

# PROGRESS, STAGNATION, AND BREAKTHROUGH: JUSTIFICATION IN THE ANGLICAN, METHODIST, AND PLYMOUTH BRETHREN TRADITIONS

In 1533, while the Protestant Reformation was underway in continental Europe, King Henry VIII of England formally severed ties with the Roman Catholic Church and made himself the temporal and spiritual head of the Church of England. The break, precipitated by the pope's refusal to grant Henry an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, was at first felt more politically than religiously. But through reforming efforts led by Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer (d. 1556), Protestant doctrine slowly gained ground during Henry's reign and took firm hold under his successor, Edward VI. After Edward died at the age of fifteen, the newly crowned Mary Tudor abruptly brought England back under the authority of the pope for five tumultuous years until her death in 1558, when Elizabeth I began a forty-five-year reign and, in the interest of political stability, steered the country on a mediating course between Protestantism and Catholicism. This "Elizabethan Settlement," as it is known to history, established what some have identified as a *via media*, or middle way, that allowed for doctrinal ambiguity but also placed the Church of England on a long and uncertain course to more fully define its ecclesial and theological identity.

Since the Reformation three strands of Anglicans with distinct theological commitments have emerged within Anglicanism. Those who identify with the teaching and practice of the Reformed branch of Protestantism are designated Reformed Anglicans below. Those who are of a more Catholic persuasion are designated Anglo-Catholics. A third strand consists of liberal Anglicans, whose evolving theological positions we do not evaluate in this issue. One consequence of this diversity is that there has been no coherent, clearly identifiable theological tradition in Anglicanism. Anglicans of different theological positions are at liberty to interpret and apply the Church of England's foundational documents—the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the two Books of Homilies—according to their respective understandings of what constitutes true Anglicanism and faithful Anglican theology. The absence of an authoritative theological tradition thus allows for significant

doctrinal diversity under the broad label *Anglican* (Campbell et al. 2:185-188).

## Justification by Faith in the Anglican Tradition

This doctrinal diversity is readily apparent in the Anglican treatment of justification. While the Anglican formularies are Protestant on the matter of justification, there is nonetheless a variety of interpretations of justification in the Anglican tradition that seems sure to persist indefinitely. Rather than constructing a "consensus" Anglican understanding of justification, then, we will instead identify themes in the teaching of justification that emerge in the work of various Anglican theologians through the centuries. In what follows we will consider Anglican theologians' views on objective and subjective aspects of justification, the role of union with Christ in justification, the assurance and security of salvation, and the relationship between justification and the sacraments. Our final sections will consider the teaching of justification by faith in the Methodist and the Plymouth Brethren traditions—both of which had their origins in, but eventually departed from, the Anglican fold. We forgo consideration of the Pentecostal tradition—which emerged from Methodism—because its teaching on justification generally follows Methodist teaching (Campbell et al. 2:188). (See Campbell et al. 2:225-229 for an assessment of Pentecostal teaching on justification.)

## Objective and Subjective Aspects of Justification

At different periods in the history of the Church of England, prominent teachers have granted a fuller understanding of justification than either the Protestant view of imputed righteousness or the Roman Catholic view of infused righteousness allows by itself. While efforts to broaden the scope of justification did not produce a representative Anglican view, they nonetheless demonstrate a willingness among some Anglicans to recognize an objective aspect and a subjective aspect of justification. These more holistic perceptions are not consistent with one another in every detail, but our point

here is that some Anglican teachers were not content with an either-or approach to justification. Such teachers aimed instead to incorporate an objective aspect and a subjective aspect into a coherent doctrine that affirmed both as complements in a justificatory whole.

