

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 6

Volume 6 • Number 2 • October 1982

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews selected from publications
worldwide for an international readership,
interpreting the Christian faith for contemporary
living.*

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Published by
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS

If we in the West insist on keeping our blessings instead of sharing them, then we will, like other nations before us, have to lose our blessings for the remaining nations to receive them. God has not changed his plan in the last 4,000 years. But how much better not to lose but to use our blessings, without reserve, in order “to be a blessing to all the families of the earth”? That is the only way we can continue in God’s blessing. The expanding Kingdom is not going to stop with us. “This gospel must be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all people groups, and then shall the end come” ([Matthew 24:14](#)).

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Righteousness and Justice

Sidney Rooy

*Reprinted from Justice in the International Economic Order (1978),
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The stark drama of suffering, uncertainty, and indifference unfolds before a conscience-stricken world. Many clamor for justice. Others say it is too late. But it is no new story. Man’s history is shot through with the power of evil and its tragic consequences. Let me give two examples.

Jeremiah laments the sorrows of captive Zion. Judah is gone into captivity; she finds no rest. Her gates are desolate, her virgins raped. Her sons are slaves, her faith laughed at. All her people sigh; they seek bread. And to slowly realize, after all is said and done, that no one really cares is just too much. She cries aloud: “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?” Comes the great doubt: Has God forgotten too? Is all this his anger upon my sin?

Behold and see if there be any sorrow
like unto my sorrow
Which God has brought upon me ...
in his fierce anger.

([Lamentations 1:12](#))

Whole peoples today are victims of another captivity. Like Israel, some are God’s people. Before the crushing weight of what others call progress they often stand alone. Their world is coming apart. Many of them tend to see organized religion as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda writes:

I did not purchase property in heaven
Sold by priests, nor did I accept

The darkness fabricated by philosophers
For the uncaring, powerful rich.

I want to die with the poor,
Who had no time to think of death,
While being beaten down by those
Who have heaven all divided up and settled.¹

To all of this the Bible speaks its word:

But let justice roll down like waters
and righteousness as a mighty stream.

([Amos 5:24](#)) p. 261

He that is righteous, let him do righteousness still.

([Revelation 22:11c](#))

But what is this torrent of justice and righteousness that rushes down the mountains to the valleys of suffering and wickedness below? And who are the righteous ones doing righteousness still, the just ones doing yet more justice before the mighty coming of the Alpha and Omega, the Judge who gives each man his due?

We shall give three partial answers which in their cumulative effect may help us on the way to finding a more just road amidst the perplexities of the suffering, doubt, and injustice of our time.

I. JUSTICE IS RIGHTEOUSNESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IS JUSTICE

One of the first discoveries that our family enjoyed upon moving to Argentina and sharing worship with the people there was the new insight another language gave to Bible reading. The reading about rich people and poor people became terribly relevant to what we experienced every day. Soon we discovered that in the Spanish version both *righteousness* and *justice* are everywhere translated *justicia*, our word for justice. Suddenly the Bible was full of texts about “justice.” But why should that surprise us? Much later we learned that the English word *justice* does not occur in the New Testament of the King James Version. Rather the word *righteousness* is nearly universally used.² What makes this even more remarkable is that *justice* was used in this and other versions with some frequency in the Old Testament. Let us begin by asking why this is so.

A. Etymological Considerations

Several words, in both noun and verbal usages, provide a rich variety of nuance in the language of the Old Testament: legal judgment, correctness of life, a natural sense of right, statutes and commandments, radical salvation, mercy, loving kindness, clemency, benevolence, that which is due, divine or human rule. Many of these meanings, though not

¹ Pablo Neruda, *Canto General*, XV *Yo Soy*, xxi, “La Muerte”, in *Obras Completas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1956). Translation by Dianne Zandstra.

