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Faith

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Faith

Paul R. Hinlicky

From its origins, 'faith' has been a central category which correlates positively with the high regard for the discipline of theology in Christianity. However, it has been understood in various different ways. Current controversies about faith crystallize around an unusual expression employed by the apostle Paul, 'the faith of Christ'. From the time of Augustine, the Western church's tradition has been to distinguish between the faith by which one believes and the faith which is believed. However, this is a potential roadblock on the way to a renewed understanding of Christian faith in the light of Paul's 'faith of Christ', and the knowledge of God this turn of phrase implies for the discipline of theology in the life of the church. Karl Barth may be credited for advocating understanding of Paul's unusual expression as referring to the faithfulness of Christ (or God's faithfulness in Christ). Yet this reformatory innovation in understanding is complicated by the problem of an individualistic and exclusively forensic doctrine of justification by faith in the so-called 'Lutheran Paul' interpretation. A holistic case for Barth's innovation, however, can accommodate a 'Lutheran' reading of Paul where the believer's faith is understood as the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit conforming the believer to Christ so as to participate in the life of the triune God. If so, reformatory implications include clarification of the status of faith in the 'fabulous' power of the saving God and the 'militancy' of his grace. Deliteralization (as opposed to demythologization) not only clarifies such questions but illuminates the Johannine bridge from early Christianity to credal Christianity with its articulation of the faith which is believed. The engagement of such faith in the world is a protest against injustice on the earth born of hope in the saving justice of God, because it is a participation in the triune life of God.

Keywords: Belief, Trust, Dogmatics, Theodicy, Pistis Christou (faith of Christ), Christology, The Holy Spirit, Fideism, Pauline theology

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1 Introduction: faith and the knowledge of God in controversy

The academic rise of religious studies has exposed to fresh view the exceptional focus upon faith in Christianity. Correlated with this focus is the extraordinary status of theology in Christianity as faith's knowledge of the God who is believed; theology is thus an integral practice of this faith (Henriksen 2019). To be sure, difficulty attends the fact that the God believed is not an ordinary object of knowledge in the world, but comes to be known in the putative event of self-donating revelation.

According to the early Christian witness of the New Testament, faith has come on the scene (Gal 3:23–25), effecting a discipleship or discipline of the mind to militant grace (2 Cor 10:4–5), and protesting injustice (Rom 3:4–20) in the strength of its peculiar theodicy as found in Rom 8:18–39. Pioneered in the Pauline literature (and as such inscribed in the New Testament canon), faith's inquiry into the knowledge of God is in obedience to an ongoing, broadly based mandate for the community of faith to probe its life by the gospel of God (Mark 13:5–6, 21–23; Gal 1:6–9; 1 John 4:1–3). The cognitive discipline of faith thus entails equally critical discernment of the disbeliefs entailed by belief (Morse 1994). Such a critical dogmatics consists in the trinitarian knowledge of God as the living God in conflict with principalities and powers, and in controversy not least of all with his own people.

1.1 Multiplicity of 'faith'

But what is 'faith' that it plays this crucial role in Christianity? Inspired by the book of Deuteronomy's admonition to 'cling with one's whole heart', Augustine – as the font of the Western Christian theological tradition – influentially defined faith as the present form of adherence to God (e.g. *The Predestination of the Saints* 2.5). For Augustine, faith as adherence thus shades into hope and love according to the way stages of the pilgrim city of God. Augustine distinguished several senses of faith which he held together in a unity according to his canonical scheme of the history of salvation:

- (1) faith in the light of creation: *credere Deum*, to believe in the sense of acknowledging that God the Creator exists as truth itself and the highest good;
- (2) faith in the light of grace: *credere Deo*, to believe in the sense of trusting God to be faithful to his mercy in Christ;
- (3) faith in the sense of hoping for God as the human goal when faith gives way to sight in the eternal rapture of love (*credere in Deo*).

In this scheme, *credere Deum* is epistemically primary; submitting to God's creative authority in principle as it is conveyed through the witness of nature and the testimonies of scripture. As with the patristic theology in general, it was the battle against Gnosticism –

with its contention that it had ‘knowledge’ in preference to the dumb and blind ‘faith’ of the Catholic Church – that informed Augustine’s arguments for the utility of believing (*On the Profit of Believing* #33; Harrison 2000: 21–25).

