

1 Justification: the emergence of a concept

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century brought about many significant changes within the life and thought of the western churches. This volume concerns one of those – the reconceptualisation and reformulation of the traditional Christian vocabulary of salvation using the Pauline image of justification.¹ Up to this point, the western theological tradition had chosen to develop its thinking about how humanity is reconciled to God in terms of ‘salvation by grace’ (Ephesians 2:8). One of the defining characteristics of the Protestant Reformation is a decisive shift, in both the conceptualities and the vocabulary, of the Christian theological tradition. For a relatively short yet theologically significant period, the reconciliation of humanity would be discussed within the entire western theological tradition primarily in terms of ‘justification by faith’ (Romans 5:1).

As the Reformation and its attendant authority figures slowly receded into the past, the difficulties associated with this way of speaking became increasingly apparent. From the late nineteenth century onwards, growing doubts were expressed as to whether the New Testament, including the Pauline epistles, placed anything even approaching such an emphasis upon the concept of justification.² Influential New Testament scholars such as William Wrede and Albert Schweitzer argued that the origins of the concept were polemical, relating to the early tensions between Christianity and Judaism.³ Wrede insisted that the heart of Paul’s thought lay in the concept of redemption.⁴ For Schweitzer, the real focus of Paul’s positive thought lay elsewhere, in the mystical idea of ‘being in Christ’, not in this ‘subsidiary crater’.⁵ Although Catholic responses to the

¹ Subilia, *La giustificazione per fede*, 117–27.

² Söding, ‘Der Skopos der paulinischen Rechtfertigungslehre’.

³ See, for example, A. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der paulinischen Forschung von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1954, 132; F. Flückiger, *Der Ursprung des christlichen Dogmas: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Albert Schweitzer und Martin Werner*, Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1955, 52.

⁴ W. Wrede, *Paulus*, 2nd edn, Tübingen, 1907, 90–100.

⁵ A. Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, 2nd edn, Tübingen: Mohr, 1954, 216–20.

Reformation, such as the Council of Trent, initially reflected its shift in vocabulary, the Catholic tradition gradually reverted to more traditional ways of speaking and thinking about the transformation of the human situation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The highly influential and authoritative *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), for example, retains the notion, while preferring to emphasise other Pauline images in its discussion of human salvation.

The rise of the ecumenical movement in the aftermath of the Second World War saw a new interest in the doctrine of justification. This did not, however, result from a new perception of the positive importance of this way of speaking, still less from a sense that the theological renewal of the West depended on a recovery of the specific conceptualities of justification. Justification was a problem, a barrier to church unity, which needed to be resolved. It was, in the view of many – but by no means all – an unwelcome relic of the past, which inhibited ecumenical collaboration in the present and future. The reconciliation of the churches demanded that the Reformation agendas, which originally led to their fissure in the sixteenth century, needed to be re-examined.⁶

One of the most important outcomes of this process of reflection was a new spurt of scholarly interest in the origins and significance of the doctrine of justification by faith, and its impact upon sixteenth-century western Christianity. This new ecumenical interest in the doctrine appears to have seen justification primarily as a problem from the past – a difficulty in the path of the reunification of the western churches, which needed to be neutralised, rather than something which was to be celebrated and proclaimed. A growing body of literature emerged, particularly within Lutheran circles during the 1960s, raising serious concerns about whether the notion of ‘justification by faith’ means anything to modern western secular culture.

Alongside increasing anxiety about the ‘secular meaning of the gospel’ (at least, as articulated in the notion of justification), a new issue emerged after the Second World War – a growing concern that traditional Protestant teachings on justification misrepresented the place of the law in Jewish life and thought. The Jewish theologian Claude G. Montefiore (1858–1938) argued that rabbinic Judaism did not hold – as Paul seemed to suggest – that Jews were self-righteous people who believed that they could earn their way into heaven. Judaism affirmed the graciousness of God, not human merit, in determining the destiny of Israel.⁷ Others

⁶ See Pannenberg, ‘Die Rechtfertigungslehre im ökumenische Gespräch’; Hövelmann, ‘Die ökumenische Vereinbarung zur Rechtfertigungslehre’.

⁷ C. G. Montefiore, ‘Rabbinic Judaism and the Epistles of St Paul’, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 13 (1900–1), 161–217.

began to take up this criticism. With the publication of W. D. Davies' *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (1948), a new challenge to the western reading of Paul emerged. 'The gospel for Paul was not the annulling of Judaism, but its completion, and as such it took up into itself the essential genius of Judaism.'⁸ The emergence of this 'new perspective' on Paul was given a decisive new impetus in 1977 with the publication of E. P. Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. From this point onwards, the plausibility of traditional Protestant formulations of the doctrine of justification, especially those following Luther's antithesis of law and gospel, were regarded with growing scepticism by biblical scholars. The debate continues, and it is unclear where it will end.

The history of the doctrine of justification primarily concerns the western, Latin-based theological tradition. The Orthodox emphasis upon the economic condescension of the Son leading to humanity's participation in the divine being is generally expressed in the concept of deification (*theosis* or *theopoiesis*) rather than justification. This is not, of course, to say that the western church was ignorant of such notions, at least one of which plays a significant (though, until recently, neglected) role in Martin Luther's soteriology;⁹ nor is it to suggest that Orthodoxy neglected the Pauline image of justification in its theological reflections. Still less does it exclude the possible integration of the notions within a suitably comprehensive theological anthropology.¹⁰ The issue concerns where the emphasis is placed, and which soteriological image came to dominate. Given the early church's relative lack of interest in the concept of justification, it is the western church's emphasis on justification, rather than the eastern church's emphasis on deification, which requires to be explained.¹¹

This volume seeks to tell the story of the rise and fall of this highly significant development in western Christian thought, and to explore its implications for an understanding of the development of Christian doctrine. How is this refocussing of vocabulary and conceptualities of the Christian tradition to be explained? What is its significance? To what extent is this development foreshadowed in earlier Christian thinking? The only way in which such questions can be answered is by rigorous scholarly investigation of the development of the doctrine of justification

⁸ Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 323.

⁹ See S. Peura, *Luther und Theosis: Vergöttlichung als Thema der abendländischen Theologie*, Helsinki: Luther-Akademie Ratzeburg, 1990; R. Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther: Ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997.

¹⁰ As pointed out by Hinlicky, 'Theological Anthropology'.

¹¹ For the role of the concept of deification in the two traditions, see A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

within the first two thousand years of the western theological tradition, without any apologetic agenda. It is such an investigation that this new edition of this work seeks to offer.

The consolidation of the concept of justification as a means of articulating Christian insights into the economy of salvation as a whole takes place during the Middle Ages, a period of remarkable theological creativity and systematisation. Although significant differences emerge within the theological traditions of this period, a number of commonalities can nevertheless be discerned, particularly the virtually universal consensus that the term 'justification' designates a process of being 'made righteous'. In part, this reflects the high esteem placed on the works of Augustine of Hippo, whose influence over the theological renaissance of the twelfth century and beyond was immense. By far the largest section of this volume is thus dedicated to the documentation and analysis of the development of the doctrine of justification during the Middle Ages. Particular attention is paid to exploring why the image of 'justification' was found so useful as a means of articulating the Christian vision of the reconciliation of humanity to God, without achieving the conceptual dominance that is associated with the theology of the Protestant Reformation.

The sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries may be regarded as the 'high noon' of the fortunes of this concept within western Christianity, including both the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic responses to this development. A major section of the work explores the emergence of the Protestant approach to the doctrine. This critically important section attempts to account for the new interest in the concept of justification, and especially for the manner in which Protestantism came to focus so heavily on this one Pauline image of salvation as a means of both articulating its own distinctive insights into the redemption of humanity and distinguishing itself from its ecclesiological rivals. The distinctive features of the Protestant conception of justification are noted, and the continuities and discontinuities with earlier ways of thinking identified.

This leads on to a consideration of the Catholic response to the Reformation, supremely the Council of Trent's celebrated 'decree on justification' (1547). This involves a detailed examination of the background to this debate, careful identification of the positions represented during the Tridentine debates on justification, and their apparent influence on the final document. There is no doubt that Trent's decision to use the imagery and language of 'justification' was a direct response to the challenge of Protestantism. In a sense, it was a forced rather than a natural development, which was of decisive importance in consolidating the conceptual dominance of justification within western Christianity in the

second half of the sixteenth century. Yet this proved to be a temporary development; within a hundred years, Catholicism had generally reverted to more traditional ways of conceptualising the economy of salvation, with the concept of 'justification' gradually giving way to a retrieval of older patterns of thought, which had been temporarily suppressed on account of the tactical need to respond to the Reformation on – and in – its own theological terms. The retrieval of more traditional ways of articulating the economy of salvation is a telling sign of the growing theological confidence of Catholicism in the seventeenth century.

Yet within the intellectual culture of western Europe, a series of developments took place which began to erode the dominance of justification as the preferred mode of discourse concerning the acceptance and transformation of humanity through Christ. The growth of rationalism in late seventeenth-century England catalysed similar developments throughout western Europe, particularly in Germany and France, which led to many of the central features of the doctrine of justification being undermined. Alongside this, New Testament scholarship began to question whether Luther's reading of Paul was quite as reliable as many had thought. Although German Lutheran scholars tended to remain fiercely loyal to their distinguished forebear, elsewhere growing anxiety was expressed. Did Paul's theological emphasis *really* fall on justification? That might well have been Luther's personal judgement; yet it seemed curiously inattentive to other soteriological conceptualities within the Pauline corpus. Despite these concerns, the modern period also witnessed some important attempts to retrieve and restate the traditional doctrine, with the concerns and agendas of the modern world in mind. Although widely regarded as a period of decline of interest in the doctrine of justification, the last three hundred years have given rise to some highly significant reappropriations of the doctrine.