² The word *justice* also does not occur in the New Testament of the English revision of 1884, rarely in the American Standard Version of 1901, and sparsely in the more recent English and American versions.

all, are combined in our words *justice* and *righteousness*.³ The multidimensional character of these terms clearly indicates how basic their meanings are to the character of Christian faith and discipleship. p. 262

But the problem arises with the New Testament usage as it relates to our modern languages. Leaving several aspects aside for now,⁴ let us consider only what is subsumed under the original New Testament words, traditionally rendered *justice* and *righteousness* in our English versions. These Greek words come from one basic root, *deik*, which originally referred to stretching out the hand, thus “to show,” “to indicate,” “to posit,” “to establish.”⁵

For Jesus and the apostles, *justice* and *righteousness*, *justification* and the *equitable*, the *right* and *judgment* all come from the same root word (in Greek) and are expressed in eight derivatives, each with various shades of meaning. To them it was transparently clear that justification, righteousness, and justice were integrally part of the same reality. We, on the other hand, tend to make tight compartments for each idea. I think the following definitions generally represent how these three terms are perceived by Christians today.

1. *Justification* is that legal act of God that changes our status and which subsequently has implications for our religious life.
2. *Righteousness* is that spiritual quality which we receive and which subsequently has implications for our conduct.
3. *Justice* is the form in which we conduct ourselves in relation to our fellowmen and seek for them that to which they have a right.

But when one reads his Bible in Spanish (as in Greek), such neat categories tend to disappear. There one reads *justification*, *justificado*, *justicia*, *justo*.⁶ These all come from one root word, as in the language of the New Testament. In this formal sense, Spanish and other Latin languages are etymologically closer to the language of the earliest Christians. The Saxon-Germanic languages have chosen two different words to express aspects of the same concept. An investigation of certain theological implications of these terms is necessary to clarify these differences of formulation. p. 263

B. Theological Implications

³ Two basic words are also used in the Dutch (*rechtvaardigheid* and *gerechtigheid*) and in the German (*rechtfertigung* and *gerechtigkeit*). However, their usages in their respective Bible versions do not correspond to that of the English.

⁴ I am thinking particularly of *mishpat* and *hesedh*, whose meanings are often translated as *judgment* and *mercy*, respectively, and which are not included in the English words *justice* and *righteousness*. It ought to be added that when *hesedh* is translated *eléos* by the Septuagint, the sense of faithlessness (disloyalty) to the covenant is lost and a tendency to spiritualization has already occurred. *Hesedh* could then better have been translated by *pistis*, by *faithfulness* and not simply by *faith* which in English often lacks that basic sense of loyalty to the covenant. See F. J. Pop, *Palabras Biblicas y Sus Significados* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Escaton, 1972), translated from *Bijbelse Woorden en hun Beteekenis*, 1964.

⁵ Taken from Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. II, p.180.

⁶ These words are based directly on the use of the Latin *justificare* in the Vulgate which is followed by the Douay and then by later Roman Catholic editions of the New Testament. In the Douay version, for example, *justice* is nearly exclusively used. *Righteous* is used only five times in the New Testament and *righteousness* twice.

The definition of biblical concepts requires precision, but not at all in a modern scientific sense. Words signify attempts to capture meanings of living people and concrete events, of divine speech and creational mysteries. Amos, in a typically hebraic, poetic way, uses *justice* (*mishpat*) and *righteousness* (*tsedeqah*) as synonyms. You can interchange them without touching the heart-meaning of the passage. The Revelation text likewise could be read: “He that is just, let him do justice still,”⁷ without altering the author’s intent. That is to say, whether the texts translate *justice* or *righteousness*, the content of the word must be sought in the life of the passage, and not from preformed definitions. The two different words used by Amos include not only the legal and forensic connotations (just judgments), but also the need for concrete decisive action (defense of the poor). These are not two separate matters; rather they are two aspects of the same theological concern that men be imbued with righteousness—read *justice*—in the totality of their life.

The righteousness-justice that man needs is God’s righteousness-justice. God’s righteousness-justice, like his love, is transcendent and qualifies his essential otherness from us. But his righteousness-justice, like his love, is incarnate in Christ and realized through him. His righteousness-justice, which is given by his justifying act, does not occur and remain on a transcendent level quite apart from this earthly life. In Christ eternal justice is temporal justice.⁸ We know judgments in the dynamic encounter between good and evil.