Faith can thus be taken in various ways: as mere opinion, as supernatural information accepted on authority, as warranted belief, as trust or trustworthiness or faithfulness. Faith can be taken absolutely as ‘the faith’ or relatively as ‘faith in something/someone’. It can be assigned to different human faculties: to the acknowledgment of reason, to the assent of the will, or to the feeling of something ineffable. Alternatively, faith can be taken holistically as the formation of desire, love that clings to the beloved by the practices of trust warranted by beliefs about the beloved. In the long history of Christian theology, faith has been variously interpreted along the foregoing lines, not all mutually compatible. Thus questions about faith arise endemically within Christianity and require the clarity of a fresh determination. What is faith and in whom and in what is it invested? By what particular relationship is it determined? These are theological questions which will be introduced by the following survey of significant positions on faith in the theological tradition.

1.2 Faith as piety and reverence

It is striking to observe far downstream from Augustine’s seminal discussion that – despite titling his prototypical modern dogmatics, *Glaubenslehre* (literally, ‘doctrine of faith’) – there is neither entry nor extended treatment of faith in the system of Friedrich Schleiermacher, the German father of modern theology. Attention is rather given to piety (German: *Frommigkeit*) as ‘the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God’ (Schleiermacher 1963: section 4, 12). Somewhat later in a discussion of ‘faith in Jesus as the Redeemer’, Schleiermacher clarifies something left unsaid in this earlier treatment, namely, that it is in

the same sense [that] we spoke above of *faith* in God, which was nothing but the certainty concerning the feeling of absolute dependence, as such, i.e. as conditioned by a Being placed outside of us, and as expressing our relation to that Being [...] But the term ‘faith in Christ’ here (as the term ‘faith in God’ formerly) relates to the state of redemption as effect, and to Christ as cause. (Schleiermacher 1963: section 14, 68, emphasis added)

Thus Schleiermacher associates ‘certainty’ with the terminology of ‘faith’ in the relation of an effect attributed to divine causality shaping human affect. Faith expresses a determination of consciousness from the outside, producing a thematized affect of piety, i.e. as articulating an object.

There is biblical warrant for Schleiermacher’s treatment of faith as certainty of pious feeling, particularly in the Psalms of Israel. In the Psalms, the pious often express their desire for, or confidence in, YHWH who is firm, reliable, steadfast in keeping his covenant.

Yet typically this trustful ‘waiting on YHWH’ to secure the troubled petitioner is cast in terms of the covenantal conflict between those who are righteous, ‘who refrain from anger and forsake wrath’, and the ‘wicked’ who ‘draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy, to kill those who walk uprightly’ (Ps 37:9, 14; Kraus 1992: 154–162). Schleiermacher’s preference for ‘piety’ as such articulated affect likewise has some support in a Hebrew synonym for the righteous, the *hasidim*. Although, as Kraus observes:

to translate the word as ‘the pious’ would only distort the focus. We do not have terms in English that could reproduce the loyal, intimate, and trusting relationship of life in service, the commitment and devotion of those who are faithful to God. (Kraus 1992: 157)

This lack of an equivalent term in English is especially noticeable in the sense of those who ‘fear’ precisely the One in whom they trust (Kraus 1992: 157). Faith in God necessarily includes the proper ‘fear’ of God (Moberly 2020: 203) – that is, the believer’s faithfulness to their calling to the purpose of God without abusing their calling for pious self-aggrandizement. The English word, ‘reverence’, would better express the idea.

In the Psalms of Israel, the reverent ‘faith’ of the righteous consists in ‘waiting on YHWH’. This waiting is deeply rooted in Israel’s memory of the foundational act of salvation (Exod 14:13; von Rad 1990: 17). Waiting, however, is no resignation to fate but ‘involves calling and crying out, being constantly on the lookout [...] for Yahweh to intervene [...], persevering expectantly [...], certain that what is coming, future health and deliverance, is more sure than what is present’ (Kraus 1992: 158), because its confident trust is in ‘Yahweh’s *hesed*’ (1992: 159), ‘loving kindness’. Such considerations lead to the Hebrew verb that is usually translated as ‘believe’, the root of which is *’aman* (cf. the English ‘amen’). The root meaning is ‘to be firm’, or in another verb form, ‘to make oneself firm’ and thus to attain the unshakable certainty that is trust in Yahweh’s saving power and goodwill (Kraus 1992: 161; von Rad 1990: 171).