An early Reformed Anglican expositor who evinced some hesitation to rule out a subjective aspect of justification was John Davenant (d. 1641), a Cambridge scholar whom King James I appointed bishop of Salisbury in 1621 and who served in that capacity under Charles I, James's son and successor. For Davenant there are two formal causes of justification because there are two aspects of justification. Objectively, the formal cause by which the sinner is accounted perfectly and absolutely just is the imputation of a perfect righteousness, that is, the righteousness of Christ, to the sinner. Subjectively, the formal cause by which the sinner is made imperfectly and incipiently righteous is the infusion of righteousness as the initiation of "inchoate justification" (1:159-160), that is, a justification that is not yet fully developed and therefore can and should increase. By holding to imputation as the formal cause of an objective justification, Davenant manifests his Reformed heritage. By teaching infused righteousness as the formal cause of an inchoate, subjective justification, he recognizes an inherent operation of righteousness that he is willing to employ new language, that of "justifaction" (1:159), to describe.

John Henry Newman (d. 1890), an Anglo-Catholic priest and theologian who eventually converted to Catholicism, affirmed before his Catholic conversion the objective and subjective aspects of justification in his *Lectures on Justification*. At the beginning of the *Lectures*, Newman expresses his conviction that the Protestant understanding of justification by faith and the Roman Catholic view of justification by obedience are not irreconcilable. Further, he argues that either understanding taken by itself is problematic. Later in the *Lectures*, he makes three points regarding justification that, taken together, are atypical of the Catholic understanding. The key issue concerns the declaration of righteousness. While Catholics grant that one will be declared righteous who has been made righteous, Newman argues that the declaration of righteousness *causes* the inward renewal by which one is made righteous. We do not agree with Newman that such a declaration causes an inward renewal, but we do find it noteworthy that he embraces an objective aspect of justification by which the sinner is accounted righteous objectively without previously having been made righteous within. While Reformed Anglicans and Anglo-Catholics typically hold strictly to an objective or a subjective aspect of justification, Newman is right to point out that the two aspects are not inconsistent. Both must be taken into account to arrive at a proper understanding of objective and subjective justification in God's full salvation (Campbell et al. 2:189-194).

## *The Role of Union in Justification*

As with the topic of the objective and subjective aspects of justification, Anglican theologians have varied views of the role of union in justification by faith. Many Reformed Anglicans have a high appreciation for union with Christ in justification, and this should come as no surprise. As we have seen elsewhere in this issue of *A&C*, the Reformed have one of the highest estimations of union with Christ in justification among all the Christian traditions. What might be more surprising, as we will see, is that some Anglicans outside the Reformed tradition likewise have much to say regarding union in justification.

We begin with several Reformed Anglicans who emphasize the need of union in justification by faith while espousing a typically Reformed understanding of the topic. In *A Learned Discourse on Justification*, Richard Hooker (d. 1600) writes:

The righteousness wherein we must be found if we will be justified, is not our own, therefore we cannot be justified by any inherent quality. Christ hath merited righteousness for as many as are *found in him*. In him God findeth us if we be faithful for by faith we are incorporated into him. (*FLE* 5:112)

Like Hooker, John Davenant argues for the importance of union in the believer's receiving of Christ's righteousness. Davenant does employ the language of imputation, but he stresses that it is not the imputation of Christ's righteousness alone that justifies a believer. That righteousness is imputed to the believer only when he or she is engrafted into Christ and made one person with Him. Davenant observes,

The Apostle here [in Phil. 3:9] teaches what that righteousness is, upon which we must rely before God; namely that which is apprehended by faith. But this is imputed righteousness. He also shews the cause why it is made *ours* by right; namely, because we are Christ's, and are found in Christ. Because then we are engrafted into his body, and are united with him into one person, therefore his righteousness is reckoned *ours*. (1:246)

Following Davenant, the Anglican bishop Ezekiel Hopkins (d. 1690) also uses the language of imputation while elaborating on the mystical union with Christ, into which a believer is brought through faith. It is in this union, so strong that the believers are said to be one spirit with the Lord and are even called Christ Himself (1 Cor. 12:12), that believers receive all that Christ is. American Episcopal bishop Charles McIlvaine (d. 1873) further illustrates the believers' union with Christ through faith with Old Testament pictures such as the cities of refuge. Just as a fugitive could enter a city of refuge and receive all the benefits of the city once inside, so too can the believer be incorporated into Christ and receive everything of His, including righteousness. These writers exemplify the recurring thought among some Reformed

Anglicans that a believer obtains righteousness by being incorporated by faith into Christ, whereby the believer enjoys all that Christ is, including His righteousness.