There has been, I fear, a fateful narrowing-down of the full import of justice. Justice reflects the character of the one who names himself the righteous (read just) judge (see [Deuteronomy 32:3, 4](#)), but we have castrated its power in a needy world by spiritualizing it. We have conceived a “heavenly justice” (read righteousness) which receives God’s gracious pardon for our personal sins, which makes us “brand-new persons inside,”⁹ and which inspires us to be forgiving and kind to others. Then we give to earthly authorities (Christian or otherwise) the secular sword to administer an “earthly justice” to restrain crime and promote the external public order. The definitions (given above) of terms for righteousness and justice fall neatly into line: *righteousness* is “heavenly justice” and justice is earthly-ordered relationships. We forget that justice is a sort of p. 264 materialization of existence; i.e., it is the incarnation in time and space of God’s relation to his world; it is the creation-form of life in divinely given structures for society without which man cannot even exist.

We must emphasize the integral and active inter-relational character of our being made just (righteous). The thought of *judicial* righteousness may logically be distinguished from other aspects. However, it cannot in reality be separated from the rule of him who is both king and judge. Justice, as we shall note below, is an essential dimension of divine salvation.¹⁰ As such it should be clear that justice and righteousness alike signify a transcendent reality present both in creation and in redemption which takes on flesh-and-blood concreteness in ordinary historical experience. This is not to relativize divine prerogatives; rather it is the only way to take divine action in history with the seriousness it requires. Jahweh’s throne is established on “justice and righteousness”;

⁷ So it occurs in the Douay version.

⁸ See Jacques Ellul, *The Theological Foundation of Law* (London: SCM Press, 1960), p.39ff.

⁹ This translation is used in the *Living Bible*, [II Cor. 5:17](#).

¹⁰ See part III, “Justice is Restoration.” See also G. Quell and G. Schrenk, *Righteousness* (London: A. and C. Block, 1951), published section of *Theologisches Wörterbuch des Neuen Testaments*.

hence it qualifies also his dealing with the nations (cf. [Psalm 9, 11, 82, 96, 97, 98](#); [Amos 1:3–2:3](#); etc.).

These theological considerations have several crucial implications. Most important is to note that when the Bible speaks of justice and righteousness it often does so in the context of the covenant. One of the key words for justice (righteousness) in the Old Testament accentuates the loyalty and solidarity of that relationship covenanted by God with his people—a permanently continuing love demonstrated by his faithfulness to his people.¹¹ God's justice in this relationship is that he fulfills his promises. Ellul has said that the covenant is God's righteousness in motion.

It is not strange that God's righteousness-justice is indissolubly linked to that covenant. God's justice brings help and salvation to his people. [Hosea 2:19ff](#) expresses the permanency of his marriage relationship to his people: "And I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness (bf etsedeq), and in justice (bf mishpat), and in steadfast love (bf hesedh), and in mercies (bf rahṭ min). I will betroth thee unto me in faithfulness (be'ṭ munah) p. 265 ..." ¹² Note here the close association of meanings suggested by the juxtaposition of these words. The God of justice requires like justice from his people. To fulfill justice is "the condition made possible by the covenant and it is the promise and hope for renewal in the 'new covenant.'" ¹³ In the biblical vision, doing justice or being righteous is not merely a horizontal inter-personal relationship or only a social or private virtue; rather, it is the very essence of covenant-life because it is the covenant of the Lord of history who practices justice to the oppressed, the widow, and the orphan.

In the uses that we have briefly discussed it is clear that for etymological and theological reasons we can say: justice is righteousness and righteousness is justice.

II. JUSTICE IS POWER-IN-ACTION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IS LOVE-IN-ACTION

This is our second answer, and, as in the case of our first answer, the predicates are interchangeable.

It was Disraeli who said: "Justice is truth in action." Our texts likewise make that clear. The seer of Patmos says implicitly that being righteous (just) and doing righteousness

¹¹ *Hesedh* is faithful and concrete mercy based in covenant relationships. See [Deuteronomy 7:9, 12](#); [Isaiah 54:10](#) (where it is used synonymously with *covenant*); [1 Kings 8:23](#) (where keeping covenant and walking rightly are compared). The word signifies an unmerited act of goodness, roughly equivalent to grace in the New Testament. When *hesedh* is inadequately translated *eléos* in the LXX (see note 4 above), it gives more the idea of godliness, saintliness, pious compassion. Twenty of the twenty-five times that *eléos* occurs in the New Testament, it is the translation of *hesedh*, but loses the covenant depth. (F. J. Pop, *op. cit.*)