So the association of faith with reverent certainty is scripturally warranted in so far as it is founded on knowledge of Israel’s covenant God, including his enmity with the wicked (von Rad 1990: 379). Faith is certain because it knows itself as claimed by the God of the covenant as by the one true God *for* Israel and *over* all. Faith makes firm by acknowledging, assenting, and entrusting the self to the reign of this God. This remains consistent in the New Testament literature, as is particularly evident in the influential definition of faith in Heb 11:1. In this verse, faith is theologically defined as the substantial reality of one’s hope for the coming of the reign of God, which has now been vouchsafed in Christ. Here faith is the certainty by which human creatures strengthen themselves to persevere under trial in following the author and pioneer of their faith through sorrows to joy. Faith knows in whom it believes; it is an intelligent anticipation prior to secure comprehension of the future promised by God.

1.3 Cognitive faith, volitional faith, and trust

At the beginnings of scholasticism, in the Western theological tradition antecedent to Schleiermacher, Anselm had articulated the Christian theological task as 'faith seeking understanding' (*Proslogion* 1–2). This definition became (and still remains) influential in theological accounts of faith. Here faith, understood cognitively (i.e. as 'holding to be true' an assemblage of beliefs authoritatively revealed by God and thus necessary for salvation), is taken as the axiomatic point of departure for theology: the rational opacity of these traditional Christian beliefs is to be overcome in the work of theological understanding. Faith is further understood volitionally, in the sense of making the decision to believe, and thus faith is a meritorious act of loving obedience to divine authority. But the context of 'faith seeking understanding' is no longer the battle within Christianity against deviant interpretations of the gospel by Gnostic claims to superior knowledge, as it was in Augustine's theology. Rather, in the early Middle Ages the inherited beliefs from the patristic era in God's Trinity and the incarnation of the divine Son in Jesus Christ had become problematic, if not unintelligible. These beliefs were singled out by Muslims neighbouring the Christian West, as well as Jews within. The objections of both relied, in various ways, on the legacies of Greek philosophy, positioning these Christian beliefs as rational absurdities unworthy of the simple and exalted divine majesty. This apologetic purpose of rationalizing particularities of the Christian tradition of belief – over against various scepticisms claiming the authority of reason – underlies developments in medieval theology after Anselm.

This apologetic intention of Christian theology was renewed in modern Protestantism, as indicated above in the discussion of Schleiermacher. His interpretation of faith as certainty of feeling in relation to the Absolute, known as 'God' in articulated piety, was explicitly deployed against cognitive and ethical skepticism arising from German idealism. Yet if the medieval developments had privileged doctrinal propositions over the human subjectivity of faith, the opposite occurred in modern Protestant theology. The relationship between faith as belief in revealed truths about God and faith as trust in God became particularly vexed: 'Protestant theology not infrequently treats faith in the promise and assenting knowledge of facts as mutually exclusive alternatives and then opts for the former rather than the latter' (Pannenberg 1991: 139 [vol. 3]). These modern developments have led to the Roman Catholic suspicion that the Protestant doctrine of faith is pure subjectivism. But this is a misunderstanding, not least of all by modern Protestants of their Reformation heritage. For the Protestant theologians of the Reformation, assurance of faith is something given by the Holy Spirit as a gift and commanded on that basis: '[h]ence reflection on the Reformation view of faith can be seen always as a way to a more nuanced conception of the essential structure of faith itself' (1991: 139 [vol. 3]).

Indeed, justification *by faith* was the battle slogan of the Reformation. This much misunderstood doctrine of faith is thus in need of a self-critical retrieval. Reformation faith is not fideistic introspection, faith in faith; rather it is ecstatic 'extraspection,' faith in Christ. In a virtuous not vicious circle, faith looks to the risen Christ who comes bringing his Spirit to generate, sustain, or renew faith by word and sacrament, as believer's need may be. Such extraspection is productive of the new subjectivity of 'being in Christ' (Pannenberg 1991: 162–163 [vol. 3]), i.e. a mode of participation in the divine life.