Interestingly, the idea of union in the believers' justification is a hallmark of not only Reformed Anglicans' understanding but also that of many Anglo-Catholics. While the Reformed tend to see union as a factor in justification but not its formal cause, John Henry Newman makes union with Christ the formal cause itself. According to Newman,

Christ then is our Righteousness by dwelling in us by the Spirit: He justifies us by entering into us, He continues to justify us by remaining in us. *This* is really and truly our justification, not faith, not holiness, not (much less) a mere imputation; but through God's mercy, the very Presence of Christ. (150)

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In this union, the believers are justified because they are united to the One who is Righteousness itself, Christ. Summing up his remarkable statements on the believer's justification, Newman concludes:

*This*, I repeat, is our justification...; we are in Him, He in us; Christ being the One Mediator, the way, the truth, and the life, joining earth with heaven. And this is our true Righteousness,—not the mere name of righteousness, not only forgiveness or favour as an act of the Divine Mind, not only sanctification within (great indeed as these blessings would be, yet it is somewhat more),—it implies the one, it involves the other, it is the indwelling of our glorified Lord. (219)

With this understanding of justification in mind, Newman believes that Protestants and Catholics can resolve their conflict by emphasizing union as the essence of justification, since they both grant union as an element of justification. Later Anglo-Catholics, such as Thomas Holtzen (1968-), also include union as instrumental in the believers' justification. Thus, the idea of justification through union with Christ, an idea existent in Anglicanism from almost the very beginning of the tradition itself, remains alive up to the present in Anglican theology. The quotations presented in this section in no way demonstrate an official Anglican position on the subject, seeing as Anglicanism has very few defined views

on any theological subject. Nevertheless, many key Anglican theologians, including both Reformed and Anglo-Catholic writers, have crafted their views on union in justification either to reconcile the two parties within Anglicanism or to answer the objections of the opposing party (Campbell et al. 2:194-200).

### *The Security of Salvation*

In its foundational formularies, the Church of England takes a discernible stance on the security of a believer's salvation. Despite the Reformed tradition's recovery of the truth concerning the security of salvation and the pervasive influence of the Reformed tradition on the Church of England, the Anglican formularies maintain the ancient error that salvation can be lost. The Thirty-nine Articles, the two Books of Homilies, and the Book of Common Prayer indicate that grace can be forfeited after baptism, that it can be restored through repentance, and that salvation, therefore, is not secure.

In *An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles*, an older but still valuable work, the Anglican theologian and bishop Edward Harold Browne (d. 1891) traces the Church of England's position on the insecurity of grace in its foundational formularies. In the Thirty-nine Articles, Article XVI ("Of Sin after Baptism") states, "After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may arise again, and amend our lives" (Cummings 678). This indicates that the Church of England rejected the Calvinist teaching of perseverance. Like the Thirty-nine Articles, the two Books of Homilies affirm that grace can be lost. A homily from the first book, "A Sermon, How Dangerous a Thing It Is to Fall from God," leaves no doubt as to whether a person once saved can finally be deprived of that salvation. Of this homily, Browne writes, "It is impossible to doubt, that the doctrine contained in it is, that we may once receive the grace of God, and yet finally fall away from Him" (377-378).