Yet although the story of the doctrine of justification really begins in the Middle Ages, the foundations for this development were laid much earlier. Our account opens by documenting the emergence of the concept of justification, and identifying the foundational resources that would be deployed during the great period of medieval synthesis. A close reading of the medieval discussions of justification leaves no doubt as to the two primary sources on which they drew: the Vulgate translation of the Bible, and the works of Augustine of Hippo.

Three points are of particular importance in relation to the dogmatic positioning of the concept of justification within medieval theology.

1. The remarkable growth in Pauline scholarship during the theological renaissance of the twelfth century, and particularly the use of Pauline commentaries as vehicles of theological speculation.

2. The generally high regard for classical jurisprudence within the western church.
3. The semantic relationship between the Latin terms *iustitia* and *iustificatio*, which allowed the theologians of the medieval period to find in the cognate concept of justification a means of rationalising the divine dispensation towards humankind in terms of justice.

In this opening chapter, we therefore turn to consider these fundamental elements of the Christian understanding of justification, and how they shaped the western tradition at this point.

1.1 Semantic aspects of the concept of justification

‘I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith . . . for in it the righteousness of God is revealed’ (Romans 1:16–17). For Paul, the Christian gospel is in some sense constituted by the revelation of the righteousness of God.¹² But what is this tantalizing ‘righteousness of God’? As the present study will make clear, the interpretation of the ‘righteousness of God’ within the western theological tradition has been accompanied by the most intractable exegetical difficulties. The concept of *justification* (Latin, *iustificatio*) is inextricably linked with that of *righteousness* (Latin, *iustitia*), both semantically and theologically.¹³ Central to the Christian understanding of the economy of salvation is the conviction that God is righteous, and that he acts in accordance with that righteousness in the salvation of humanity. It is clear, however, that this conviction raises certain fundamental questions, not least that of which concept of ‘righteousness’ can be considered appropriate to a discussion of the divine dispensation towards humankind. The relationship between God and humanity, according to the Christian understanding, may be characterised in three propositions:

1. God is righteous.
2. Humanity is sinful.
3. God justifies humanity.

The quintessence of the Christian doctrine of justification is that these three propositions do not constitute an inconsistent triad. God, acting in righteousness, justifies the sinner. The proclamation of the actuality of such a justification to those outside the church has always been accompanied by speculation within the church as to how it is actually possible for God, being righteous, to justify sinners in the first place. It is therefore of

¹² The issues are regularly surveyed in the literature; see, for example, P. Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus*; H. Brunner, ‘Die Gerechtigkeit Gottes’, *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 39 (1987), 269–79.

¹³ See McGrath, ‘Justice and Justification’.

great importance to consider the various understandings of the concept of 'righteousness' or 'justice' which have been employed in the articulation of the doctrine of justification.

Modern theological vocabularies contain a host of Hebrew, Greek and Latin words, most of which possess, in their original contexts, a richness and depth of meaning which cannot possibly be conveyed by the mere translation of the word into English. Such an enterprise involves, not merely the substitution of a modern word for the original, but the transference of the latter from its own proper conceptual framework to one in which its meaning is distorted.¹⁴ This problem has long been recognised. Jesus ben Sirach, presumably in an attempt to divert attention from the absence of a Hebrew original, complained that 'things originally spoken in Hebrew do not have the same force when they are translated into another language . . . with the law, the prophets and the rest of the writings, it makes no small difference when they are read in their original language'.¹⁵ The conceptual foundations of the Christian doctrine of justification may be sought in the Old Testament, in a milieu quite different from that of western Europe, where it received its systematic articulation. The transference of the concept from this Hebraic matrix to that of western Europe has significant consequences, which we shall explore in the present section.

The primary source for Christian theological speculation is Holy Scripture; indeed, Christian theology may be regarded as an extended commentary upon the biblical material.¹⁶ It is therefore evident that Christian theology will contain a number of important concepts originating from a Hebraic context, and that the transference of these concepts from their original context may result in a shift in meaning with unacceptable theological consequences. In particular, it must be pointed out that the equation of Hebraic and western concepts of 'righteousness' is frequently implicit in theological works, so that western concepts of justice are employed in the articulation of the Christian doctrine of justification. A study of the classic western understandings of justice suggests that these are essentially *secular* and *practical*, and therefore potentially quite unsuited to a discussion of the 'righteousness of God'. The present section, dealing with the Hebrew, Greek and Latin understandings of 'righteousness', is therefore intended as a prolegomenon to the study of

¹⁴ See W. Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation: Some Reformation Controversies and Their Background*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

¹⁵ Sirach, prologue.

¹⁶ This is true throughout the medieval period, despite the important debates of the era concerning the role of tradition: see H. Schüssler, *Der Primat der Heiligen Schrift als theologisches und kanonistisches Problem im Spätmittelalter*, Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1977.

the doctrine of justification. Although not strictly a part of the history of the doctrine itself, the question exercised such an influence over the subsequent discussion of justification that its omission at this stage is impossible.

The etymology of the two Hebrew terms *sedeq* and *sedaqa*, both of which are usually translated as ‘righteousness’, is generally accepted to be obscure, and it is quite possible that the original meaning of the grapheme *sdq* is lost beyond recovery. The fact that there are two Hebrew words usually translated as ‘righteousness’, the masculine *sedeq* and the feminine *sedaqa*, has been the subject of much speculation. Although it might be supposed that these two terms are synonymous, this has been called into question for two reasons.¹⁷ First, it is philologically improbable that two different words should bear exactly the same meaning at the same time. Second, *sedeq* is used as a characterising genitive, especially for weights and measures, as in Leviticus 19:36. *Sedaqa*, however, is not used in this manner. It is difficult to know how much can be read into this distinction. It is certainly possible to argue that the feminine form tends to refer to a concrete entity, such as a righteous action or a vindicating judgement, whereas the masculine form tends to be associated with the more abstract idea of ‘that which is morally right’ or ‘right order’. Yet it is unclear quite how this impacts on our investigation.

Recent theories of the historical background of the Hebrew language have tended to divide the Hamito-Semitic languages into two groups: the archaic southern Cushitic and Chadic languages, and the more progressive northern group of languages, including the Semitic languages, the Berber languages of north Africa, and ancient Egyptian and Coptic.¹⁸ The trilateral root is a conspicuous feature common to all the languages of the northern group, and it is possible to argue that at every level – whether semantic, grammatical or phonological – features of these languages are theoretically derivable from a common source. When the etymology of the grapheme *sdq* is examined, using other ancient near-eastern languages as models, a spectrum of possible meanings emerges, of which the most fundamental appears to be that of *conformity to a norm*.¹⁹ This observation is confirmed by the fact that the dominant sense of the

¹⁷ A. Jepsen, ‘sdq und sdqh im Alten Testament’, in H. G. Reventloh (ed.), *Gottes Wort und Gottes Land*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965, 78–89.

¹⁸ A. Saenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

¹⁹ For example, the use of the Canaanite term *saduk* in the Tel el-Amarna texts to indicate that the king had acted ‘correctly’ when dealing with the ‘Kasi’ (= Cushite?) people. See D. Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967, 82–98, especially 82–6. The following

terms *sedeq* and *sedaqa* appears to be that of ‘right behaviour’ or ‘right disposition’.²⁰ The world is understood to be ordered in a certain way as a result of its divine creation; to act ‘rightly’ is thus to act in accordance with this patterning of structures and events. Emphasis has often been placed on the idea that the divine act of creation involves the imposition of order upon chaos;²¹ such ideas can be found throughout the wisdom literature of the ancient Near East.

The validity of such an appeal to etymological considerations has been criticised by James Barr,²² who illustrates the alleged inadequacy of the tool with reference to the English word ‘nice’. The etymology of the word indicates that it derives from the Latin *nescius*, presumably via the Old French *nice*, thereby suggesting that its meaning should be ‘silly’ or ‘ignorant’ – which is clearly of little use in determining its usage today. Barr neglects, however, to point out that etymological considerations can give an indication of the early meaning of a term, despite the connotations it may develop later as a consequence of constant use. While the derivation of ‘nice’ from *nescius* does not allow its modern meaning to be established, it is perfectly adequate to allow its *sixteenth*-century meaning to be established, it then bearing the sense of ‘silly’ or ‘ignorant’. As the enterprise in question is to establish the meaning of the term in texts of widely varying age, etymological arguments are perfectly acceptable in an attempt to establish its *early* meaning; the later meaning of the term, of course, cannot be determined by such considerations, as nuances not originally present make their appearance. Thus, in later Hebrew, *sedaqa* came to mean ‘almsgiving’, a meaning that cannot be derived from etymological considerations alone. Here, as elsewhere, the semantic connection between a grapheme and the meaning of a word appears to have eventually become so strained as to have almost snapped completely. However,

studies should also be consulted: H. Cazelles, ‘A propos de quelques textes difficiles relatifs à la justice de Dieu dans l’Ancien Testament’, *Revue Biblique* 58 (1951) 169–88; A. Dünner, *Die Gerechtigkeit nach dem Alten Testament*, Bonn: Bouvier, 1963; O. Kaiser, ‘Dike und Sedaqa. Zur Frage nach der sittlichen Weltordnung: Ein theologische Präludium’, *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 7 (1965) 251–75; H. H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte des alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffs*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1968.

