law unless the context shows this to be impossible' (C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Vol. 1; Edinburgh, 1975], p. 154 fn.).

sinner and of the ungodly must wait for the moment. But there can be no doubt that this is what 'righteous' means.

Yet, although Wright's language will not serve as a definition of justification it does, nevertheless, set forth a truth: the truth covered by the Pauline word *huiothesia* (adoption). We have already noticed how closely Calvin links the idea of reconciliation to the idea of the divine fatherhood: 'being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness we have in heaven instead of a Judge, a gracious Father'.[37] Although Calvin did not use the word 'adoption' in this connection, there can be no doubt that justification and adoption are inseparably linked, although distinct. God both makes and declares the justified person a member of the covenant family. To return to the courtroom analogy: the judge acquits and vindicates the accused, but he does not then turn to him and say, merely, 'You are free to go!' Instead, he says, 'I want you to come home with me and to become a member of my family, with all that that means.'

Adoption is not, as such, an Old Testament concept, and even in the New Testament its use is limited to the apostle Paul (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). Paul does not relate the idea of adoption in any direct way to the idea of covenant, but he does link it very directly to the idea of inheritance: 'if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ' (Rom. 8:17). This provides an indirect link with covenant, since the word *diatheke* can denote either 'covenant' or 'last will and testament' (a meaning it bears in, for example, Hebrews 9:16: 'For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established'). Taking the overall New Testament view, the believer, as an adopted child, enjoys many privileges (including access, provision, protection, security, indwelling by the Spirit, discipline and hope), but the primary thing is that every child of God enjoys the inheritance of his Father. Stated so baldly, it may not seem to amount to much, but we must always take it in the light of the accompanying phrase, 'joint-heirs with Christ'. The believer and Christ are co-heirs, enjoying one and the same inheritance. This means that all the promises made to Christ are, equally, promises made to his people. He is the heir of all things (Heb. 1:2) and in him all things are ours (1 Cor. 3:21ff.). We must be careful not to relegate or defer our enjoyment of this inheritance to the end-time. It is all too easy to forget that the death which makes a will effective is not the death of the beneficiary, but the death of the testator. We enter into the inheritance not when we die but when *he* dies. That means that we are already enjoying the benefits. God's promises are 'Yes!' and 'Amen!' in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

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[37]   Calvin, *Institutes*, III.XI, 1.

Adoption, like justification, is entirely forensic. It is not a change in a child's nature or temperament or disposition. It does not make a bad child a good one or a good one a better. In itself, it leaves the child unchanged. What it changes is his or her status. It creates a whole new relationship: indeed, a set of relationships. In the religious use this forensic sense is plain. Adoption gives us a new spiritual status and brings us into a new relationship with God. We were enemies and aliens; now we are brought near, incorporated into God's family and fully entitled (indeed, as entitled as Jesus himself) to call God, 'Abba!'.

One of the most remarkable features of the biblical presentation of this doctrine is the clear difference between Paul and John. John never uses the word adoption. He speaks, instead, of the new birth. Similarly, he does not refer to believers as 'sons' of God, but as 'children' (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1; 1 John 3:10). It would be hazardous to infer from this that while Paul's main interest is in the forensic, John's is in the transformational. John's language in John 1:12, for example, clearly has a forensic nuance: to those who received Christ God gave *authority* to *become* children of God. On the other hand, Paul can speak of Christian initiation as a vivification: God *made us alive* together with Christ (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13).

New birth and adoption are clearly two sides of the same reality. Being a child of God means both being adopted and being born again. This ensures that the forensic is inseparable from the ontological and transformational. In the case of the apostle Paul this becomes particularly clear in the connection between adoption and the gift of the Spirit: 'because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"' (Gal. 4:6). One result of this is boldness and assurance in our approach to God, but the Spirit also exercises a dynamic, transforming ministry in the heart of each believer, ensuring that we walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), live by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25) and bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Under the Spirit's leadership, sin is mortified (Rom. 8:13) and 'the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' (Rom. 8:4). The Spirit of Adoption is also the Spirit of Transformation.

In this respect, divine adoption differs radically from the human. The human adoptive parent cannot change the inherited nature of the child. God can. Not only is he able, like the human parent, to provide an entirely new environment for the child ('in Christ' or 'in the Spirit'). He is also able to change his child from within. He can give it a new heart. He can put his seed (*sperma*) in it (1 John 3:9). He can completely rewrite the software. This instantly precludes the possibility of our enjoying the privileges of

the Children of Light while living like the Children of Darkness. In the moment of adoption God provides for the eventual outcome: total moral and spiritual conformity to the image of his eternal Son. As we have born the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

But one thing must be made categorically clear. The forensic does not rest on the transformational. The change in nature does not earn or merit the change in relationship. We are not adopted because we are born again any more than we are justified because we are saints. If our peace rested on our transformation we would never have peace because we could never seem to ourselves transformed enough. Our faith has to lean on unconditional grace, not on personal moral and spiritual transformation.

Justification, then, is linked indissolubly to adoption ('membership of the covenant family'). But it is not the same. Adoption is a glorious plus, but without prior justification it would be inconceivable. God could not harbour the guilty, adopt the damned or damn the adopted. The marvel is that he does not stop at forgiveness, acquittal and vindication. He makes the criminal his child and his heir.