Reformed Anglicans naturally desired the Church of England to adopt a more Calvinist understanding of security, but early attempts to introduce that view met with resistance. Nevertheless, there remains a strong Reformed presence in Anglicanism that affirms the eternal security of salvation. E. A. Litton (d. 1897) argues that Article XVII ("Of Predestination and Election") of the Thirty-nine Articles can be interpreted to mean that the Church of England itself affirms the security of salvation. He states,

The reformed divines hold that the regenerate cannot finally fall away, since in fact they are the elect. That our Church leans to this latter view seems implied in Art. xvii: "They be made sons of God by adoption, they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy,



they attain to everlasting life.” No intimation is given that they may possibly come short of this destination. (346)

The Reformed are right to insist on security, and we wish they were right to claim that the Anglican formularies affirm this great truth. But we agree with Browne that the formularies teach the insecurity rather than the security of salvation (Campbell et al. 2:200-207).

### *Faith and Baptism*

If we are to locate a typically Anglican position on the means of justification, we again must look to the formularies. Those sources indicate that while justification is by faith only, baptism is also an instrument of justification, through which the baptized are forgiven of sin, regenerated, and thereby justified. Anglican theology thus continues a longstanding error in the Christian tradition by joining justification and baptism, thereby undermining the exclusive role of faith in justification and perpetuating the fallacy that justification is sacramental.

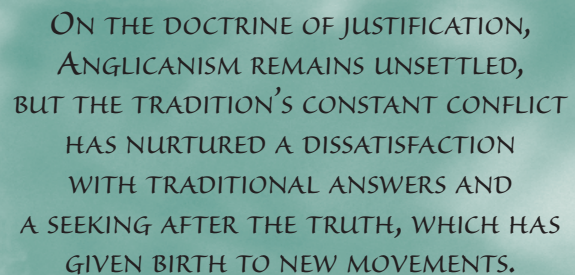
Anglo-Catholic writers have affirmed the formularies’ teaching of baptism and its relation to faith and justification. Francis J. Hall (d. 1932), for example, states that baptism is “the instrumental cause of justification” and that through the work of the Spirit in baptism, “justifying faith” is “made possible for us to attain by His grace” (8:30). In other words, faith does not precede justification; rather, justification, enacted through baptism, leads to faith. This deliberate joining of baptism and justification undermines the power and efficacy of faith for the objective justification of the believer. In such an understanding, faith becomes subordinated to the sacrament of baptism.

Reformed Anglicans such as E. A. Litton affirm the necessity of baptism, but they teach that justification is by faith only and not through baptism as an instrument. Litton writes that “nothing but faith is spoken of as the channel through which remission of sin is obtained” (306). Moreover, he says that it is “hardly safe to argue” from passages such as Romans 6:4-5 “that because baptism is said (in some sense) to unite us to Christ, and union with Christ includes justification as the general includes the particular, therefore baptism conveys justification” (307). Taking the typical Reformed view that justification is the declaration of a completed act, Litton denies that baptism can add anything to that declaration.

Despite such disparity between Anglo-Catholic and Reformed Anglican renderings of faith and baptism in justification, some effort has been expended to reconcile the two into a more holistic understanding, which has led to some unfortunate results. In an otherwise valuable account of justification that we have treated above, John Henry Newman seeks a *via media* between Anglo-Catholic and Protestant-leaning Anglican understandings of faith and baptism and

thus introduces a fatal flaw into his work. For Newman, justification is not by faith alone but by baptism and faith as complementary instruments. In Newman’s understanding, baptism is the primary instrument and faith is the secondary instrument; or, put differently, the sacraments are the “instrumental” cause and faith is the “sustaining cause” of justification (226). As the primary instrument of justification, baptism for Newman necessarily precedes faith, and thus faith follows justification and is itself justifying only in its relation to baptism.

Faith, then, being the appointed representative of Baptism, derives its authority and virtue from that which it represents. It is justifying because of Baptism; it is the faith of the baptized, of the regenerate, that is, of the justified. Justifying faith does not precede justification; but justification precedes faith, and makes it justifying. (227)



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In trying to find a *via media*, Newman ultimately subordinates faith to the sacrament of baptism and thereby devalues the function of faith in the objective justification of the believer. Moreover, by assigning a requisite justifying function to baptism, Newman and traditional Anglicans have wrongly compromised the role of faith as that which uniquely justifies (Campbell et al. 2:207-211).