Luther did not disassociate trust from faith as cognitive assent; but in the reformatory treatise on the freedom of the Christian, he existentialized faith as fear and trust concurring with God's judgment which thus fulfils the First Commandment (Pannenberg 1991: 140 [vol. 3]). Luther's concurrence may be seen as formally parallel to Thomas Aquinas' position that love for God is the ultimate basis for adhering to God's authority in faith. In spite of the formal parallel with Luther, Aquinas' view of faith as formed by love became problematic for the magisterial Reformers, who wished instead to speak of faith formed by Christ (*conformitas Christi*). Aquinas' extended discussion in *Summa Theologiae* 2:5 (see Aquinas 1947) inquires into the 'merit' of faith as a human act. He ultimately locates this 'merit' of faith in believing revealed truths about God: this belief transcends human reason out of love for the Supreme Being, humanity's highest good. Undoubtedly, if one is thinking of faith as only holding true beliefs surpassing human reason but revealed by God, such convictions could fall under the condemnation of the Jas 2:19 concerning demons who believe correctly but shudder at the truth which judges them. So the motivation of love informing faith is critical for Aquinas. However, the Reformers rejected the same truncated understanding of faith as *fides historica*. For them, the specific nature of faith emerges in view of promise, as *fiducia*: in spite of God's judgment on sin, in Christ God promises to be 'for me'. Melancthon thus famously taught that faith and the promise are correlative, yet understanding that this correlation presupposes *notitia*, i.e. 'knowledge' of the promise and the promisor. Hence faith is the personal appropriation of the 'object of faith' which is God's merciful self-presentation in Christ by the Spirit (Pannenberg 1991: 141–144 [vol. 3]). It is not love which believes in Christ, but faith – which is beloved in Christ and which loves in turn.

In sum, *fiducia* (trust) presupposes knowledge and assent which are its logical conditions. In this sense, the obedience of faith acknowledges the 'news' in the 'good news' as the basis of trust; and this, in turn, indicates the historicity of the gospel as a message that comes to humans from outside of themselves in the contingencies of history. This exposes the real nature of Christian faith: as a risk that ventures upon the putative promise of God. Such risk stands against the false security of fideism, which would make faith into its own basis, as if self-authenticating. To be sure, this retrieval by Pannenberg of the original Reformation view – the correlation of faith as trust on the basis of a definite

knowledge of God, putatively given by God – simultaneously exposes Christian knowledge to the erosive effects of historicism: perspectivalism, claims to truth contending with each other, the hermeneutic circle (in which biblical texts are interactively contextualized and recontextualized), and endless contention of faith about faith itself (Pannenberg 1991: 150–155 [vol. 3]). Trust must bear the burden, therefore, of the dubitability of Christian beliefs until they receive their judgment and verification in the eschaton. Only God verifies faith and vindicates trust.

Pannenberg's discussion of contested faith signals the cultural evolution beyond European modernity to what is vaguely referred to as postmodernity. Within postmodernism, metanarratives like the biblical canon's history of salvation are doubted in principle – not so much on the cognitive grounds, which preoccupied modernity, but on ethical ones. Metanarratives are regarded as totalizing and as such inherently oppressive. Going forward theologically in this new cultural context, it is therefore essential to see that faith intrinsically insists upon an apophatic reserve. Questioning is part of genuine faith because God is invisible. The real issue is in what sense God is invisible. A fundamental decision in theology is whether to take divine invisibility as the metaphysical background of the cosmos or as the as yet unrealized but promised future of the creation in the Christ, in whom faith exists.

1.4 Faith, salvation, and the Spirit of God

Simeon Zahl, in Pannenbergian fashion, notes that in the New Testament salvation belongs to the future: it is an 'eschatological reality rather than something that has already taken place or is currently taking place in our present experience' (Zahl 2020: 84). Such divine invisibility specifies present experience of the Spirit as 'a proleptic participation in a future eschatological reality in some sense'. Consequently, particularly important are the notions of hope and faith as language 'that speaks about Christians engaging in a present-tense participation in Christ's death and resurrection in some sense' (Zahl 2020: 84). So, what precisely is the sequence of events by which believers come to have faith that conforms them to Christ's death and resurrection? How does a person's own Pentecost experience come about (cf. Acts 2)? In asking such questions, the great contribution Zahl makes to the understanding of justification by faith is to see it – consistently and radically – as the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in moving hearts to faith.

It is important to stress here that the experience of the Spirit of God generating faith is not a matter of apologetics (authenticating faith in face of scepticism) but of identifying faith as the work of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Theological concern for identifying the experience of the Spirit who works faith in Christ reflects a concern for perseverance in faith in a fraught and contested world apropos of postmodernity. Between the ascension of Christ and his coming in glory there are many singing siren songs of liberation, justice, and peace.

Consequently, what is needed theologically is to articulate a sequence of the Spirit at work moving human affects from a state of plight and uncertainty to another of security in the biblical certainty of faith – a practically identifiable ‘plot’, a ‘pattern’, a ‘model’, a ‘grammar’, or a ‘symbol system’, as Zahl variously describes the Reformation sequence of law and gospel.

