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JUSTIFICATION & JUSTICE VI

GOOD NEWS & GOOD WORKS

The planning committee for Craigville Theological Colloquy VII instinctively followed the English-language rule that to increase wing-lift, move from Greek to Latin & from Latin ("Justification & Justice") to Germanic ("Good News & Good Works"), with a not too costly loss in precision. So that the public not be at a loss as to what the two-decker title is aiming at, the committee helped me craft the following interpretive paragraph (some polishing to follow):

How is the good **news** of justification by grace through faith related to good **works**? **Justification** by grace through faith is God's Good News calling us to the good works of **justice**. How does the good work of Jesus Christ in the atonement inform our action toward a more just society & world? How are his obedience & ours related? How are personal faith & social action related?....While our Reformation traditions in the United Church of Christ richly associate the good news of justification & the good works of justice, in recent American Christianity, including our own church, the bridge between the two has fallen into disrepair. At one end of it, justification has been privatized; at the other, justice has been secularized. The Colloquy will explore both our doctrinal heritage & the current situation, toward rebuilding the bridge, to enrich the faith, life, & mission of our congregations & church.

1. "Justification has been **privatized.**" Torah is written on the heart, but it's corrupted if contained within the heart, confined to the advantages of God's "unconditional love" for the autonomous person ("the individual," on whom televangelists put their bite). Scripture condemns self-love detached from God-love, but also God-love + self-love without neighbor-love (in the Colloquy's terms, justification without justice).

2. "Justice has been **secularized.**" This is subtler, harder to grasp, than the privatization of justification. Doesn't everybody know what "justice" is? Far from it. The characteristics of biblical justice derive from those of biblical justification, whose characteristics derive from the biblical God of "holy love." (In our UCC Statement of Faith, God "seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.") But is not the ethical principle of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10^{25-37}) separable from its theological context in the mind-heart of Jesus? Kant's ethical theory attempts to demonstrate precisely this: ethics is autonomous, dependent for its validity on nothing else. If rights are derivable from the fact that every human being is a rational creature, can we not construct a harmonious pluralistic society without recourse to theological principles, whether or not we individually, privately, are God-believers? So, during the long 1911 Stuttgart International Communist Conference, argued Lenin with Dr. E.E.Carr, who face to face reported to me these conversations. Lenin was for constructing, on the basis of Marx, a thoroughly & aggressively secular society cohering through a thoroughly & aggressively secular understanding of justice. In three days we enter the last decade of this century: could the falsity, the inhumanity, of Leninist "justice" be more completely exposed than it has been these past few months?....Leninist "justice" was cleanly atheist: more seductive are secular versions of justice that Jews have circumcized & Christians have baptized. I have particularly in mind the various forms of French egalitarian-socialist "justice," all of which assume eg that anything available to anybody should be available to everybody.

3. Justice is which: like riding a bicycle (unconscious of balance), or like playing chess (which depends on sustained alert intellection)? My experience of liberal Christians is that for most of them, "justice" has an assumed meaning (like assuming your bicycle-balance) derived more from secular than from sacred considerations & thus subject to the Kantian rubric: religion ratifies, but does not shape, "justice." All its business can be done, actually, on its own side of the bridge, though the bridge to the theological side is acknowledged & sometimes, though seldom, traveled. For me, defining "justice" is more like playing chess--requiring constant critical-flexible consciousness. Eg, in 1945 "justice" for Japan demanded cultural imperialism, that we impose a U.S.-style constitution on the country, in violation of traditional Japanese understandings of "justice." As all empires before us, we insisted that the Japanese accept, by force, our political & jurisprudential way of life. Another example: The

government of S.Africa has a European rather than black-African sense & structure of "justice"--the latter inferior at the transtribal level, to judge from actual transtribal black-African governments past & present: how expand black S.African freedoms (which should happen) without sacrificing European "justice" (which should not happen)? And how expand Palestinian rights without sacrificing superior Israeli "justice" to inferior Arab "justice"? My illustrations puncture the liberal dogmas that (1) empire is essentially bad (so imposing our will & way militarily on Japan was an instance of--ugh! --colonialism, which is sometimes better than national sovereignty, as it was in Lebanon); (2) the EurAmerican way of life is not superior to other ways (black African, Muslim, et al), so we should not try to impose our ideas & structures of "justice" on others.... IRONY: Liberals pressure their governments to use sanctions, economic & even military, to force our ideas of "rights" on other governments, in spite of the overwhelming evidence that the intent to do economic damage boomerangs on us--instance grain embargoes against the USSR (which then got its grain from competitors of ours, esp. Canada & Australia), forcing Cat to cancel its West-East pipeline contracts (which turned over that lucrative market to the Japanese, as did the exiting of IBM & Kodak from S.Africa). The pose of moral purity & the desire to express righteous indignation makes the US look arrogant & foolish, economically damages us, & hardly ever so much as dents a fender of foreign sinners against "justice." Why do so many leaders in American religion egg our government on to such stupidity? More traffic on the justification-justice bridge, less captivity to secular concepts of "justice," would help church & state toward a foreign policy truer to our spiritual & political heritages. I hope the Colloquy tangles with this tough issue. I hope we'll not continue to be supine about "the substitution of the 'primacy of individual conscience' [with subtending "human rights"] for justification by grace through faith," along with secular-thinking Geo. Will (qt. from Jas. E. Wall, 1192, 20-27 Dec 89 CHRISTIAN CENTURY). (Liberalism is proErasmus [DE LIBRO ARBITRIO], antiLuther [DE SERVO ARBITRIO].) (Wall again: Against "Will's individualistic ideology," let's acknowledge, as did the GDR Christians who led the movement that toppled the Berlin Wall, "our dependence on God's gracious initiatives for personal and social transformation." In Luther's east Germany, "the church [appropriately] provided the social space for critical reflection and action....We should not allow ourselves, any more than the East German Christians did, to become a transmission belt for the civil religion of our state.")

4. Both justification & justice are both action & intellection, <u>deed & doctrine</u>. This double duality constitutes the two cables of the suspension bridge between them + the bridge's two-way traffic. One grid can show, & interrelate, the two:

	divine	human
action	A	B
intellection	C	D

To sketch out a few reflections, we could either compare the boxes one at a time (eg, comparing, in "A," justification and justice) or--which I choose to do--look at the whole grid first on justification, then on justice:

Justification "**A**" both opens & centers the drama. It's the atonement, God's action in & through our Lord Jesus Christ to save us sinners. "**B**" is our living out of the atonement mimetically, in lives of grateful, joyful, humble service. KJV 2P.3[11] comes to mind: "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" In this, we participate in justification as continuing divine action, "sharing Christ's sufferings" (1P.4[13]; cf. 2Cor.1[5,7] Phil.3[10]), as the Spirit works sanctification in us. "**C**" is God's making us aware of the significance of the work of Christ "for us." And "**D**" is the theology of the atonement, our spelling out & spinning out the meaning in each new relationship & situation (including, in the Colloquy, how justification is related to justice).

Justice "**A**" reminds us that in our "struggle for justice & peace," we cannot hope to achieve more than approximations of justice, & even those approximations are tainted with sin: justice is proximately, & will be ultimately, a gift from God (& thus the Lord's Prayer's second petition). But "**B**" tells us we are to "do justice" (Mic.6[8]): our sinfulness & weakness are no excuse from trying, any more than is the continuing & final fact that justice is a divine gift. "**C**" is God's revelation, by nature & grace, of what constitutes justice; & "**D**" is our synergistic effort to hear God's word of justice situationally, moment by moment, from place to place.