### *A Concluding Word regarding the Anglican Tradition*

The broadness of the Anglican tradition allows Protestant and Catholic views of justification by faith to live together under one ecclesial roof, thus allowing for, in Alister McGrath’s words, “a spectrum of theologies of justification” (41). As we have seen, there are elements in those competing views that can be affirmed and other elements that, we feel, are in error. But the presence of such variety has fostered theological experimentation in Anglicanism, and this has borne some promising fruit.

At times in the history of Anglicanism, certain theologians were willing to reach beyond their respective Catholic or Protestant heritages to appropriate elements from both sides and thus made progress toward a more fully developed notion of justification. But the examples treated above serve

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as a reminder that the gains in Anglican understandings of justification have been undermined by persistent misunderstandings. On the doctrine of justification, then, Anglicanism remains unsettled, but the tradition's constant conflict has nurtured a dissatisfaction with traditional answers and a seeking after the truth, which has given birth to new movements. One of these new movements, as we will see below when we examine the Plymouth Brethren, attained an unprecedented understanding of justification (Campbell et al. 2:211-212).

### Justification by Faith in the Methodist Tradition

Methodism began in the eighteenth century as a move of reform within the Church of England. The main proponents of reform among those who were eventually labeled Methodists were John Wesley (d. 1791), his brother Charles (d. 1788), and George Whitefield (d. 1770). During their lifetime this move of reform became its own tradition separate from the Church of England. Despite the split, there are few authoritative doctrinal differences between the Methodist tradition and the Church of England. The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church (commonly known as the Twenty-five Articles of Religion) are little more than Wesley's abridgment of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. The Methodist article on justification by faith closely follows that of the Church of England (Campbell et al. 2:212-213).

### Justification as Forgiveness of Sins

Most of the prominent teachers within the Methodist tradition, beginning with John Wesley, have held that justification is no more than forgiveness of or pardon from sins. Many Christian traditions in some way identify justification with forgiveness of sins, of course, but they have attempted to account for an additional positive reality of righteousness in justification (e.g., the imputed active obedience of Christ or the renewal of the believer's inner being). The Methodist tradition generally rejects these proposed positive components of justification. For instance, after rejecting several prominent notions of justification, Wesley insists:

The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is that act of God the Father, whereby for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he "showeth forth his righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of the sins that are past." (WJW 1:189)

Thus, Wesley held to an understanding of justification consistent with the account of the patristic writers—that justification is God's forgiveness of past sins based on Christ's redemptive work on the cross—and rejected the additions that had accumulated during the controversies of the intervening centuries. The Methodist tradition in general has

followed Wesley in this respect. A more intrinsic understanding of justification can be found in the Methodist tradition, in the writings of William Burt Pope (d. 1903) for instance. But the prominent Methodist view is that justification by faith is simply the forgiveness of sins with no positive reality of righteousness, a view that comes short of justification as revealed in Paul's Epistles (Campbell et al. 2:212-218).

### *The Spirit's Inner Witness as Assurance of Justification*

Closely related to the Methodist teaching of justification by faith is the teaching concerning the assurance of justification. The primary argument that Methodists employ in their defense of assurance is the inner witness of the Spirit, and much of their understanding of this witness draws upon John Wesley's own understanding.

Wesley understood the assurance of justification to consist of the Spirit's inner witness in Romans 8:16. In his *Sermons on Several Occasions*, he devotes three sermons, written over a span of twenty-four years, to the teaching of the witness of the Spirit. Wesley saw a twofold witness in Romans 8:16 and argued that the witness of the Spirit is a direct testimony of the Spirit of God, an immediate and inward impression upon the believers' souls that they are children of God. Wesley considered this direct testimony of God's Spirit vital to justification and thought it impossible for believers to be able to love God and pursue holiness without the Spirit of God first making them aware that God loves them and has forgiven them.

