

JUSTIFICATION & JUSTICE XIII

HOW DOES THE BIBLE SAY IT?

THE VERBAL ARCHITECTURE OF "JUSTIFICATION & JUSTICE"

Mozart was born on the 3rd floor, & I won't forget my heart singing thanks to God as I walked up those two narrow flights of stairs. I, too, was born, in the architecture of this Thinksheet, on the **3rd floor**: English is my "Muttersprache," my mother's native tongue & therefore mine. As my aural-oral-semantic womb & primary linguistic environment, it's the only language in which I can naturally, normally, & without forethought feel ("Sprachgefuehl"), think, speak, write. I have given years to studying/teaching the basic languages of our spiritual heritage & "have a feel for" the biblical languages; but they never could be native to me, I must always be foreign to them. In the strictest sense then, the Bible must remain for me--though it's the book I know best--foreign to me. For the same reason, Third World theologies must remain foreign to me, as my English-language theology must be to all whose mother-speech is other than English....When I descend to the **2nd floor**, I'm in the Roman-Latin language-world, the cultural world of the West for 14 cs. (say, from Tertullian through the 16th-c. Reformers, though for the common people Luther Germaned the Bible. This world gave us 60% of English (though our English language is structurally Germanic), including "justification" & "justice," which are transliterations from Latin. Harv. Div. School Dean Douglas Horton was the only Protestant peritus at Vatican II who could read, write, & speak Latin (& I was more embarrassed than pleased when he asked me to discuss with him the Latin of a document to be mastered by the periti before the conference: I've a good analytic grasp of it, but nowhere near his feel for it). Latin, the West's lingua franca before French (the West's lingua franca before English, which is now the globe's lingua franca), was so much the language of culture that instead of asking which Western classics (in all fields) were written in Latin, it'd be faster to ask which ones weren't. My diary of ½ c. ago today says "Read Tischendorf on Ac.8:37." T. was 550pp of required reading in a senior seminary course, & we were expected to be able to read it--in Latin, as it'd never been Englished. Those of us who could English it orally took, each of us, four or five illiterate (in Latin) students. That, mind you, was in an American Protestant seminary only fifty years ago! How important is all this? Latin is the language of the West's theology, Protestant as well as Catholic. We can't talk "justification & justice" without talking Latin theology (seen, of course, through English spectacles). What am I getting at? "Sprachsitz," continuous consciousness, when we're theologizing, of our speech-location--to use this Thinksheet's metaphor, of the floor we're on, & whether it's the floor where we were born (whether we're natives of or aliens on a particular floor), & what's the pertinence, if any, of floors other than the one we're on at the moment....Now let's walk down another flight, to the **ground floor**. Greek is indeed the ground of the Christian religion, our faith's mother-speech. Greek is the formative language of the Christian religion. In our formative period, roughly the first four centuries (Paul through Augustine), almost no Christian knew Hebrew, so almost no Christians could read & use the Hebrew Bible. Instead, they read & used (& in the NT quoted) the Greek Bible (which before the NT was the Greek translation [the LXX, Septuagint] of the Hebrew Bible)--"Bible" itself being a Greek word, as are the words which "OT" translates. So of course all our earliest Bibles (OT + NT) are only in Greek. As the Roman legal sense crept into the West's theology (eg, heightening Western understandings of the atonement), even before that the Greek philosophical mind greatly influenced the theologizing of our religion's foundational thinkers, beginning with Paul & running through the debaters in the christological & trinitarian controversies....Finally, our last flight of stairs, into the **basement**. For both Jews & Christians, Hebrew is the most important language, the artesian well of all our basic religious feelings, images, & ideas....Jesus the Galilean lived in three intersecting language worlds, spoke Aramaic (& read Hebrew & Aramaic), had a working knowledge (for life & work in "Galilee of the gentiles") of Greek, & knew a sufficient smattering of Latin. His first apostle "born out of due time," Paul, was sophisticatedly trilingual; in his writings, we can see him running up & down the two flights of stairs joining basement, ground floor, & second story. (Some contemporaries of his, eg Philo, were likewise sophisticated trilinguals; but none of them has the importance for Judaism or Christianity that Paul has.) How rich Paul is, & how careful we need to be in trying to understand him & hear the word of God through him! And rather than reading him in cold blood, we should take him seriously when he says (Ro.7:6, my literal translation) "we serve in newness of spirit & not oldness of letter": the familiar paradox: the more you've mastered something (in this case, language) the freer you are from it as well as in it.