When the law is deployed to reveal sin and effect terror, the user is God the Spirit (Zahl 2020: 168–169); when the Spirit uses the law to contest usurping powers and to prosecute the controversy of the Lord with his people in the manner of the prophets of Israel, we have ‘the beginning of man’s justification and of his true baptism’. This prepares the way for the trust-generating experience of divine grace where ‘grace’ is not another theological abstraction but the self-donating Son personally presented (Zahl 2020: 169–175). The pastoral implications are profound. The discursive labelling provided by the Reformation’s law-gospel ‘symbol system’ can

interpret affective experiences without having to make overly strong claims about the power of discourse either to generate affects from scratch or to overcome affective intransigence in a straightforward manner [...] diminishing confusion and tapping new resources of compassion for ourselves and others, and reconfiguring which objects such affects latch onto in a way that opens up new possibilities of hope. This is a kind of process of excavation to forces and feelings that are present in the body but which have been shrouded, misinterpreted, or numbed. (Zahl 2020: 172)

By contrast, overly optimistic views about Christian ethical transformation do not grasp the ‘rhetoric of passivity’ in treating faith as a meritorious human act rather than as a passion which overtakes a person in the Spirit.

Much of the force of the Christian message is precisely its efficacious protest, in and through the work of Christ, against the natural human tendency to freight our day to day actions and feelings with soteriological or crypto-soteriological significance. (Zahl 2020: 116)

The saving work of the Spirit is such ‘disillusionment’. Zahl (2020: 174) connects the ‘severe mercy’ of disillusionment with Augustine’s distinction between use and enjoyment as a hermeneutic of idolatry:

[W]hat makes a thing an idol is not its substance or the form it takes but the way we treat it: whether we treat it as an object of worship, ‘enjoying’ it for its own sake rather than ‘using’ it for the sake of enjoying God through it. (Zahl 2020: 180)

Divine law as the Spirit’s hermeneutic of human experience is subject to important qualifications if it is not to be misunderstood as the sanctification of demonic hegemonies. ‘There really are quite significant theological differences between the judgment of God and

the judgment of our boss, our spouse, or our parents, and these in turn will have effects on how we “experience our experience” (Zahl 2020: 179). The Reformation purpose clause, ‘God makes us sinners *in order to* make us righteous’, is absolutely crucial to the proper deployment of the law-gospel hermeneutic of experience: ‘It is only in the Spirit that the *revelatio peccati* is put in its proper context of divine love, as an instrument of compassionate diagnosis that is always ordered to an infinite grace’ (Zahl 2020: 181).

Theology as a critical, postmodern *Glaubenslehre* (doctrine of faith) proceeds as a reciprocating movement of hearing, understanding, and trust in hermeneutical circulation of the community of faith extending through space and time. It produces articulated knowledge of God in doctrine which confesses what has been heard in a concrete context, thus equipping the faithful for the interpretation of their experience in the world as participation in the life of God. But what specifically and experientially is such participation in the life of God by Spirit-generated faith that conforms to Christ? To answer this question – which has emerged as a central one of theological controversy today – one must consider the faith of Jesus Christ.

2 The salience of the *pistis Christou* debate

We can orient ourselves by recognizing how, in early Christianity, faith was elevated as the appropriate reception of the gospel: Christianity’s original message concerning the resurrection of the crucified Jesus (Dalferth 2015). As the earliest texts surviving from early Christianity, Pauline literature in particular reflects the historical fact that Christianity arose not as the religion of an ethnicity or of the consolidation of ethnic religions under a pantheon of imperial power, but in response to a message of divine deliverance. This message called for people from all nations to gather together and become a renewed humanity for a new kind of community on the earth: the ‘Israel of God’ (Gal 6:16).

It is the abiding merit of Rudolf Bultmann’s entry on faith in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* that it underscored this missional context for the pre-eminence accorded to faith in early Christianity (Friedrich 1969: 208 [vol. 4]): ‘faith’ is the echo among human beings sounded by the gospel proclamation. This *kerygma* (announcement) purports to be the saving word of the Creator God (1 Thess 2:13), addressed to all creation in the resurrection vindication of the crucified Jesus (Dahl 1991: 100–101). Such a paradoxical pronouncement of good news – promising a cosmic transformation of the earth on which the cross of Jesus stood – was unheard of; its novelty forthwith demanded the labour of understanding, not chiefly for apologetic purposes but so that the faithful themselves might know what it is they have come to believe and how it interprets life and directs practice. Thus Christ in the *kerygma* is ‘always the foundation of faith’ so that faith is inseparable from the person mediated by the proclamation. At this stage in his career, Bultmann could clearly see that ‘the figure of Jesus Christ cannot be detached

from its “myth” (Friedrich 1969: 211 [vol. 4]) in Paul (Kay 1994). As displayed in Mark’s historical initiation of the gospel genre (under the influence of Paul; Marcus 2005: 73–75), it is the *narrated* Christ who requires (Mark 1:15) and elicits (9:23–24) trust, who summons confession of faith (8:27–31) and exemplifies it (14:61–62) – although in the process he suffers its betrayal (14:10) and denial (14:66–71).