¹² See also [Micah 7:9](#), [Isaiah 46:12ff](#), [51:5](#), [59:17](#), [61:10ff](#); [Psalms 70:15](#), [98:2](#), where righteousness-justice signifies salvation. The equation of righteousness with salvation is still more explicit when the Septuagint uses *dikaïosune* as the translation of *hesedh*; cf. [Genesis 19:19, 20:13, 21:23, 24:27, 32:10](#), [Exodus 15:13, 34:7](#), [Proverbs 20:13](#) (Quell, *op. cit.*, p.30).

¹³ José Miguez-Bonino, *Christians and Marxists* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), pp.31, 35.

(justice, good, right) are concomitant realities. The injunction is not to be more righteous, but rather to do yet more righteousness (justice), as though that were the key to becoming more righteous (just). Amos uses more forceful, metaphorical language. He depicts semi-arid Palestine where sudden torrential rain transforms dry arroyos into raging, violent walls of water rushing down the mountainside: "Let justice roll down like waters."

Even in dry Palestine a few streams carry water the year around. These provide life-sustaining refreshment for people, animals, and plants. The second phrase of our text repeats the synonym in a different form: "... and let righteousness [flow] like an unfailing stream." Dynamic justice and righteousness are what God seeks. Not eternally repeated burnt and meal offerings nor ten thousand rivers of oil, but ever-flowing justice and righteousness. Not isolated nor repeated acts of moralistic virtue, but a living, unbroken embodiment of the norms of the covenant. [p. 266](#)

A. The Dynamics of Power-in-Action

Let us see how justice is power-in-action by viewing its relation to justification, which literally means "to make just," although traditionally we interpret it to mean "to declare just." The question is whether or how we ought to distinguish between justice and justification.

The Scriptural teaching on justification must always be seen in the light of the covenant. The richness of that key concept for biblical theology cannot be captured in a few words.¹⁴ Perhaps for that reason it is so widely disputed and so little understood. Of justification by faith, Paul Tillich once wrote:

The idea is strange to the man of today and even to Protestant people in the churches; indeed, as I have over and over again had the opportunity to learn, it is so strange to modern man that there is scarcely any way of making it intelligible to him.¹⁵

Not only is the concept little understood, but many perversions have become prevalent as well. As one man put it: "For God's sake (literally) be careful about justification by faith; it's the greatest escape mechanism in history."¹⁶

For Paul, God's righteousness (justice) relates dynamically to humanity and creation as a whole by imparting justice (righteousness). God's justification, like his creation, should be considered in its root meaning as a verbal noun, the action of "setting things right."

To proclaim divine righteousness means to proclaim that God sets things right; that it is of his nature and the nature of his covenant that he is a right-setting kind of God.¹⁷

Although the Scriptural analogy of the judge and court are helpful, it does not cover the fullness of the relationship signified. The illustration is inadequate for the reality. Let us compare this to the act of creation. An artist sets himself to create a work of art, a research engineer a new machine. He labors and strives to realize his goal. But this is wholly

¹⁴ Here the reader is referred to such authors as G. C. Berkouwer (*Faith and Justification*), H. Ridderbos (*Paulus*), etc.

¹⁵ Quoted in Arthur Miller, *The Renewal of Man* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1955), p.81.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ John Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972), p.229.

inadequate to describe God's act of creation. His word is power. To declare is to make dynamic, to make living, to accomplish. There is no declaration separated from realization. To say "let there be light" was enough. Light was there.

So it is with justification. When God says, "Let there be new men," it is done. God's power is at work. When God justifies we can say [p. 267](#) that we have been justified ([Romans 4:24](#)). The power of that redemptive word gives new and constantly renewing life under the royal reign of grace ([Romans 5:17](#)). God's righteousness is the power of new life in us so that "in Christ we might become the righteousness of God" ([II Corinthians 5:21](#)). The righteousness belongs to God, but the identification through the union with Christ is forceful. In Romans it is difficult to separate "justification" and "in Christ."¹⁸ That righteousness does not belong to the believer; it is not now his private possession; rather, it is that normative force-principle which possesses him, exercises divine authority over and through him, and defines to him his covenant obligations.