As with his teaching on justification, Wesley's teaching on the inner witness of the Spirit as the assurance of our salvation is held by the majority of those within the Methodist tradition. Thus, the Methodist tradition holds that every believer should have an assurance of faith upon or shortly after believing. This assurance consists of a direct testimony of the Spirit of God—an inward impression on the soul of God's love and forgiveness—and the believer's own testimony. Whereas the appeal to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit for the assurance of salvation is not unique to the Methodist tradition, Methodism emphasizes and develops this point more extensively than other major Christian traditions do. We agree with the Methodists that every believer can and should have the inner witness of the Spirit as an assurance of salvation (Campbell et al. 2:218-221).

### *The Insecurity of Justification*

As we have seen, the Twenty-five Articles, which represent the teachings of Methodism, are adapted with judicious changes from the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. A notable difference is the omission from the Twenty-five Articles of the latter's Article XVII on predestination

and election. In contrast to Calvin, Wesley taught that those who believe in Christ and are thus justified by faith can still fall away from their faith and suffer eternal perdition. Wesley testifies that he himself saw many fall away who were later restored:

It is remarkable that many who had fallen either from justifying or from sanctifying grace, and so deeply fallen that they could hardly be ranked among the servants of God, have been restored...They have at once recovered both a consciousness of his [God's] favor and the experience of the pure love of God. In one moment they received anew both remission of sins and a lot among them that were sanctified. (WJW 3:225)

This is the portion of those who fall, even apostatize, and then repent. However, not all who fall are restored. The lot of these, Wesley believes, is perdition: "For a great part of these 'it had been better never to have known the way of righteousness.' It only increases their damnation, seeing they die in their sins" (3:224). We surely do not agree that those who believe into Christ can fall away from salvation. Because justification is appropriated by faith alone, it can never be annulled by works. This gives the believers boldness before God and security in their salvation. Having this boldness, the believers are then free to apply all diligence in the pursuit of Christ for sanctification and growth in life (Campbell et al. 2:221-225).

### Justification among the Plymouth Brethren

When compared with the traditions considered thus far, the Plymouth Brethren are numerically less prominent, yet their apprehension of justification advanced beyond the understanding in those traditions. Concerning this advancement, Witness Lee (d. 1997) said, "Luther recovered the truth of justification by faith, but he did not expound it clearly enough; the Brethren thoroughly expounded the truth of justification by faith" (CWWL, 1956 2:378-379). Brethren thought on this subject was, in large part, shaped by John Nelson Darby (d. 1882), who presents his most concentrated statements on the believer's justification in his pamphlet *The Righteousness of God*. In this pamphlet, Darby disagrees with the imputation of Christ's active righteousness, a hallmark of Reformed teaching, because the idea depends upon the fulfillment of the law for justification as opposed to the believer being in Christ. The law, Darby argues, is related to the old man, whom God set aside. Now the believer is not in the old man, who is finished, but in the new man, the "second Adam," Christ. Concerning the righteousness of God, Darby states,

It is an entire setting aside the old man, his whole condition and existence before God, by which we get our place before God: not a keeping the law for the old man. Then you must keep him alive. God forbid! I live by the

second Adam only, with whom I have been crucified: nevertheless live not I, but Christ in me. But then, in the new man I am not under law, so there is no question of fulfilling it for me, because I am already accepted and have life. There can be no Do this and live. I am, as even Luther expresses it, Christ before God. If righteousness come by law, then Christ is dead in vain. But if Christ has fulfilled the law for me, it does come by law, and Christ is dead in vain. Law applies to flesh, is weak through it, sets up, if it could, the righteousness of the first man. But I am not in the flesh at all—I am in Christ. (CWJND 7:440)

God declares believers righteous not by reckoning to them Christ's obeying the law perfectly throughout His life but by putting them into a new position—in Christ. Christ becomes the believer's righteousness because the believer is now united with the One who is the righteousness of God Himself. Darby elaborates,