3rd floor	English
2nd floor	Latin
ground fl.	Greek
<hr/>	
basement	Hebrew

1. While it's generally true that images are less culture-specific (bound to particular language-worlds) than are ideas, a few ideas exist in almost all culture & together form a global lexicon, an esperanto of the human soul, a lingua franca of the spirit; & the interrelations of these ideas from culture to culture are so similar as to constitute what I may call a grammar beyond grammar (on the model of Tillich's "God beyond God," but also with support from Noam Chomsky). In this global lexicon, the idea I'm pointing to now is that **human beings derive from & are responsible to a Reality beyond theirs & thus beyond them**. Culture, & subcultures within cultures, differ on how we derive & what our responsibility to that Reality is. INSTANCE: From Aristotle to Ockham, things were thought to move only when continuously pushed (thus Aquinas' identification of Aristotle's Prime Mover with God, the former's first "proof" of God's existence--conformable with the radical theistic conviction that while we do some things, God does all things). But Ockham: During the Creation, God gave everything a shove, & since then they've continued in motion by themselves (he called it "impetus," we call it momentum): they don't need to keep being moved from beyond themselves. The last stage in this line of reasoning was 19th-c. materialism, including Darwin's "spontaneous generation": things don't even need an original shove.

We call the three stages theism, deism, atheism. Stage-three thinkers, who dominate our schools & the media, deal with "justice" without transcendent reference: there's no divine hand, or cosmic tendency, pushing for justice. (While Marx was formally atheist, he wasn't functionally so: he believed that there is indeed a cosmic tendency pushing for justice; he called it "history," which thus in the Marxian lexicon is a holophrase for God, & explains why we must consider Marxism a religion.) As for "justification," to stage-three thinkers it's nonsense, since they can't manage a secular translation of the idea that a god has been offended & must be appeased, an idea you recognize as one dimension of the idea in boldface in this §.

2. Now let's tell the Christian story using the terms of §1. God gave a push toward "the good" (Gn.1f), righteousness, justice. Instead of going with that flow, we counterpushed: the Fall. God could not put up with this rebellion (was, anthropathistically put, offended). The tilt in the universe must be corrected (anthropathistically, God must be appeased). So God repairs his world that we damaged, & does so within himself, doing for the world & for us what we ourselves cannot do (anthropathistically, God appeases himself within himself: the Incarnation & the Atonement--the deed & process we call "justification"). But for this story to make sense, our culture must recover, recall, reinvigorate the basic idea (boldface, §1). But even without that conversion, individuals can overcome the cultural amnesia & enter the holy space & language-world of the Church or Synagogue. Historical instance: In 988, Russia went Greek Orthodox because Prince Vladimir of Kiev, on the basis of extensive research into the holy spaces of Islam, Judaism, & Roman Catholicism, decided that the Greek Orthodox--judged especially by the glorious mosaicked Hagia Sophia in Istanbul--had the best sense of & access to the Eternal. (Loree & I were in that church when the Muslim plaster, applied in 1453, was removed, revealing the world's greatest mosaics, capable of "seizing the worshiper and transporting him [out of the chaos & confusion of a crumbling empire] to a new and better world" [57, Jan/90 SMITHSONIAN, Robt. Wernick's magnificent article on the Ravenna Mosaics of the 5th & 6th cs., also made at the peak of the art & by the same school].)

3. What am I building up to? Stating the deepest root & highest reach of the "justification & justice" complex of ideas, viz its **theocentricity**. To put it syntactically, the only proper sentences about "justification & justice" are those having God as subject. (I'm speaking attitudinally, not literally.) "Man becomes truly human as he attempts to do godly deeds....[fn.] The Rabbis said: 'As God is merciful, so be thou merciful. As He is just, so be thou just.'" (22, THE TORAH: A [great!] MODERN COMMENTARY, Union of Am. Heb. Congregations/81). Now I'll use p.21, "God in Genesis," in TORAH (ibid.) to expatiate on what I've been saying since this Thinksheet's intro: "God was not an abstract force, principle, or process; rather, He was Father, Friend, King--all of which implied 'person.' Individuality was the highest expression of creation, and God the Creator could himself be spoken of only in such terms. It would not have occurred to the ancients to speak of God in any other way than the way one spoke of man (because man was created in God's image), and it was therefore most natural to think of God as speaking, seeing, regretting, and occasionally as walking or descending. The divinity and majesty of God were thereby not diminished....However one interprets the nature of God--as person or as process, as individual reality or generalized principle--there are three basic ideas which the contemporary reader can share with biblical man and which are implicit in Genesis: (1) That God, as **Father**, or Creative Force, provides all creation with purpose and that therefore to understand God means to understand one's own potential; (2) That God, as **Lawgiver**, validates the principles of justice and righteousness which must govern the affairs of men; (3) That God, as **Redeemer**, guarantees the ultimate goals of existence and enables man to find meaning in his life"

(bf. mine). (A fn. quotes vonRad that OT faith could more easily "tolerate the danger of lessening God's greatness and 'absoluteness' by human description than to run the risk of giving up anything of God's personalness and His vital participation in everything earthly.")