To use an etymological equivalent, man is rectified. As Miller puts it:

To be justified is to have life *rectified* so that it is not organized around the false and idolatrous center of the self (nor around any large or expanded idolatrous self such as family or nation) but moves upon its true and authentic fulcrum ... Christ reigns where self was, and man is restored from the prison of his autonomous selfhood to the spontaneous "new covenant" relationship to God and the neighbors.¹⁹

Thus the righteousness-justice of God effectively establishes his lordship over his covenant people. The Christian does not first of all become a brand-new person inside as if the ontology of the person or his psychological and neurological equipment were transformed. Rather, "if anyone is in Christ, new is creation," or more smoothly, "there is a whole new world, the old order is gone, and a new order has already begun."²⁰ The Christian already sees and participates in reality with a new perspective.

B. The Dynamics of Love-in-Action

Justice is God's power-in-action made effective through his justifying grace in Christ. That power becomes real and efficacious through his rulership, his reign over and through us. His judgments and commands become incarnate in human judgments and laws. This we will discuss below, but we want to emphasize here that without power human justice, like divine justice, is ineffective, it fails. As Pascal said, "Justice without power is impotent and power without justice is [p. 268](#) tyrannical."²¹ This points to the manner in which justice is carried out. To that we now turn, citing a few biblical examples.

Righteousness-justice is love-in-action. Here we want to first point to the Johannine literature. John clearly equates love and righteousness.

¹⁸ [Romans 8:10](#): "And if Christ is in you ... the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (ASV of 1901). See also G. Quell, *op. cit.* p.51. For an excellent study of the concept "in Christ" as union with Christ, consult L. Smedes, *All Things Made New* (Grand Rapids, Win. B. Eerdmans, 1970).

¹⁹ Arthur Miller, *op. cit.*, pp.91, 75.

²⁰ As the New English Bible has it (II Cor. 5:17). See J. Yoder *op. cit.*, pp.227–228. Cf. [Ephesians 6:15](#).

²¹ Quoted in Heinz-Horst Schrey, Hans Hermann Walz, and W. A. Whitehouse, *The Biblical Doctrine of Justice and Law* (London: SCM Press, 1955), p.18.

The man who does right (justice) is born of God.

([1 John 2:29](#), [3:7b](#))

Likewise he who loves his neighbor is born of God.

([1 John 4:7](#))

He who does justice knows God.

He who loves also knows God.

([1 John 4:7](#))

He who does not do justice, as he who does not love, does not know God—because God is love.

([1 John 3:10](#), [4:8](#))

John not only equates justice and love, he makes them the indispensable lived-out reality of knowing God.

This is no new doctrine. It is the universal message of the prophets. Jeremiah identifies doing justice and righteousness to the poor and needy with “knowing” God ([Jeremiah 22:13–16](#)). “He understands and knows me” who recognizes that “I am Jehovah who exercises love, justice, and righteousness” ([Jeremiah 9:23](#)). This is true for God; it is likewise his requirement for man. “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,” cries Hosea ([4:6](#)), but that has nothing to do with an intellectualization of the message; rather, they have not observed God’s commands—there is no justice. “What I want is love (loyalty, goodness), not sacrifice, knowledge of God, not holocausts” ([Hosea 6:6](#), Jerusalem Bible). This relation of love-loyalty to one’s fellow man is the unalterable condition of the covenant, of having communion with God. “Sow for yourselves justice, and you will reap what loyalty (love) deserves ... for it is time to seek Jehovah” ([Hosea 10:12](#)). This becomes the call to conversion for Israel—“Turn again, then, to your God. Hold fast to love (loyalty) and justice, and always put your trust in your God” ([Hosea 12:6](#), Jerusalem Bible).