²⁰ W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., London: SCM Press, 1975, 1.239–49; Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., London: SCM Press, 1975, 1.370–83.

²¹ See, for example, R. Rendtorff, ‘Die theologische Stellung des Schöpfungsglaubens bei Deuterjesaja’, *ZThK* 51 (1954), 2–13; M. Bauks, ‘“Chaos” als Metapher für die Gefärdung der Weltordnung’, in B. Janowski, B. Ego and A. Krüger (eds.), *Das biblische Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontexte*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001, 431–64.

²² J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961, 107–60.

as we shall indicate below, this later meaning of the word *sedāqa* can be understood on the basis of its etymology if its theological associations are given due weight.

The *oldest* meaning of *sedāqa*, as judged by its use in the Song of Deborah (Judges 5:1–31), appears to be ‘victory’.²³ This meaning appears to be retained in some later texts, such as 1 Samuel 12:7 and Micah 6:5, although it is clear that the nuances associated with the term have altered. In this early passage, which contains many unusual grammatical forms and rare words, God is understood to have acted in ‘righteousness’ by defending Israel when its existence was threatened by an outside agency. This use of the term allows us to appreciate that the term ‘righteousness’ can possess both retributive and salvific aspects, without being reduced to, or exclusively identified with, either concept. Thus God’s act of judgement is retributive with regard to Israel’s enemies, but salvific with regard to God’s covenant people.

Underlying this understanding of *iustitia Dei* is the conceptual framework of the covenant: when God and Israel mutually fulfil their covenant obligations to each other, a state of righteousness can be said to exist – that is, things are *saddiq*, ‘as they should be’. There is no doubt that much of the Old Testament thinking about righteousness is linked with the notion of a covenant between God and Israel, demanding fidelity on the part of both parties if a state of ‘righteousness’ is to pertain.²⁴ The close connection between the themes of creation and covenant in the Old Testament points to a linking of the moral and salvific orders.²⁵

Similar understandings of ‘righteousness’ were common elsewhere in the ancient world. For example, contemporary Assyrian documents suggest that the king was to be seen as the guardian of the world order, who ensured the regularity of the world through his cultic actions.²⁶ The kinship of these notions can also be seen from the close semantic association between the ideas of ‘righteousness’ and ‘truth’ in the Aryan *rtá*

²³ G. Wildeboer, ‘Die älteste Bedeutung des Stammes *sdq*’, *ZAW* 22 (1902) 167–9. For related use of the feminine plural, see 1 Samuel 12:7; Psalm 103:6, Isaiah 45:24; Daniel 9:16; Micah 6:5.

²⁴ See the study of R. C. Ortlund, *Whoredom: God’s Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996. Note how the terms ‘righteousness’ and ‘covenant’ are linked at Nehemiah 9:32–3; Psalms 50:1–6; 111:1–10; Isaiah 42:6; 61:8–11; Hosea 2:16–20.

²⁵ As pointed out by B. W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994, 146–64.

²⁶ S. M. Maul, ‘Der assyrische König: Hüter der Weltordnung’, in K. Watanabe (ed.), *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East*, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1999, 201–14.

and Iranian *aša*.²⁷ Thus Israel's triumphant victories over her enemies were seen as proofs of the *sidqot 'adonay* (Judges 5:11) – the *iustitiae Dei* of the Vulgate. Even where the specific term 'righteousness' is not found, it seems that a clear connection is understood to exist between God's activity as a judge and Israel's victory over its neighbours (as at Judges 11:27, and possibly also 2 Samuel 18:31).²⁸

At this stage in the history of Israel, the 'righteousness' of the covenant does not appear to have been considered to have been under threat from within Israel itself, but merely from external agencies. However, with the establishment of Israel came the rise of prophecy, and the threat posed to the covenant relationship from within Israel itself became increasingly apparent. The eighth-century prophets Amos and Hosea stressed the importance of righteousness on Israel's part if it were to remain in a covenant relationship with its righteous God.²⁹ This insight was expressed by the prophets in terms of the *conditional election* of Israel as the people of God, For the prophets, *sedaqa* was effectively that condition or state required of Israel if its relationship with its God was to continue.³⁰ Although there are many instances where *sedaqa* can be regarded as corresponding to the concept of *iustitia distributiva*, which has come to dominate western thinking on the nature of justice (despite the rival claims of *iustitia commutativa*), there remains a significant number which cannot.

A particularly significant illustration of this may be found in the Old Testament attitude to the poor, needy and destitute. As we have noted, *sedaqa* refers to the 'right order of affairs' which is violated, at least in part, by the very existence of such unfortunates. God's *sedaqa* is such that God must deliver them from their plight – and it is *this* aspect of the Hebrew concept of *sedaqa* which has proved so intractable to those who attempted to interpret it solely as *iustitia distributiva*. It is

²⁷ On *rtá*, see H. Lüders, *Varuna I: Varuna und die Wasser*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997, 13–27, especially 27 (on the relation between the Vedic *rtá* and the Avestic *aša*); idem, *Varuna II: Varuna und das Rta*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997, 402–654. The Caucasian term *äcäg*, deriving from the Iranian, should also be noted in this context: see H. Hommel, 'Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit. Zur Geschichte und Deutung eines Begriffspaares', *Antike und Abendland* 15 (1969), 159–86; 182–3 n. 86.

²⁸ For some important issues that arise from this notion of God as 'judge', see A. Gamper, *Gott als Richter in Mesopotamien und im Alten Testament: Zum Verständnis einer Gebetsbitte*, Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 1966; P. Krawczack, 'Es gibt einen Gott, der Richter ist auf Erden!' (*Ps 58, 12b*): Ein exegetischer Beitrag zum Verständnis von Psalm 58, Berlin: Philo, 2001.

²⁹ H. Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique of the Eighth-Century Prophets*, New York: Peter Lang, 1993.

³⁰ Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 67; cf. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 1.370.

clear that this aspect of the Hebraic understanding of 'righteousness' cannot be understood in terms of an impartial judge who administers justice according to whichever party has broken a universally accepted law.

Hermann Cremer (1834–1903) argued that the only way of making sense of the Old Testament usage of *sedaqa* was to assume that, in its basic sense, the term refers to an actual relationship between two persons, and implies behaviour which corresponds to, or is consistent with, whatever claims may arise from or concerning either party to the relationship. The relationship in question is that presupposed by the covenant between God and Israel, which must be considered as the ultimate norm to which *sedaqa* must be referred. The Hebrew concept of *sedaqa* thus stands in a conceptual class of its own – a class which Cremer brilliantly characterised as *iustitia salutifera*.³¹

The strongly soteriological overtones of the term *sedaqa* can be illustrated from a number of passages in which 'righteousness' and 'salvation' are practically equated, particularly in many passages within Deutero-Isaiah:³²

I will bring my *sedaqa* near, it is not far away, And my salvation will not be delayed. (Isaiah 46:13)

A similar theme recurs throughout many Psalms, which stress and proclaim 'the reliable, foundational event of the covenant and the continuous salvific faithfulness of Yahweh in history and worship'.³³ This is not, it must be emphasised, to say that 'righteousness' and 'salvation' are treated as being synonymous; rather, they are regarded as being inextricably linked on account of the covenant relationship between God and Israel.³⁴ Semantic and theological considerations combine to give the Old Testament concept of the 'righteousness of God' such strongly soteriological overtones, which the western concept of *iustitia distributiva* cannot convey.

The later meaning of *sedaqa* in post-biblical Hebrew ('almsgiving') can thus be seen as the development of a trend already evident in passages

³¹ H. Cremer, *Die paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre im Zusammenhange ihrer geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1899. The German term 'Gemeinschaftstreue' has subsequently become increasingly used as a translation of *sedaqa*.

³² C. F. Whitley, 'Deutero-Isaiah's Interpretation of *sedeq*', *Vetus Testamentum* 22 (1972), 469–75. For a related pattern in 'Trito-Isaiah', see B. Rosendal, 'Guds og menneskers retfærdighed hos Tritojesaja', in B. Rosendal (ed.), *Studier i Jesajabogen*, Aarhus: Universitetsforlag, 1989, 94–116.

³³ H. J. Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986, 157–8.

³⁴ See, for example, R. Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1992.

such as Psalm 112:9 and Daniel 4:27 (Aramaic, 4:24: although this section of the book of Daniel is written in Aramaic, rather than Hebrew, the same word is used in each language). The ‘right (or intended) order of affairs’ is violated by the existence of the poor and needy; it is therefore a requirement of *sedāqa* that this be remedied by the appropriate means. Thus the sense which *sedāqa* assumes in the Targums and Talmud (‘benevolence’ in general, or ‘almsgiving’ in particular) can be seen to represent a natural development of the soteriological nuances which had been associated with the term from the earliest of times, rather than the final rupture of the semantic connection between a word and its root.³⁵ The etymology of the term on its own is inadequate to explain this development; the soteriological context within which it is deployed, especially when linked with the motif of the covenant between God and Israel, enables this extended meaning to be understood without difficulty.

The problems attending the translation of the Old Testament into any second language, whether modern English or Hellenistic Greek, are well illustrated by the application of semantic field theory. The *semantic field* of a word includes not merely its synonyms, but also its antonyms, homonyms and homophones.³⁶ As such, it is much broader than the *lexical field*, which may be defined very precisely in terms of words which are closely associated with one another.³⁷ The enormous size of such semantic fields may be illustrated from the associative field of the French word *chat*, which is estimated to consist of some two thousand words.³⁸ The translation of a word into a different language inevitably involves a distortion of its original semantic field, so that certain nuances and associations present in the original cannot be conveyed properly in a translation, while new nuances and associations not already present make their appearance. The word chosen to translate the original will itself have a well-established semantic field, so that an alien set of associations will come to

³⁵ Thus J. F. A. Sawyer, *Semantics in Biblical Research: New Methods of Defining Hebrew Words for Salvation*, London: SCM Press, 1972, 50. For a penetrating criticism of Sawyer’s work, see the review by P. Wernberg-Møller, *JThS* 24 (1973), 215–17.

