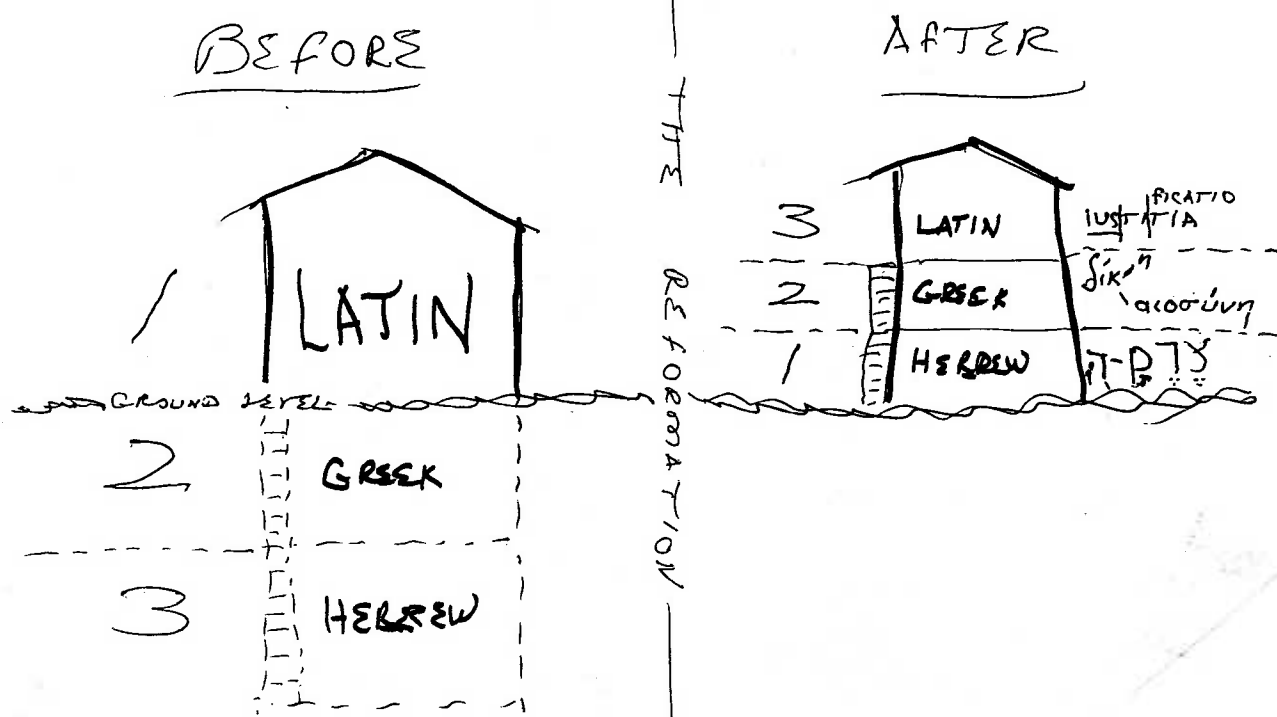


# "Justice" is 'what God does for us' instead of to us.

Rowan Wm. Why Study the Past? 64-68



In reading Rowan Williams' WHY STUDY THE PAST? for discussion in Cape Cod Theology Tabletalk, I came upon this (pp65-66): In "reading the Bible with some of the 'humanist' tools of the day," Luther concluded for "a protest against the belief that conscientious scruple can be solved by immediate human authority....a theological abuse directly attributable to papal ambition." In "the evolution of his theology," what sprang him free of Rome's authority (direct, & funded in the magisterium) was "a moment of new understanding concerning the Bible's language about God's 'justice,'" which <sup>he</sup> no longer experienced as that "God has the right to condemn sinners"--language he "feared and hated....he suddenly came to see--with real help from the new [humanist] style of biblical interpretation beginning to develop in response to the new availability of the Bible in its original languages--that it [viz., "justice"] should be read as expressing **what God does for us** [boldface, to signal the words as in this Thinksheet's title]. Just as, when we hear of the wisdom of God in the Bible...we think of how God's action makes us wise, so when we hear of God's justice we should think of that act by which he makes us just. God's justice...is not God's 'reaction' to our behaviour...but his initiative, quite irrespective of our behaviour. God is free to do what he wills, and his freedom takes the form of acting to change us." What changes is not "God's attitude" toward us, but that "we become the locus of God's free activity." The cross is central: "God steps into the void and chaos of created existence and establishes himself there as God." After showing Calvin's consonance with Luther here, Williams concludes (p69) for this as "the basic Reformation principle: the Church must be judged by its freedom to witness to the freedom of God." This would be "a theological revolution" in which the Church today would live "how and why the [early] Church was *different*" from its world, it's surrounding culture.