Isaiah directly connects this love-in-action with the doing of righteousness by the messianic king ([isaiah 11:1–9](#)). He who is the root of Jesse receives the Spirit of Jehovah. He will not judge by what he sees or hears. Righteousness, justice, and faithfulness characterize his ministry. The pacification of all creation is possible only when the whole earth is full of this knowledge of the Lord. Knowing God is not theological reflection; it is doing justice and righteousness. Or, to say it the other way around: p. 269

Obedience is not the consequence of our knowledge of God, just as it is not a pre-condition for it; obedience is included in our knowledge of God. Or, to put it more bluntly: obedience is our knowledge of God.²²

Enough has been said, I trust, to make clear what we mean when we say: Justice is power-in-action and righteousness is love-in-action. That, in part, is what Paul is driving at when he says:

I shall take the measure of these self-important people, not by what they say, but by what power is in them. The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power.

²² I am dependent here on José Miguez-Bonino, *op. cit.*, p.40.

III. JUSTICE IS RESTORATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IS REHABILITATION

A. The Ethical Imperative of Justice

The ethical imperative of justice-righteousness directly relates to the foregoing. This is inevitable, for we have been making theoretical distinctions of what at root is one existential reality. Justice and righteousness, like justification and sanctification, come from one root source and flow out into one historical reality. They are united in the indivisible mediator of creation and redemption. So Paul writes,

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

([I Corinthians 1:30](#), KJV)

Calvin interprets:

But you cannot attain justification without *at the same time* attaining to sanctification. For these benefits are *perpetually* and *indissolubly connected* ... We may distinguish between justification and sanctification but Christ contains both *inseparable*.²³

That is to say, what Calvin and we distinguish in theological talk are really united in their origin and destiny. We properly stress forensic justification—as did Paul—when we confront the work-righteousness of modern “churchianity” and tithing Pharisees. Indeed, by this work-righteousness (“religiosity”) shall no flesh be justified in his sight. For merits pave no roads to Zion. But what we call forensic justification is vitally integrated in God’s creation of the new humanity. Luther says: “... for when God saves a man, he performs an act of creation and that is a miracle.”²⁴ The new-creation man is p. 270 characterized by obedience. Man participates in a new reality.²⁵ Thus obedience and faith are neither a consequence of nor a precondition to justification; they are man’s experience of it.

... [T]here is not a causal relationship between Christ’s righteousness and the righteousness of faith, but a correlative association in which the subjectivity of faith has meaning and significance only as it lives off grace.²⁶

The life of the new man is what Berkouwer calls a “faith-righteousness” and Barth “the lived-out reality of faith.” The works of faith do not deny but confirm *sola fide*.²⁷

Faith must not be seen as assent to noetic notions about God. It would be more true to the biblical concept to translate faith as faithfulness with the idea of loyalty, solidarity. Here we must warn against the adaptations which Christian theology has made to the

²³ *Institutes*, II, 36. My emphasis.

²⁴ Quoted in G. Quell, *op. cit.*, p.51.

²⁵ H. Ridderbos, *Paulus: de ontwerp van zijn theologie*: “... de imperativus op de indicativus rust in dat deze order niet omkeerbaar is.” (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1966), p.281.

²⁶ G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954), pp.79, 85.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.107, 109, 112.

Graeco-Roman world. The idea of a pure, divine essence, knowable only by intellectual comprehension, mystical contemplation, or natural conscience, came prior to the concrete action of the divine in a specific historical moment. Catholic scholasticism, and to a lesser extent Protestant intellectualistic tendencies, integrated this structure into Christian theology, notably in the definition of God's essence and his attributes. This, as Miguez points out, robs

God of his particular identity ... his "I am" for us and for the world. We make an image apart from his own action, his *debarim*, that is, the words and commandments in which he has defined the conditions of the covenant.²⁸

That we have not always been conscious of this danger, some emphases in pietistic withdrawal and social irresponsibility bear witness. But also the danger exists (and becomes a reality in much of modern fundamentalism) of separating certain noetic element in faith from the life of discipleship. This may be done by either requiring assent to a super-simple "belief" statement or by the meaningless memorization of catechetical doctrine. To divorce intellectual knowledge from discipleship is, to put it bluntly, a contradiction in terms and a denial of biblical righteousness and justice. Or, to put it in Bonhoeffer's terms: it is cheap grace that costs nothing. p. 271

There is, of course,

an imperfect faith, a faltering faith, but there cannot be, in the nature of the case, a *believing* disobedience—unless it is the "dead faith" of which James speaks, and which "profits nothing."²⁹

We do not know God in his essence, that is, as the object of a pure gospel which we accept and from which we deduce ethical consequences. "Rather we know God in the synthetic act of responding to his demands."³⁰ Our response is historical, earthy, concrete—what Miranda calls "truth in deeds."