³⁶ On which see S. Öhmann, ‘Theories of the “Linguistic Field”’, *Word* 9 (1953), 123–34; N. C. W. Spence, ‘Linguistic Fields, Conceptual Spheres and the *Weltbild*’, *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1961), 87–106; V. L. Strite, *Old English Semantic-Field Studies*, New York: Peter Lang, 1989.

³⁷ For some excellent studies, see L. M. Sylvester, *Studies in the Lexical Field of Expectation*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994; J. R. Schwyter, *Old English Legal Language: The Lexical Field of Theft*, Odense: Odense University Press, 1996.

³⁸ See the seminal study of P. Guiraud, ‘Les Champs morpho-sémantiques’, *Bulletin de la Société Linguistique de Paris* 52 (1956) 265–88, which defines such a field as ‘le complexe de relations de formes et de sens formé par un ensemble de mots’. See further P. Guiraud, *La Sémantique*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972.

be imposed upon the word in question as a result of the translation process itself.

This difficulty is well illustrated in the two non-contiguous semantic transitions of importance to our study. In each case, a Hebrew word is replaced by a Latin equivalent in the Vulgate translation of the Old Testament. The state of biblical scholarship during the Middle Ages was such that it was the Vulgate, rather than the Hebrew original, which became normative for medieval theology.³⁹ Most theologians of the period were unaware of the semantic issues involved, not having access to the Hebrew original (and probably, in any case, being unable to understand the older language). In each case, the transition from Hebrew to Latin involves an intermediate Greek term in the Septuagint (LXX) translation of the Hebrew text, which itself introduces new issues. The two transitions are:

‘righteousness’: *sedaqa* → *dikaiosyne* → *iustitia*;
 ‘to justify’: *hasdiq* → *dikaioun* → *iustificare*.

We shall consider these semantic transitions individually.

1.1.1 ‘Righteousness’: *sedaqa* → *dikaiosyne* → *iustitia*

The considerable influence of Greek philosophy and culture upon Christian thought in its formative period has been well documented.⁴⁰ This influence is also mediated through the LXX, whose origins date from the beginning of the third century BC.⁴¹ The term *dikaiosyne* had by then acquired a generally Aristotelian sense, so that by *dikaiosyne* we may understand something very similar to *iustitia distributiva* – the notion of ‘giving persons their due’.⁴² Aristotle’s ethical thinking is to be set in the context of the political community, the *polis*, so that ‘righteousness’ is defined teleologically, in terms of the well-being which it brings to the

³⁹ For a survey of the knowledge of Hebrew in the Middle Ages, see B. Smalley, ‘Andrew of St Victor, Abbot of Wigmore: A Twelfth Century Hebraist’, *RThAM* 10 (1938), 358–74; idem, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970, 112–95. For the manuscripts on which such studies are based, see C. Sirat, *Du Scribe au livre: les manuscrits hébreux au Moyen Age*, Paris: CNRS Editions, 1994.

⁴⁰ See, for example, H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

⁴¹ See S. Olofsson, *God is my Rock: A Study of Translation Technique and Theological Exegesis in the Septuagint*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990.

⁴² For a useful general survey, see E. A. Havelock, ‘DIKAIOSUNE: An Essay in Greek Intellectual History’, *Phoenix* 23 (1969), 49–70. The best study at present is B. Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal: Community, Justice, and Conflict in Aristotelian Political Thought*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

political community as a whole.⁴³ Lower beings, such as the animals, and higher beings, such as the gods, were excluded from Aristotle's discussion of *dikaiosyne* precisely because they were not members of the contracting political community.⁴⁴ The sphere of *dikaiosyne* is defined as that of the *polis*, so that the concept of the 'righteousness of God' has no immediate practical significance. The contrast with the Old Testament notion of Israel as a covenant community will be evident; both Aristotle and the Old Testament presuppose a covenant community as the basis for an understanding of 'righteousness'; the 'covenants' in question are, however, quite distinct, not least in the manner in which they implicate – or fail to implicate – God in human affairs.⁴⁵

It is evident that Aristotle's understanding of 'righteousness' is quite different from that signified by the Hebrew word *sedāqa*. In particular, *dikaiosyne* is now a fundamentally secular concept incapable of assuming the soteriological overtones associated with the Hebrew term. While the translators of the LXX appear to have attempted consistency in this translation of Hebrew terms,⁴⁶ they were unable to accommodate the meaning of *sedāqa* by the simple substitution of *dikaiosyne* in every case. Of particular interest is the translation of *sdq* in the construct form (e.g., at Leviticus 19:36, Deuteronomy 25:15 and Ezekiel 45:10). Here, the Hebrew clearly has the sense of 'accurate' – that is, in the case of Leviticus 19:36, the weights are 'as they are intended to be' – namely, accurate. The LXX, however, translates this phrase as the 'weights of righteousness.' This phrase could easily be misunderstood as possessing developed cultic or religious overtones, when it clearly denotes nothing more than accurate weights. Similarly, the LXX 'sacrifices of righteousness' (Deuteronomy 33:19; Psalms 4:6; 51.21) are essentially 'correct sacrifices' – that is, those which are 'in order' under the cultic prescriptions of the covenant, rather than sacrifices which are to be thought of as ethically 'righteous' in themselves.

The basic meaning of the *sdq* group as 'conformity to a requirement', illustrated by the use of *sdq* in the construct form, caused some difficulty

⁴³ Aristotle, *Politics* I, 1253a 2–3.

⁴⁴ For an older perspective, see H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*, 2nd edn, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

⁴⁵ For some of the issues that second-century writers faced in dealing with such concerns, see E. Peretto, *La giustizia: Ricerca su gli autori cristiani del secondo secolo*, Rome: Edizioni Marianum, 1977.

⁴⁶ For the difficulties they faced, see S. Olofsson, *The LXX Version: A Guide to the Translation Technique of the Septuagint*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990. Older studies of interest include H. S. Gehman, 'The Hebraic Character of LXX Greek', *VT* 1 (1951), 81–90; H. M. Orlinsky, 'The Treatment of Anthropomorphisms and Anthropopathisms in the Septuagint of Isaiah', *Hebrew Union College Annual* 27 (1956), 193–200.

for the LXX translators, in that there was no satisfactory Greek equivalent for this grammatical form. While the *dik* lexical group appears to have been considered capable of translating the *sdq* group in the majority of cases, the soteriological connotations of *sedāqa* were occasionally so strong that it could not be translated by *dikaïosyne*, the translators being forced to use *eleemosyne* – in other words, ‘mercy’.⁴⁷ This would be expected to have at least one very significant consequence for Greek readers of the Old Testament, unfamiliar with its Hebrew original; here they might encounter a reference to God’s *dikaïosyne*, there to God’s *eleemosyne* – yet the same Hebrew word, *sedāqa*, lies behind both. A reader who was unaware that the same Hebrew word was being ‘translated’ in each case might thus conceivably set God’s ‘righteousness’ and ‘mercy’ in opposition, where no such tension is warranted on the basis of the text itself.

For the first fifteen hundred years of its existence, the western church’s theologians depended mainly upon Latin translations of the Bible, chiefly the Vulgate, for their theological deliberations. As most theologians of the period did not have access to the original Hebrew version of the Old Testament – if they knew any Hebrew in the first place – their interpretation of such Latin theological terms as *iustitia Dei* and *iustificare* would ultimately be based upon the Latin version of the Bible available to them.⁴⁸ It is therefore of importance to appreciate the difficulties attending the translation of essentially Hebraic concepts, such as ‘justification’, into a Latin linguistic and conceptual framework.⁴⁹

By the second century AD, the Latin term *iustitia* had acquired well-established juristic connotations which were to exert considerable influence over future theological interpretation of such notions as *iustitia Dei* – the ‘righteousness of God.’ The Ciceronian definition of *iustitia* as *reddens unicuique quod suum est* (‘giving someone their due’) had become normative.⁵⁰ As van Zyl notes:⁵¹

⁴⁷ For example, Psalms 24:5; 33:5; 103:6. The problem is particularly evident in Deutero-Isaiah; see J. W. Olley, ‘Righteousness’ in the Septuagint of Isaiah: A Contextual Study, Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979, 65–78.

⁴⁸ For the resurgence of Hebraic scholarship in the sixteenth century, see T. Willi, ‘Der Beitrag des Hebräischen zum Werden der Reformation in Basel’, *ThZ* 35 (1979), 139–54; H. P. Rüger, ‘Karlstadt als Hebräist an der Universität Wittenberg’, *ARG* 75 (1984), 297–309.

⁴⁹ For discussion of how Christian Latin – including that of the Vulgate – coped with the linguistic demands it faced, see V. Binder, *Sprachkontakt und Diglossie: Lateinische Wörter im griechischen als Quellen für die lateinische Sprachgeschichte und das Vulgärlatein*, Hamburg: Buske, 2000.