The underlinings are mine: this Thinksheet looks at the Reformation (the vertical line in the above before/after visual) as one expression of the Renaissance. Two of the humanists were Erasmus--who stayed in the library & saw to the 1516 print-publishing [the first ever] of the Greek NT, the year before humanist Luther left the library & nailed his "Theses" to the Wittenberg U. door--then, eight years later, saw to the print-publishing of his translation-into-German not from the Church's official (Latin, official till 1943) Bible but from the unofficial original Greek. (In 1943, Roman Catholics scholars were freed to meet with non-Roman biblical scholars; one sat on either side of me during the opening session of the

annual meeting (at UTS/NY) of the Society of Biblical Literature, saw that I was using a Greek-Latin NT, & asked how long I'd been doing that: 1935.)

On the visual, you'll note my reference to the Williams text p1 of this Thinsheet speaks about: I often doodle as I think, & this visual is a five-minute doodle I didn't intend for publication. But then, I thought the architectural analogy had a potential for picturing **the Renaissance-Reformation's change of language venue** from the Latin playing-field, where Rome wrote & enforced all the rules (so, on the visual's left, Latin is No.1, with Hebrew & Greek invisible basements)--but on the right, Latin is only No.3, accessed-checked only after attending to the Bible's original languages. Now let's try to **retrace Luther's thought-process** across the stepping-stone words to liberation from the rigid Latin lock-in of words-ideas. (In my 1933 printing class, I dropped a lock-in frame of cold type [before the "hot-type" days], & the mess on the floor was called "pie": I'd insufficiently tightened some of the eight lock-in screws. Rome [rightly!] feared that the humanists were loosing the screws locking Christian thought into the Latin verbal-mental frame.)

In Latin, Luther couldn't "repent" without "doing penance": the Latin phrase locked the penitent into the confessional booth. Instead of being (as in the Bible) the primary Actor, God is in 3rd position, after (1st) the penitent & (2nd) the priest. The Reformation freed God from his imprisonment in Latin!

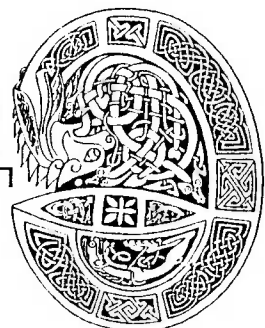
And freed the believer from the juridical locus, the courtroom, under ius (law, "lex" being statute)--the base of ius-titia (justice) & jus-tificatio (justification). Also with court flavor is "ius" with the meanings of jurisdiction & rights conferred by law; the basic meaning is what's right vs. what's wrong...

whereas the Greek parallel, nomos (from vb. "distribute") is less court-ish, more custom, then law-defined usage: picture the Latin word as judge but the Greek word as teacher (similar to Hebrew torah, commandment-enforced teaching). But the NT prefers dik-, a root even less court-ish than "nom"--& more moral & religious than legal: "diké" can mean a judicial hearing but is also the goddess "Diké" (Ac.28.4 TEV, "Fate"; NIV, "Justice"). A dikaio is someone with the divine status of rightness, with the character of dikaio-suné (righteousness). And justification is both God's gifts of setting right (dikaio-sis) & of declaring righteous (dikaio-ma).

Finally, moving into Hebrew, we're farthest from the law-court & deepest into character: to be a tsadiq (a righteous one) is to participate in tsedeqa (God's righteousness). Of his nature (Lat. "natura"), that is the moral aspect, touching our behavior; we are to share, too, his loyal-affectional aspect (chesed: "God is love") & his separation from all that adverse to his being & will (kavod: "Be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy"). (Modern Hebrew uses the three terms less discretely, almost as synonymous.) Tsedeq carries also the connotations of "normal" & "right" to rule: God is the "righteous" ruler-king-judge, with power to vindicate-justify-deliver his people, granting victory & prosperity (shalom): tsedeqa is the foundation of his throne.