Deeds of justice and righteousness are the concrete historical manifestation that the "normal" relationships and responsibilities of life are

rehabilitated and made relative to the kingdom and to the kingship of Christ. At the center is the kingdom and all wills and wishes must be bent in its direction. Self-denial is not negative; it is the positive re-direction of the total being.³¹

The ethical imperative is thus part and parcel of the restoration of man to a right relation to God and his fellow man as well as the rehabilitation of his creaturely capacity for just and right living. The crucial problem arises because many Christians and churches do not function as rehabilitated and restored agents for justice and righteousness. Yet this is often judged to be of secondary importance because, after all, they believe the gospel and are justified by faith and not by works. Let us not be deceived. A more diabolical escape mechanism cannot be conceived. No such divorce between justification and justice exists. Many lamp-bearers will indeed come to the closed door of the wedding feast—having had the form of godliness but not the power thereof.

²⁸ Miguez-Bonino, *op. cit.*, p.39ff.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ G. C. Berkouwer, *op. cit.*, p.139.

B. The Church' p. Task

It has been said that "the ultimate manifestation of God's justice is God's will to restore."³² How does God restore justice and righteousness upon the earth?

1. The Church must *learn* justice-righteousness. We have noted that it is inadmissible to confess a divine righteousness and a human justice divorced from each other and forming two coexisting but independent realities. Therefore it will not do to conclude that the people of the covenant have no responsibility for human justice. It is [p.272](#) inseparably integrated, rooted into, grafted into the righteousness of God. Human justice unrelated to God's justice cannot but erode into utopian humanism or pessimistic otherworldliness. The tendency of the covenant people to escape into their churches is a living demonstration of the latter.

Amos and Isaiah condemn out of hand the cultic escape by ordering the halt to burnt offerings and sacrifices. Grave social crimes cannot be remedied by grand cultic ceremonies. Close down your churches, stop paying the rich ministers, call a halt to the construction of fancy buildings ... For I hate, I despise, your communion services and polished sermons. I am not happy with your congregational meetings; even though you offer me your tithes for missions and your offerings for the building fund, I will not even look at them. Stop the noise of your hymn-sings, and all your special music with trumpets and quartets ... But let justice and righteousness roll down over the countryside into the little villages and great cities until it covers the earth. Justice within the four walls of the church means nothing, absolutely nothing, if it is not a reality outside the church.

So the church must begin by learning. A canyon greater than those of the Rocky Mountains exists in the contemporary theologies of the churches. Well-meaning pastors have educated us to a spiritual righteousness divorced from earthly justice. We reap fruits as bitter as the prophet's wormwood. Is it not tragic that any church which dares to speak of politics and economics and social justice is gravely suspect? Old Testament prophets were suspect, too. Oh Lord, will human nature never change? When will we learn?

2. The Church must *teach* justice. Before God's justice all human justice is unjust ([Psalm 64:6](#)). Yet God takes human justice into account because it is the analogy of his justice. He channels his justice and righteousness through his ambassadors ([Psalms 74:1-4, 7:8](#)). God's justice is the dynamic norm which gives ultimate validity to ethics. God's law is the inseparable associate of his grace; indeed, grace is the loving exercise of his justice-righteousness in society and in creation.

The Church must teach the State of the Church's right to exist. The Church is born of the word of God and must claim the right to proclaim that word. The message of the full Lordship of Christ, the judgment upon and the forgiveness of public and private evils needs to be known. When the State refuses this right, God's justice is violated. The Church must disobey the constituted authorities, for it must obey God rather than men. This is civil disobedience, but that may be part of its pedagogical ministry. [p. 273](#)

The Church must teach God's justice-righteousness in God's world. The Church is God's minister in the world; as such it manifests God's presence in the world by its life. It does not do charity, it is charity; it does not talk, it witnesses (literally, martyrs the gospel); it does not seek comfort, it shares Christ's afflictions. It is the mouthpiece for God in the midst of an unjust world.