⁵⁰ Cicero, *Rhetoricum libro duo* II, 53: ‘Iustitia virtus est, communi utilitate servata, suam cuique tribuens dignitatem.’ Cf. Justinian, *Institutio* I, 1: ‘Iustitia est constans et perpetua voluntas suum unicuique tribuens.’ On Cicero’s fundamental notion of *iustitia*, see D. H. van Zyl, *Justice and Equity in Cicero*, Pretoria: Academica Press, 1991.

⁵¹ Van Zyl, *Justice and Equity in Cicero*, 34.

The golden thread running through all of Cicero's thought on moral philosophy is the need, and indeed the desire, of all persons to achieve 'the greatest good' (*summum bonum*). This is done by a leading a virtuous, moral, and ethically acceptable life in accordance with the 'cardinal virtues' of wisdom, justice, fortitude, and self-restraint. Its purpose is to bring man back to his true nature (*natura*), in conformity with reason, justice, and equity. In this regard, Cicero is essentially a moralist and an idealist, who links his moral philosophy inextricably with his approach to law and good government as prerequisites for a stable and harmonious society.

In effect, the Ciceronian definition encapsulates the western concept of *iustitia distributiva*, the 'due' of each person being established through the *iuris consensus*, and embodied in *ius*.⁵² The tension between this concept of 'righteousness' and that of the Old Testament will be evident. There is no fundamental appeal to a covenant between God and humanity as determinative of ethical or legal norms or conventions.

The most important book of the Old Testament, as judged by its influence upon the development of the Christian doctrine of justification, is the Psalter, the subject of major commentaries by Augustine, Peter Lombard and Luther, to name but three. The Vulgate, as we know it, contains Jerome's translation of the Hebrew books of the Old Testament, with the exception of the Psalter. The Psalter found in the Vulgate is the *Psalterium Gallicum*, Jerome's second revision of the Old Latin Psalter, itself based upon Origen's recension of the LXX version.⁵³ His later *Psalterium iuxta hebraicam veritatem* never gained general acceptance. The difference between the two Psalters may be illustrated from their translations of Psalm 24:5 (Vulgate, 23:5):

Psalterium Gallicum:

. . . accipiet benedictionem a Domino et *misericordiam* a Deo salvatore suo.

Psalterium iuxta hebraicam veritatem:

. . . accipiet benedictionem a Domino et *iustitiam* a Deo salutari suo.

Here the Gallic Psalter follows the LXX, and the *Psalterium iuxta hebraicam veritatem* the original Hebrew. The *Psalterium Gallicum* appeals to God's mercy (*misericordia*) for salvation; the *Psalterium iuxta hebraicam veritatem* appeals to God's righteousness (*iustitia*). The theological implications of this could have been considerable, not to mention the confusion that could arise from such fundamental disagreements.

Although it is clear that considerable confusion could potentially have arisen through such translations, two important factors served to greatly reduce this possibility.

⁵² F. Wieacker, *Römische Rechtsgeschichte: Quellenkunde, Rechtsbildung, Jurisprudenz und Rechtsliteratur*, Munich: Beck, 1988.

⁵³ For details of the two translations, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings and Controversies*, London: Duckworth, 1975.

1. The Vulgate itself is not consistent in its translation of the LXX. Thus the LXX *eleemosyne*, translating *sedaqa*, is translated into Latin as *iustitia* at Psalm 35:24 and elsewhere. It is almost as if the translation of the Greek has been corrected in the light of the original Hebrew, even though there are no persuasive arguments for believing that any such comparison took place. The reasons for this inconsistency are not clear.

2. The two passages in the Psalter which appear to have exercised the greatest influence over western conceptions of *iustitia Dei* are Psalm 31:1 (Hebrew and Vulgate, 30:2) and 71:2 (Vulgate, 70:2).⁵⁴ In both these passages, the Psalmist appeals to God, acting according to righteousness, for deliverance:

In you, O Lord, do I take refuge,
Let me never be put to shame.
In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me.

In both cases, the LXX translated *sedaqa* as *dikaiosyne*, and the Vulgate thence as *iustitia*. The strongly soteriological sense of the Hebrew root lying behind the Latin term *iustitia* in this specific context could thus be appreciated, as is borne out by the study of the exegesis of such passages in the early medieval period.

1.1.2 'To justify': *hasdiq* → *dikaion* → *iustificare*

In turning to consider the Hebrew term *hasdiq*, usually translated 'to justify', it is essential to note that it never, at any point in the canonical books of the Old Testament, bears the negative sense 'to condemn' or 'to punish', its primary sense apparently being 'to vindicate', 'to acquit', or 'to declare to be in the right'.⁵⁵ The difficulty faced by the LXX translators was that the corresponding Greek verb *dikaion* differed from *hasdiq* in two important respects.

1. In its classical usage, *dikaion* with a *personal* object almost invariably seems to be applied to someone whose cause is *unjust*, and thus bears the meaning of 'to do justice to' – that is, 'to punish'. Although it is possible to adduce occasional classical references in which *dikaion* may conceivably be interpreted as assuming a *positive* sense – that is, to 'right an injustice suffered'⁵⁶ – it must be emphasised that this is extremely rare. In general,

⁵⁴ See the study of H. Bornkamm, 'Iustitia Dei in der Scholastik und bei Luther', *ARG* 39 (1942), 1–46.

⁵⁵ See N. M. Watson, 'Some Observations Concerning the Use of *Dikaioo* in the Septuagint', *JBL* 79 (1960), 255–66.

⁵⁶ For example, Polybius III, xxxi, 9; cited in Olley, '*Righteousness*' in the *Septuagint of Isaiah*, 38.

the classical usage of *dikaion* is such that it is highly unusual to find it applied, with a personal object, in the sense of ‘to justify’ – and yet it is this positive sense which constitutes the *norm* for the Septuagintal use of the verb. Indeed, there are no known occurrences of *dikaion* in a negative sense in any part of the Septuagint for which there exists a Hebrew original.⁵⁷ It is therefore clear that the Septuagintal usage of the term represents a significant shift away from the classical meaning of the term towards that of the corresponding Hebrew term – a shift which might prove stultifying to a Greek reader of the Old Testament, not familiar with the Hebrew original. No example of the classical use of *dikaion* can be found within the LXX, and the normal meaning it assumes in the LXX can be adduced only in a few isolated and controversial passages in classical Greek literature.

2. In classical Greek, *dikaion* with a personal object *applied to a person whose cause is unjust* invariably assumes the negative meaning ‘to punish’. The Septuagintal use of the verb in an identical context demands that it assume a *positive* meaning – that is, ‘to justify’, ‘to declare to be in the right’, or ‘to acquit’. For example, Isaiah 5:22–3 (LXX) follows the wording of the Hebrew Massoretic text very closely. The substance of the complaint is that certain people are, for the sake of financial considerations, ‘justifying the wicked’. This complaint does not make sense if the classical sense of *dikaion* (e.g., as it is encountered at Sirach 42:2) is presumed to apply; if the unjust are punished – that is, have ‘justice done to them’ – there can be no cause for complaint. The complaint does, however, make sense if the term is presumed to have a Hebraic background, in that the substance of the complaint is then that certain people have been bribed to declare the guilty to be innocent. It is clear that the term *dikaion*, although of classical Greek provenance, has assumed a Hebraic meaning as a consequence of its being used to translate the *sdq* words. The Greek reader of the Old Testament, unfamiliar with the Hebraic background to such material, would find passages such as the above highly perplexing.

The *locus classicus* for the secular Greek use of the verb is Book V of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. If the classical Aristotelian understanding of the concept is applied to the Septuagintal translation of Isaiah 43:26, an apparent absurdity results. Israel is there invited to confess her sins, ‘so that she may be justified’. It is not clear why this should move Israel to confess her sins, since, in the classical sense of the verb, her punishment

⁵⁷ In apocryphal works, the secular Greek sense of the term is usually encountered, as at Sirach 42:2. Here the Greek phrase ‘justification of the ungodly’, so subtly nuanced in its Pauline sense, merely assumes the commonsense meaning of ‘the punishment of the wicked’.

will follow as a matter of course. Of course, if it is assumed that the Greek verb *dikaion* has here taken on the meaning of *hasdiq*, rather than conforming to secular Greek usage, the meaning becomes clear and comprehensible: Israel is invited to confess her sins, in order that she may be acquitted of them. A similar conclusion must be drawn in the case of Micah 6:11 (LXX), in which it is clear that the rhetorical question expects an answer in the *negative* – in other words, assuming a Hebrew, rather than Greek, meaning of the term.

It is therefore clear that, under the influence of the Hebrew original, the Septuagintal verb *dikaion* came to assume a meaning quite distinct from its secular Greek origins. Furthermore, such a meaning must have become widespread and accepted within Greek-speaking Judaism – otherwise, the LXX would have been incomprehensible at points. It is apparent that this inherent difficulty reflects the quite different semantic fields of the *sdq* and *dik* words.

A difficulty of a quite different nature arose in the translation of terms such as *hasdiq* or *dikaion* into Latin. The verb *iustificare* ('to justify'), employed for this purpose, was post-classical, and thus required interpretation. The general tendency among Latin-speaking theologians was to follow Augustine of Hippo (see 1.4) in interpreting *iustificare* ('to justify') as *iustum facere* ('to make righteous'). Augustine's etymological speculations have been the object of derision for some considerable time – for example, his impossible derivation of the name *Mercurius* from *medius currens*.⁵⁸ His explanation of the origins of the term *iustificare* is, however, quite plausible, for it involves the acceptable assumption that *-ficare* is the unstressed form of *facere*. While this may be an acceptable interpretation of *iustificare* considered in isolation, it is not an acceptable interpretation of the verb considered as the Latin equivalent of *dikaion*.