4. It's clear, then, what's the biblical shape of the **response responsibility** in the idea in bf. in §1. (I use, for Mic.6⁸ here, the rendering in TANAKH: THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, JPS/85:) God is just, so "do justice"; God is good, so "love goodness"; God wants to walk with us, so "walk modestly with your God." We are not to do our own thing, but God's thing (even when sometimes you have to be the skunk at the garden party)--while avoiding manic messianism & depressive cynicism. Our reflective-active spirituality is to be a continuous representation of the divine image in us, in mimesis of the divine reflection-action, the divine character in inner & outer action.

5. So what, in relation to "justification & justice," is the divine character? Integrity, self-consistency, God's doing his being (conforming, in action, to his nature or character)--all gathered up in Hebrew "tsadiq" (usu. trd. "righteous"), which with its cognates accordingly includes such ideas as truth, innocence, having a just cause, approbation, acquittal, justification, fairness, equity, acknowledgement of being in the right. At least from the 8th c. onward, this divine "righteous" self-consistency is viewed as including judgment ("mishpat") against, within creation, nonconformity to this divine self-conformity (for creation is to model itself consistently on the divine character, & cannot do so without reflective-responsive self-consistency) & mercy ("chesed" [in Mic.6⁸], "racham," "chanan") to those who suffer from others' unrighteousness & to those who repent of their own unrighteousness (& so the associated ideas, "deliverance" & "salvation"). We may call this, respectively, the hard & the soft actions of the divine righteousness (roughly corresponding also to threats/promises & punishments/rewards). On the soft side, "tsadiq" even comes to mean benevolence & the action thereof, viz almsgiving (eg, Jesus in Mt.6¹ says we're not to do our "righteousness" [Gk. "dikaiosisune"], meaning [as vv.2-4 shows] almsgiving, "in public so people see you doing it." (In this pericope we see the basement [Hebrew-Aramaic] coming up to, influencing, the ground floor.)

6. Which is more offensive to the ego, **conformity** to an impersonal norm or **obedience** to a person? Hard to say. Both nonconformity & autonomy are strong in me, though not as strong as my hunger & thirst for God & the joy of his Presence. For Adam & Eve to go atheist, all it took was a switch of attention from walking with the Gardener in the cool of the day to the apple (ie, what their egos thought they could get away with even though it was anti-"tsadiq"). Since every human being has a rebellious ego & steps over into atheism when the rebel urge becomes rebellion, every sinner who decides on a re-turn (Heb. "teshuvah," repentance, accepting the *judgment* aspect of God's "tsadiq") rejoices that God's "hesed" (the *mercy* aspect, the divine eagerness to forgive) is available in justification, which restores the "tsadiq" relationship at a higher level, for now the penitent-forgiven has further reason to love God (ie, be a "hasid," pl. "hasidim"). Jesus says the angels share the penitent's joy (L.15^{7,10}; earthlings too: vs.32). Joy in "victory" (perhaps the oldest meaning of "tsadiq," Judg.5¹⁻³¹), the return of things to the divine norm-al, as they should be, the convergent "truth" of right disposition & right behavior ("justice").

7. §§ 5 & 6 are in the **Hebraic** mode, in the basement. When we walk up to the ground floor (& move thus from the Western to the Eastern churches), we're in the **Hellen(ist)ic** language-world, where being has more importance than relation. In the Hebraic language-world, repentance-forgiveness restores the divine-human relationship with increment of gratitude (Jesus' "forgiven much...loves much"). The Greek focus is on an increment of being, that we become "partakers of the divine nature" (KJV 2P.1⁴, NT's only ref. to deification [Gk. "theosis"], the ground-floor parallel to the basement's & 2nd-floor's justification). We become like whom/what we love, as the old New England yarn "Ernest and the Great Stone Face" (& the Bible, & life) tells us.

8. As we ascend, now, to the 2nd floor, we find the **Latin** language-world's "justice" cooler, more forensic & juristic, than "tsadiq," more interested in order than character (as Hebrew) or nature (as Greek).