Hence Christ was, in sovereign grace, made sin for me and died, not to build up the old man again, after death, when it was dead, and confer righteousness on it, but to put me in a wholly new position in the heavenly man, who is my righteousness; to set me in the righteousness of God, seated in heavenly places in Him. (7:410)

Although Brethren thought after Darby is hardly monolithic, numerous Brethren evangelists and authors continued to stress union with Christ as the basis of a believer's justification. Charles Stanley (d. 1890) also strongly disagreed with the Reformed notion of the imputation of Christ's active obedience:

Oh, say they, you are under it, and break it; but Christ kept the law for you in His life, and this is imputed to you for righteousness. I would say, in answer to many enquiries on this solemn subject, I cannot find this doctrine in Scripture: it cannot be the ancient doctrine of God's church. The basis is wrong—to refer to the illustration, on the wrong side of the river. Justification is not on the principle of law at all. "The righteousness of God without law is manifested." "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin."...But does Scripture ever say that Christ kept the law for us for justifying righteousness? I am not aware of a single text. And yet, if it were so, there are many places where it should say so. (CST 2:4-5)

How, then, is the believer made righteous? According to Stanley, "It is thus risen in Him, one with Him, we are made 'the righteousness of God in him'" (2:6). William Kelly (d. 1906) also contends that a believer is justified by being brought into union with Christ completely apart from the law:

Law-righteousness differs from that of God. Law promises earth and living long thereon to those who keep it. Grace gives Christ to suffer for our sins, the Just for the unjust, raises Him for our justifying, glorifies Him in heaven, and makes us God's righteousness in Him there. (50)



Even though these earlier Brethren teachers emphasize that believers are justified by being brought into union with Christ rather than by having Christ's active righteousness imputed to them, the influence of the early Brethren teaching seems to have dwindled among subsequent expositors. Later Brethren authors such as Sir Robert Anderson, A. J. Pollock, William E. Vine, and F. F. Bruce do not accord union the role that it had among earlier Brethren related to the believer's justification. Thus, it seems that the Brethren's distinctive understanding of justification waned among some of the Brethren themselves (Campbell et al. 2:229-234).

With John Nelson Darby and other early Plymouth Brethren, we see a seismic shift in the understanding of the righteousness that God desires and requires. It was they who dared to unshackle justification from the principle of the law, for which the church of God owes them a debt of gratitude. The Brethren understood an important distinction between the righteousness of Christ and the righteousness of God in relation to justification. While they heartily acknowledged

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—WITNESS LEE

that Christ was absolutely righteous according to the law throughout His life and in His death, they challenged the assumption that God imputes Christ's obedience to the law, His righteousness, to the believers for their justification. Such a construct, the Brethren protested, is altogether absent from God's Word. In challenging this assumption, the Brethren saw that the righteousness spoken of in relation to justification is actually the righteousness of God, not the righteousness of Christ (a phrase used only once in the entire New Testament), and that this righteousness, as they tenaciously affirmed, is “apart from the law” (Rom. 3:21; cf. Rom. 6:14; Gal. 2:21; 3:11). God's righteousness in justification is not only “apart from the works of the law” (Rom. 3:28), meaning that our works to fulfill the law can never justify us, but also “apart from the law,” meaning that justification is entirely apart from the principle of the law. The Brethren saw that the righteousness of God and the righteousness of the law are two completely different kinds of righteousness. Hence, even if Christ's righteousness could somehow be imputed to those who believe, that righteousness would still be a righteousness of the law, a righteousness within the system of the law. The righteousness of God, however, is not of the law but “out of God and based on faith” (Phil. 3:9). The Brethren understood that faith actually removes

believers out from under the whole milieu of the law and places them in an entirely new position in union with Christ before God. In Christ the righteous One, God sees the believers as righteous and justifies them. This is the righteousness of God, absolutely apart from the righteousness of the law. We thank the Lord for the light that He gave to our brothers as well as for their determination, like Luther, to declare what they saw in spite of theological tradition (Campbell et al. 2:309-310).

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