The biblical theologian is a composer of quartet music, the instruments being Hebrew, Greek, Latin, & the intended hearers' language. No solos, please; or even duets or trios.

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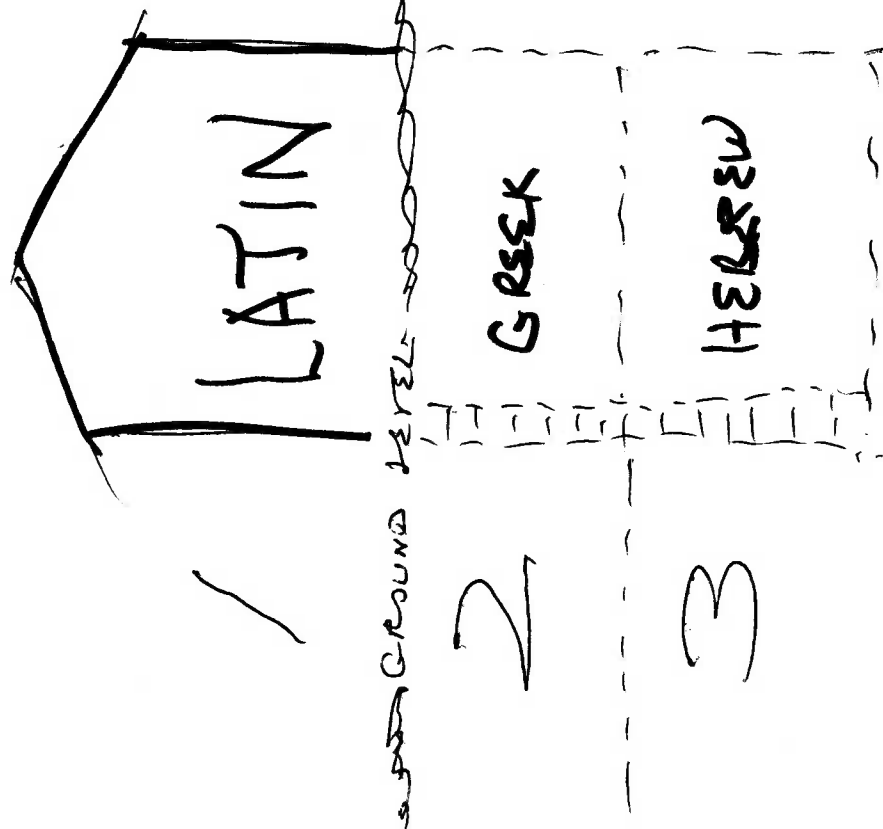


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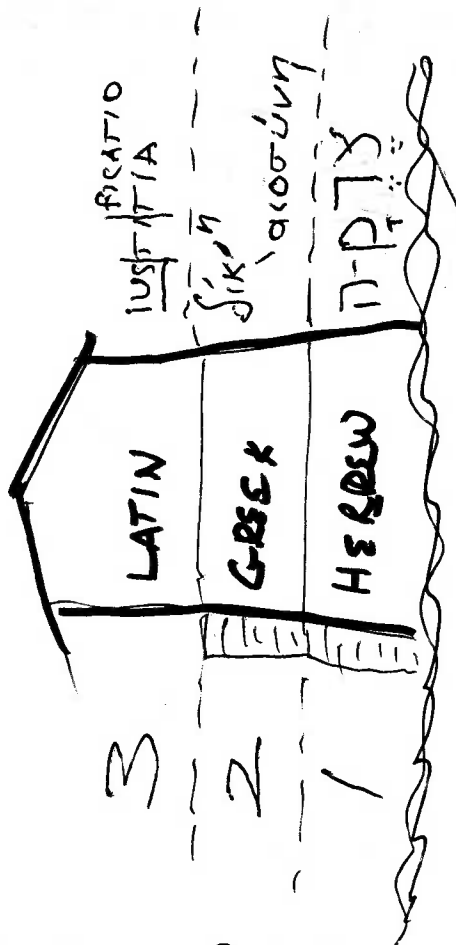
Reverend Wm. Why Study Latin? 64-65

ROWAN WILLIAMS

BEFORE



AFTER



THE REFORMATION