'Messieurs, l'Angleterre est une île.' The great French historian Jules Michelet prefaced his lectures on British history by pointing to a single geographical factor – that England was an island – which had such a decisive influence upon his subject, and was all too easily overlooked. As we begin our study of the development of the Christian doctrine of justification, it is necessary to observe that the early theologians of the western church were dependent upon Latin versions of the Bible, and approached their texts and their subject with a set of presuppositions which, it could be argued, owe at least as much to the specifics and peculiarities of Latin language and culture as to Christianity itself.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *De civitate Dei* VII, 14, CSEL 40.322.10–17.

⁵⁹ A further semantic transition which may be noted at this point has had a highly significant impact on a substantial section of the western Christian tradition since the sixteenth

The initial transference of a Hebrew concept to a Greek, and subsequently to a Latin, context points to a fundamental alteration in the concepts of ‘justification’ and ‘righteousness’ as the gospel spread from its Palestinian source to the western world.⁶⁰ The most significant such development, as we shall see, was the widespread assumption that the all-important theological notion of the ‘righteousness of God’ – which, for Paul, lay at the heart of the Christian gospel – was about God giving each person their due. And as Martin Luther would later point out, that meant condemning sinners such as him, and justifying those who were already righteous. What, he asked, was good news about that?

We have only touched on Paul’s contribution to the development of the western doctrine of justification. We must now turn to consider the role of the Pauline epistles in much greater detail.

1.2 Paul and the shaping of the Christian tradition

From the earliest times, Christian theologians have forged their theology through an obedient yet creative interaction with Scripture, with the Pauline epistles playing a particularly significant role in determining the contours of the emerging doctrine of justification in the West. The reasons for this are not difficult to discern: chief among them is the simple fact that the language of ‘justification’ is especially associated with Paul, and concentrated in the letters to Rome and Galatia. In one sense, the debates over justification within the western church may be regarded as an attempt to come to terms with the Pauline heritage, and to extract a coherent understanding of the grounds and nature of justification from this source.⁶¹

It is, however, necessary to appreciate that the church’s attempt to grasp Paul’s concept of justification is as a ship still at sea, rather than one which has entered its intellectual harbour. What is presented in this section is simply an overview of some of the themes that have dominated

century – namely, the transition of terms derived from Hebrew, Greek and Latin into *English*. For historical reasons, English developed two roots capable of expressing the Latin concept *iustitia* – the term ‘justice’, deriving from the Latin via a French intermediary, and ‘righteousness’, deriving from Anglo-Saxon roots. Although arguably equivalent in some ways, the two terms have come to have quite different connotations. ‘Justice’ has primarily legal connotations, whereas ‘righteousness’ tends to be associated with personal morality.

⁶⁰ See further H. Thielicke, ‘Ius divinum und ius humanum’, in G. Kretschmar and B. Lohse (eds.), *Ecclesia und Res Publica*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961, 162–75.

⁶¹ For an excellent summary of the debates, with good bibliographies, see J. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

the western theological tradition as it sought to make sense of this fundamental resource. It can only be descriptive, and makes no pretence at being prescriptive. Biblical scholars are cited to illustrate the importance of the debates and their possible outcomes; in no way can these matters be considered to have been settled. The entire subject matter of this book can be regarded as an extended attempt to interpret Paul correctly, and to erect such theological superstructure as may be thought necessary upon its basis.

Paul's use of the concept of justification is focussed particularly on two letters – Romans and Galatians – in which it plays a critical and constructive role in clarifying the connections and distinctions between Christianity and Judaism, particularly with regard to the relation of the 'works of the law' and 'faith'.⁶² To speak of Paul's concept of 'justification' is perhaps misleading; the idea is expressed as a noun (*diakaisiōsis*) only twice in the Pauline letters. For Paul, justification is a divine action, and is thus to be expressed as a verb (*dikaion*).⁶³ The Pauline vocabulary relating to justification is grounded in the Old Testament, and seems to express the notion of 'rightness' or 'rectitude' rather than 'righteousness'.⁶⁴ The Old Testament prefers the verb, rather than the noun, presumably thereby indicating that justification results from an action of God, whereby an individual is set in a right relationship with God – that is, vindicated, or declared to be in the right. Paul echoes this emphasis, using the verb 'to justify' to designate God's powerful, cosmic and universal action in effecting a change in the situation between sinful humanity and God, by which God is able to acquit and vindicate believers, setting them in a right and faithful relation to him.⁶⁵

It has, however, proved problematical to integrate Paul's statements on justification into a coherent theological system. While Heikki Räisänen's thesis that Paul was neither a systematic nor a consistent thinker⁶⁶ has

⁶² This is best construed as apologetic, rather than polemical, in tone: see W. S. Campbell, 'The Romans Debate', *JST* 10 (1981), 9–28.

⁶³ The verb is found 23 times, 8 in Galatians and 15 in Romans. The noun is found only in Romans.

⁶⁴ This point is made by a number of commentators. B. F. Westcott, *St Paul and Justification*, London: Macmillan, 1913, 38, suggests that 'rightness' is the fundamental theme of Paul's view of the gospel. See further L. E. Keck, *Paul and His Letters*, 2nd edn, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988, 110–20; R. K. Moore, *Rectification ('Justification') in Paul, in Historical Perspective, and in the English Bible*, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002.

⁶⁵ See D. A. Campbell, *The Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3.21–26*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992.

⁶⁶ H. Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 2nd edn, Tübingen: Mohr, 1987, xi. See the positive comments of A. J. M. Wedderburn, 'Paul and the Law', *SJT* 38 (1985), 613–22.

met with considerable resistance,⁶⁷ it remains difficult to integrate Paul's statements on justification into a coherent whole without recourse to subtle nuancing, strategic emphasis or selective attention. For example, Karl Donfried has recently suggested that the key Pauline concepts of justification, sanctification and salvation may be accommodated within a rather neat past–present–future framework, as follows:⁶⁸

justification: a past event, with present implications (sanctification);
sanctification: a present event, dependent upon a past event (justification), which has future implications (salvation);
salvation: a future event, already anticipated and partially experienced in the past event of justification and the present event of sanctification, and dependent upon them.

Despite its admirable neatness, this approach is clearly inadequate. For example, within the Pauline corpus, justification has future, as well as past, reference (Romans 2:13; 8:33; Galatians 5:4–5), and appears to relate to both the beginning of the Christian life and its final consummation. Similarly, sanctification can also refer to a past event (1 Corinthians 6:11), or a future event (1 Thessalonians 5:23). And salvation is an exceptionally complex idea, embracing not simply a future event, but something which has happened in the past (Romans 8:24; 1 Corinthians 15:2), or which is even taking place now (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Justification language appears in Paul with reference to both the inauguration of the life of faith, and also its final consummation. It is a complex and all-embracing notion, which anticipates the verdict of the final judgement (Romans 8:30–4), declaring in advance the verdict of ultimate acquittal. The believer's present justified Christian existence is thus an anticipation of and advance participation in deliverance from the wrath to come, and an assurance in the present of the final eschatological verdict of acquittal (Romans 5:9–10).

So is the concept of justification of central importance to Paul? The question of the precise role of the concept of justification to Paul's understanding of the gospel remains intensely controversial within modern Pauline scholarship. Martin Luther regarded it as central, not simply to the apostle's theology, but to the proclamation of the Christian gospel as a whole, a judgement which some leading Protestant theologians maintain to this day.⁶⁹ While some recent writers have endorsed Luther's position,

⁶⁷ Most notably, see T. E. van Spanje, *Inconsistency in Paul? A Critique of the Work of Heikki Räisänen*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999.

⁶⁸ Donfried, 'Justification and Last Judgement in Paul'. See also Cosgrove, 'Justification in Paul'; Seifrid, *Justification by Faith*.

⁶⁹ Most notably, Jüngel, *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen als Zentrum des christlichen Glaubens*.

others have been somewhat more critical of this traditional Lutheran stance, seeing the centre of gravity of Paul's thought as lying elsewhere. On their reading of Paul, it is actually quite difficult to identify *any* centre to his thought, not least because there is disagreement among scholars as to what the idea of a 'centre' actually means. A principle of coherence? A summarising principle? A criterion of authenticity?⁷⁰ These difficulties stand in the path of any attempt to reach agreement on the importance of justification to Paul's thought. Three broad positions may be discerned within recent scholarship on this question.⁷¹

1. Justification by faith is of central importance to Paul's conception of Christianity. As noted above, this position has strong historical associations with Martin Luther, and it is perhaps not totally surprising that it is echoed by many modern German Lutheran New Testament scholars. This school of thought tends to regard justification as the real theological centre of gravity within Paul's thought, and is critical of any attempt to treat it as being of lesser importance. Justification by faith is not simply concerned with clarifying the Christian gospel in relation to first-century Judaism; it addresses the fundamental question of how sinful human beings can find favour or acceptance in the sight of a righteous God.⁷²

Nevertheless, differences can be discerned within this broad approach. For example, Bultmann adopts what is recognisably a Lutheran position, stressing the positive importance of faith, while at the same time interpreting Paul's 'justification' language in existentialist terms. On the other hand, C. E. B. Cranfield takes what appears to be a more Reformed position on this matter (although it must be noted that this appears to be the outcome rather than the presupposition of his reflections), noting the continuing importance of the law for Paul.⁷³

2. Justification by faith is a 'subsidiary crater' (Albert Schweitzer) in Paul's overall presentation and understanding of the Christian gospel. The origins of this view may be traced back to the nineteenth century,

⁷⁰ For related problems in identifying a literary or theological 'centre' in other biblical writings, see G. Fohrer, 'Der Mittelpunkt einer Theologie des Alten Testaments', *ThZ* 24 (1968), 161–72; K. Backhaus, 'Die Vision vom ganz Anderen: Geschichtlicher Ort und theologische Mitte der Johannes-Offenbarung', in K. Kertelge (ed.), *Theologie als Vision: Studien zur Johannes-Offenbarung*, Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2001, 10–53.