The Church must teach human rights. It is the prophetic mouthpiece for human need. When the Church takes a clear stand on fundamental political or economic issues, it *is*

³² Jacques Ellul, *op. cit.*, p.47.

preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. When it maintains silence before a hungry and suffering man it *has* broken covenant with the Lord of hosts ([Isaiah 24:5](#)).

3. The Church must *incarnate* justice. It is not enough to teach, not when three billion people do not know the justice-righteousness of the Kingdom, not when half the world goes to bed hungry at night, not when totalitarian governments systematically negate elemental human rights, not when the minority of the world's population—the majority of whom are Christians—use the greatest part of creation's resources for themselves. How can the Church minister justice to a needy world?

It is inspiring to speak of rapid church growth, of winning the world in this generation for Christ, of organizing continent-wide evangelistic campaigns, and of revitalizing our dying churches. I do not criticize the little we do. I only ask—does this sort of action fulfill the demands of God's justice in a needy world? Our preachers, our evangelists, our missionaries cannot touch more than half the world's population, but our national and international policies do. Our economics, our politics, our sociology, our corporations, our tariffs, our communications media, all touch them indeed. These are the Church's testimony—like it or not—to the needy world. These are the hands with which we touch the beggar's lips, the hearts with which we show indifference or compassion, the minds with which we calculate for his gain or for our own, the eyes which we avert so as to see neither his plight nor our riches.

It hurts to hear the cry of impotence from the poor.

Penniless ...
A while
Without food
I can live;
But it breaks my heart
To know
I cannot give. [p. 274](#)

Penniless ...
I can share my rags,
But I—
I cannot bear to hear
Starved children cry.

Penniless ...
And rain falls,
But trust is true.
Helpless I wait to see
What God will do.³³

4. The Church must *righteous* the future. *Righteous* and *justice* are also old English verbs that mean to *set right*. We have long since lost that verbal usage; one fears that we may have also lost the art. Here the pendulum comes full swing. We began by noting that justicerighteousness means to re-establish right relations with God and man. In God's dealings with his people we learn to know him as a right-setting kind of God. When he puts things right he does so integrally and wholly. Justification and justice-righteousness are but two sides of God's coin of grace; they are inseparably united in the Christ of

³³ Poem "Penniless" by the Japanese Christian, Toyohiki Kagawa.

history. It is he who calls us to *righteous* history: “Let justice roll down” and “Let the righteous do more righteousness still.”

Justice-righteousness is realized fully in the consummation of history. But that consummation does not negate the historical process. Righteous and just judgment will be pronounced, not upon the human finiteness which limits human possibility, but upon the selflove which broke faith with man and creation.

... According to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness-justice dwells.

([II Peter 3:13](#))

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A Pastor's Workshop: The Gospel of Mark and Conflicts with Evil Today

Cor Bronson

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A Case Study of a small group Bible Study whose method raises important hermeneutical questions on the relationship of text and context.

INTRODUCTION: AN INTENSIVE TEE COURSE ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Flexibility, surprise, variety, challenges and risk describe theological education by extension (TEE). I know of no better way to say “amen” to those words than to describe an intensive TEE class I taught recently. Although conventional TEE demands a lot of flexibility to begin with, this six-hour class on the Gospel of Mark pulled the students and myself in directions that surprised, sometimes frightened and always challenged us.

First of all, as a self-respecting North American missionary, I might have been celebrating U.S. Thanksgiving Day with my family and friends instead of spending three days with Indian pastors from the denomination I work with. Alas, the pastors had planned this session without taking into consideration my designs on a turkey dinner. Secondly, this workshop, while not part of an established TEE program, was an intensive course for pastoral enrichment and Biblical orientation to some pressing social and political issues confronting the denomination of these pastors. They were all pastors from one of the many tribal groups in their country, members of a church whose majority is Indian, but whose powerful minority is Spanish speaking. Thirdly, to deal with such issues as racism, majority rights, political freedom and so on in their country and church invites misunderstanding at best and accusations of wrenching the gospel into categories alien to it at worst. Fourthly, most of the fifteen pastors at the workshop had no more than a