⁷¹ See, for example, C. J. A. Hickling, 'Centre and Periphery in the Thought of St Paul', *StB* 3, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1978, 199–214.

⁷² See, for example, H. Bornkamm, *Paul*, New York: Harper & Row, 1971; E. Käsemann, 'The Righteousness of God' in Paul', in *New Testament Questions of Today*, London: SCM Press, 1969, 168–82; Kertelge, 'Rechtfertigung' bei Paulus; C. Müller, *Gottesgerechtigkeit und Gottesvolk*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964.

⁷³ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975.

especially the writings of William Wrede. Wrede argued that justification by faith was simply a polemical doctrine, designed to neutralise the theological threat posed by Judaism. Having neutralised this threat, Paul was then able to develop the positive aspects of his own thought (which, for Wrede, centred on the idea of redemption in Christ). The real emphasis of Paul's thought thus lies elsewhere than justification. Among those who adopt this position, the following may be noted (along with their views on where the centre of Paul's thought really lies): Schweitzer (the rising and dying of the believer with Christ),⁷⁴ R. P. Martin (reconciliation with God),⁷⁵ and E. P. Sanders (believing participation in Christ).⁷⁶

3. A third view may be regarded as a compromise between these two views. Justification by faith is regarded as one of a number of ways of conceptualising what God has achieved for believers in and through Christ.⁷⁷ The centre of Paul's thought does not lie with justification as such; rather it lies with the grace of God. But justification is one of a number of ways of describing this grace (in juridical terms of unconditional pardon and forgiveness). It is thus central in one sense (in that it is a way of expressing the core of the gospel), and not central in another (in that it is only one way, among others, of expressing this core).

We have already noted that there is a close semantic connection between terms such as 'justification' (*dikaiosis*) and 'righteousness' (*dikaiosyne*) in Paul's thought. The idea of the revelation of the righteousness of God is obviously of major importance to Christian reflection on the grounds and means of salvation. It is therefore entirely to be expected that there has been an extensive and complex history of interpretation of this term within the western Christian tradition. Augustine of Hippo argued that 'the righteousness of God' referred, not to the personal righteousness of God (in other words, the righteousness by which God is himself righteous), but to the righteousness which he bestows upon sinners, in order to justify them (in other words, the righteousness which comes from God).

This interpretation of the phrase seems to have dominated the western theological tradition until the fourteenth century, when writers such as Gabriel Biel began to reinterpret it in terms of 'the righteousness by

⁷⁴ Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*.

⁷⁵ R. P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981.

⁷⁶ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, London: SCM Press, 1977, 467–8.

⁷⁷ See, for example, J. Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965. See also his earlier discussion of the conceptual equivalence of 'the righteousness of God' and 'the salvation of God': J. Jeremias, *Der Opfertod Jesu Christi*, Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1963, 19.

which God is himself righteous' – an interpretation which led to Luther's sustained engagement with the issue around 1515. Such an understanding of the nature of the righteousness of God has continued to find service in the modern period, especially on the part of Lutheran interpreters of Paul. Two such interpreters may be considered in a little more detail – Rudolf Bultmann and Ernst Käsemann.

Bultmann, basing himself especially on Romans 10:3 and Philippians 3:9, argued that the 'righteousness of God' was not a moral, but a relational, term. The believer is counted as being righteous, on account of his or her faith. The term 'righteousness of God' represents a genitive of authorship. Whereas Judaism regarded the bestowal of this righteousness as part and parcel of the future eschatological hope, something which would happen at the end of history, Bultmann argues that Paul is declaring that this righteousness is imputed to believers in the present time, through faith.⁷⁸

Käsemann subjected Bultmann's interpretation to a penetrating criticism, on a number of grounds. First, he argued that Bultmann had fallen into the trap of a radical individualism, based on his anthropocentric approach to theology. Bultmann was mainly concerned with questions of human existence; he ought, according to Käsemann, to have concentrated on the purpose of God. Furthermore, by interpreting 'the righteousness of God' as a genitive of authorship, Bultmann had managed to drive a wedge between the God who gives and the gift which is given. Bultmann's approach isolates the gift from the giver, and concentrates upon the gift itself, rather than upon God himself. Käsemann comments thus: 'The Gift can never be separated from the Giver; it participates in the power of God, since God steps on to the scene in the gift.'

This lack of balance could be recovered by understanding 'righteousness' as referring to God himself, rather than to that which he gives. Käsemann then argues that the 'righteousness of God' refers to God in action. It refers to both God's power and God's gift. (Strictly speaking, then, Käsemann is not treating the 'righteousness of God' as a statement about God's attributes, but as a reference to God in action.) A cluster of phrases may help convey the sort of things that Käsemann has in mind here: 'salvation-creating power'; 'a transformation of [our] existence'; 'the power-character of the Gift'; 'a change of Lordship'. The basic theme that recurs throughout Käsemann's discussion is that of God's saving power

⁷⁸ Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus*; see also J. Reumann, *Righteousness in the New Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982; J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972; Hempel, *Rechtfertigung als Wirklichkeit*.

and action, revealed eschatologically in Jesus Christ. It merges a number of central Pauline themes, including those of victory through Christ, God's faithfulness to his covenant, and his giving of himself in power and action.⁷⁹

Käsemann's approach has been very influential in recent years, both positively and negatively. Basing himself on Käsemann, Peter Stuhlmacher argues that it is unacceptable to treat the 'righteousness of God' as if it were a purely theocentric notion or an exclusively anthropocentric idea. It brings together elements of both, as the embodiment of the saving action of God in Christ, which brings new life for believers in its wake. The righteousness of God is both demonstrated and seen in action in the redemptive event of Christ – both in terms of God's faithfulness to his covenant, and in terms of the salvific transformation of the believer.

Once more, an important debate is still under way, and has yet to be resolved. J. Reumann suggests that four main lines of interpretation of the 'righteousness of God' may be discerned, along with their respective modern champions, as follows:⁸⁰

1. An objective genitive: 'a righteousness which is valid before God' (Luther).
2. A subjective genitive: 'righteousness as an attribute or quality of God' (Käsemann).
3. A genitive of authorship: 'a righteousness that goes forth from God' (Bultmann).
4. A genitive of origin: 'humanity's righteous status which is the result of God's action of justifying' (C. E. B. Cranfield).

So in what way, according to Paul, does the 'righteousness of God' entail the justification of humanity? In recent years, a considerable debate on the relation of Paul's views on justification to those of first-century Judaism has developed, centring upon the writings of E. P. Sanders, especially *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), which was followed several years later by the more important *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (1983). Sanders' work represents a demand for a complete reappraisal of existing understandings of Paul's relation to the Judaism of his time. Sanders noted that Paul has too often been read through Lutheran eyes.

According to Luther's interpretation of Paul (which, in marked contrast to the Reformed standpoint, linked with Bullinger and Calvin, stresses the divergence between the law and the gospel), Paul criticised a totally

⁷⁹ Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*; idem, *Commentary on Romans*. See Zahl, *Die Rechtsfertigungslehre Ernst Käsemanns*, 58–62. See also S. K. Williams, 'The "Righteousness of God" in Romans', *JBL* 99 (1980), 241–90.

⁸⁰ Reumann, *Righteousness in the New Testament*, passim.

misguided attempt on the part of Jewish legalists to find favour and acceptance in the sight of God, by earning righteousness through performing works of the law. This view, Sanders argued, coloured the analysis of such Lutheran writers as Käsemann and Bultmann. These scholars, perhaps unwittingly, read Paul through Lutheran spectacles, and thus failed to realise that Paul had to be read against his proper historical context in first-century Judaism – a religion of grace, rather than of legalism.⁸¹

According to Sanders, Palestinian Judaism at the time of Paul could be characterised as a form of ‘covenantal nomism’. The law is to be regarded as an expression of the covenant between God and Israel, and is intended to spell out as clearly and precisely as possible what forms of human conduct are appropriate within the context of this covenant. Righteousness is thus defined as behaviour or attitudes which are consistent with being the historical covenant people of God.⁸² ‘Works of the law’ are thus not understood (as Luther suggested) as the means by which Jews believed they could gain access to the covenant; for they already stood within it. Rather, these works are an expression of the fact that the Jews already belonged to the covenant people of God, and were living out their obligations to that covenant.

Sanders thus rejects the opinion that ‘the righteousness which comes from the law’ is ‘a meritorious achievement which allows one to demand reward from God and is thus a denial of grace’. ‘Works of the law’ were understood as the basis, not of entry to the covenant, but of maintaining that covenant. As Sanders puts it, ‘works are the condition of remaining “in”, but they do not earn salvation’. If Sanders is right, the basic features of Luther’s interpretation of Paul are incorrect, and require radical revision.

So what, then, is Paul’s understanding of the difference between Judaism and Christianity, according to Sanders? Having argued that Jews never believed in salvation on account of works or unaided human effort, what does Sanders see as providing the distinctive advantage of Christianity over and against Judaism? Having argued that it is not correct to regard Judaism as a religion of merit and Christianity as a religion of grace, Sanders argues that Judaism perceives the hope of the Jewish people for salvation as resting upon ‘their status as God’s covenant people who possess the law’, whereas Christians believe in ‘a better righteousness based solely upon believing participation in Christ’. Paul, like Judaism, was concerned with the issue of entering into and remaining within the

⁸¹ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*; idem, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*. See further Dunn, ‘The New Perspective on Paul’; Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith*; Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*.

⁸² For a related theme at Qumran, see Betz, ‘Rechtfertigung in Qumran’.

covenant. The basic difference is Paul's declaration that the Jews have no national charter of privilege; membership of the covenant is open to all who have faith in Christ, and who thus stand in continuity with Abraham (Romans 4).

This approach is not without difficulties.⁸³ First, Sanders is rather vague about why Paul is convinced of the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Judaism is presented as being wrong, simply because it is not Christianity. They are different dispensations of the same covenant. But, as Sanders' critics have noted, Paul seems to regard Christianity as far more than some kind of dispensational shift within Judaism; salvation-history does not account for all that Paul says, much less for the passion with which he says it.⁸⁴

Second, Sanders suggests that both Paul and Judaism understand works as the principle of continuing in salvation through the covenant. Yet Paul appears to regard good works as evidential, rather than instrumental. In other words, they are demonstration of the fact that the believer stands within the covenant, rather than instrumental in maintaining him within that covenant. One enters within the sphere of the covenant through faith. There is a radical new element here, which does not fit as easily with existing Jewish ideas as Sanders seems to imply. Sanders may well be right in suggesting that good works are both a *condition for* and a *sign of* remaining within the covenant. Paul, however, sees *faith* as the necessary and sufficient condition for and sign of being in the covenant, with works as (at best) a sign of remaining within its bounds.

Third, Sanders tends to regard Paul's doctrine of justification in a slightly negative light, as posing a challenge to the notion of a national ethnic election. In other words, Paul's doctrine of justification is a subtle challenge to the notion that Israel has special religious rights on account of its national identity. However, N. T. Wright has argued that Paul's doctrine of justification should be viewed positively, as an attempt to redefine who comes within the ambit of the promises made by God to Abraham.⁸⁵ Paul's teaching on justification by faith is thus seen as Paul's redefinition of how the inheritance of Abraham genuinely embraces the Gentiles apart from the law.

This modern debate is of considerable importance, as it marks a significant shift in interpretation of Paul. Most earlier Christian writers in

⁸³ For some important comments, see F. Thielman, *From Plight to Solution: A Jewish Framework for Understanding Paul's View of the Law in Galatians and Romans*, Leiden: Brill, 1989.

⁸⁴ See Gundry, 'Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul', 1–38.

⁸⁵ Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*. For an evaluation of Wright's approach, see C. C. Newman (ed.), *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright's "Jesus and the Victory of God"*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999.

the West did not explore Paul's relation with Judaism in exploring his doctrine of justification.⁸⁶ For most patristic and medieval writers, the idea of being justified by 'works of the law' was synonymous with the idea of achieving salvation by moral effort, or being accepted by God on account of one's religious or ethical achievements. The term 'works of the law' was not interpreted within a specifically Jewish context, but as a universalised category addressing the universal human tendency to self-justification and self-assertion.

A tradition of interpretation within Protestant Pauline scholarship, drawing its inspiration largely from Luther in the sixteenth century, argued for an absolute contradiction between justification by faith and human works in the Pauline corpus.⁸⁷ The phrase 'works of the law' is here understood to mean something like 'human achievement', losing its specific cultic meaning within its original Jewish context.⁸⁸ On this reading of Paul, 'faith' and 'works' are to be seen as mutually exclusive entities, designating two radically opposed ways of thinking about, and responding to, God. The way of works is seen as orientated towards human achievement, centred upon human righteousness, and based upon human merit. The way of faith is seen as radically opposed, orientated towards God's achievement in Christ, centred upon the righteousness of God, and based upon divine grace.

Yet many recent writers have suggested that this represents an inadequate understanding of a complex aspect of Paul's understanding of justification, which fails to do justice to the highly nuanced understanding of the relation of faith and works within Paul's thought, most notably expressed in the terse statement that 'not the hearers, but the doers of the law will be justified' (Romans 2:13). Some have sought to dismiss this as a vestige of Paul's Jewish phase, although this has failed to win general acceptance.

Perhaps the most important issue to emerge from recent Pauline interpretation in this area aims to clarify the relation between Paul's theme of 'justification by faith' and 'judgement by works'. There seems to be an apparent contradiction here, the resolution of which is made considerably more difficult by the fact that Paul can speak of this future judgement both negatively (as a warning against disobedience) and positively (as an encouragement for obedience). E. P. Sanders argues that Paul reproduces a characteristic first-century Jewish attitude, which could be summarised in the words: 'God judges according to their deeds those whom he saves

⁸⁶ See Roo, 'The Concept of "Works of the Law" in Jewish and Christian Literature'.

⁸⁷ See Kroeger, *Rechtfertigung und Gesetz*; Joest, *Gesetz und Freiheit*.

⁸⁸ See Roo, 'The Concept of "Works of the Law" in Jewish and Christian Literature'.

by his grace.’ Justification by faith resonates with the theme of grace – so why are believers going to be judged on the basis of their works (e.g., Romans 2:12; 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:15; 2 Corinthians 5:10), which resonates with the theme of human achievement? But this statement of the problem fails to deal with the fact that justification is seen, not as something in the past, but as something with future reference (Romans 2:13; 8:33; Galatians 5:4–5). It is not simply a case of being justified in the past and judged in the future; there is a ‘not yet’ element to Paul’s teaching on justification, which Sanders cannot quite explain.

One possible explanation of the way in which justification and future judgement are related involves an enhanced sensitivity towards the different contexts which the Pauline letters presuppose.⁸⁹ Paul’s message of justification is directed towards audiences with very different backgrounds. The one doctrine finds itself applied practically for very different ends. The Corinthians appeared to be living in a state of delusion and spiritual arrogance; Paul’s objective is to break down their arrogance by warning them of judgement. Paul does not intend the message of judgement to be his last word, but rather the word they need to hear so long as they remain unaware of the full implications of the gospel. On the other hand, those who exist in a state of spiritual dejection or discouragement need reassurance of the unconditionality of grace. If this approach is correct, it implies that the theme of judgement by works is not Paul’s final word to his audience; it is his penultimate word, determined by the pastoral situation of his audience, and intended to shake up those who exploit (and thus distort) the gospel proclamation of grace. Yet the idea of a ‘penultimate’ word raises certain difficulties, not least over how one might be reassured that it is indeed God’s penultimate (and not final) word.

We shall return to consider the ‘new perspective’ on Paul later in this work, in assessing some of the challenges raised for the doctrine of justification in the later twentieth century. The debate is far from over. In this present section, we have noted some themes of debate which emerge from Paul’s epistles, and seen at least something of the manner in which they impacted on the western debates on the nature and means of justification. The purpose of this survey has been, not to establish Paul’s precise teaching on justification – which remains contested – but to indicate something about the vocabulary, conceptualities and issues associated with his presentation of the doctrine. Inevitably and properly, these have played a major, if not decisive, role in shaping Christian theological discussion down the ages.

⁸⁹ See here Watson, ‘Justified by Faith, Judged by Works: An Antimony?’

The remainder of this work will explore the way in which Paul's concept of justification was developed within the western theological tradition. In the case of this specific doctrine, the full exploration of its importance dates from the Middle Ages, rather than the patristic era. In this chapter, therefore, we shall consider the way in which the debates of the patristic period laid the foundations for this later consolidation, having particular regard to the significant contribution of Augustine of Hippo. To begin with, we may note some trends in the pre-Augustinian tradition.

1.3 The pre-Augustinian tradition

The patristic era is that of the exploration, and where possible the reduction, of the tension existing between the need to retain a traditional corpus of belief as the *regula fidei*,⁹⁰ and the need to expand and develop that corpus in the face of opposition from both within and without the Christian community. The earlier patristic period represents the age of the exploration of concepts, when the proclamation of the gospel within a pagan culture was accompanied by an exploitation of both Hellenistic culture and pagan philosophy as vehicles for theological advancement.⁹¹ The use of such concepts in Christian theology was not, however, without its risks; it was not sufficient merely to baptise Plato and Plotinus, for the tension which existed between the essentially Hebraic concepts which underlie the gospel and the Hellenism of the medium employed in its early formulation and propagation remains unresolved. While it is evident that some form of adaptation may be necessary in order to give the gospel more immediate impact on its introduction to an alien culture, it is equally evident that such an adaptation may result in both compromise and distortion of the characteristic and distinctive elements of the gospel. An excellent example of the influence of a Hellenistic milieu upon Christian theology is provided by the doctrine of the impassibility of God,⁹² which clearly suggests the subordination of a biblical to a philosophical view of God.

⁹⁰ G. G. Blum, *Tradition und Sukzession: Studien zum Normbegriff des Apostolischen von Paulus bis Irenaeus*, Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1963.

⁹¹ H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.

⁹² J. K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926; R. B. Edwards, 'The Pagan Doctrine of the Absolute Unchangeableness of God', *RelSt* 14 (1978) 305–13. For a criticism of this doctrine, see J. Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott: Das Kreuz Christi als Grund und Kritik christlicher Theologie*, Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1984, especially 256–8; W. McWilliams, 'Divine Suffering in Contemporary Theology', *SJTh* 33 (1980), 33–54; K. Surin, 'The Impassibility of God and the Problem of Evil', *SJTh* 35 (1982), 97–119.