After Bultmann, questions about christologically-formed faith have crystallized in a vigorous contention concerning Paul’s grammatically ambiguous genitive construction, *pistis Christou*. This formulation occurs seven times in the Bible, in Gal 2:16 (twice); 2:20; 3:22; Rom 3:22, 26; and Phil 3:9 (also in the deuterio-Pauline Eph 3:12). Does the apostle refer human deliverance promised in the gospel to the faithful obedience of Christ, Christ’s own lived faith (fulfilling the law’s double commandment of love), or does the construction refer deliverance to faith in Christ, an individual’s own trusting in Christ (against the same law’s accusation of human lovelessness)? Or, somehow to both? Literally transposed into English, this unusual formulation would read ‘the faith (or faithfulness, the Greek *pistis* can mean either) of Christ’. The debate centres on whether this expression ascribes the agency of salvation to Christ’s own faith or faithfulness (the genitive of the subject) or to the faith which is invested in Christ by human beings (the genitive of the object). Does the phrase ‘faith of Christ’ say something about Jesus Christ whose faith or faithfulness saves, or does it speak about those who trust in him, whose faith saves them? Or does it encapsulate both?

As the authentic Pauline letters are the earliest surviving testimonies of early Christianity, questions about faith crystallized by the *pistis Christou* debate have relevance for the understanding of the matter in the rest of the New Testament. There are interesting and significant developments on the theme of faith in the later literature of the New Testament especially in the historically first gospel (Mark) and the historically final gospel (John), as noted below. It is also possible to see an alternative to Paul’s doctrine of faith in Jas 1–2, but this possibility itself attests the formative influence of Paul’s doctrine of faith – as also to the difficulty from early times in grasping its coherence.

It has been suggested that the eruption of vigorous debate about *pistis Christou* has issued in ‘a proxy war between a corporate participationist reading of Paul and an individual, forensic reading’ (Bird and Sprinkle 2009: 6). The helpful collection of opposing positions by Bird and Sprinkle put this scholarly ‘warfare’ on display and served to bring the controversy up to date. What is evident after the din of battle, however, is that the opposing arguments of biblical scholars have come to a standoff, indicating that this particular problem of the sense of *pistis Christou* – and therewith all the questions regarding the sense and importance of ‘faith’ in Christianity – cannot be resolved on the basis of semantics, grammar, or even exegesis alone. Theological reconstruction which uncovers the coherence of Paul’s doctrine of faith by accounting for all the evidence

moves the argument forward – under the assumption, to be sure, of the formative and to that extent normative witness of the New Testament for Christian theology.

Nevertheless, the Western theological tradition has worked with another influential distinction beyond the previously discussed senses of *credere* since the time of Augustine, partly in response to the varying emphases in New Testament accounts of faith. The faith which believes (*fides qua*) is distinguished from the faith which is believed (*fides quae*). Is this distinction aid or obstacle in reconstruction? Where does *pistis Christou* belong here? Does the distinction express or undermine the coherence of faith in Paul, or for that matter, the New Testament and Christianity?

2.1 *Fides qua* and *fides quae*

In 1983, when Richard Hays initiated the scholarly controversy about the peculiar Pauline locution, *pistis Christou*, it was chiefly to contend on behalf of Bultmann's forgotten (or abandoned) insight into the narrative (or 'myth') presupposed in Paul's hermeneutical dialectic of faith and understanding (Hays 2002). For Hays, Christ is not an event of liberation, such that Jesus and his faithful way to the cross – in obedience to the God of Israel for the sake of others – is mere scaffolding that may be left behind, let alone substituted by other narratives. Being 'from faith for faith' (Rom 1:17), the narrative proclamation of Jesus Christ rather warrants and defines the way of liberation for those who believe. If that is right, the faith which trusts (*fides qua*) and the faith which is believed (*fides quae*) are not disjunctive but correlative.

What is at stake in this correlation? Speaking for Old Testament scripture's knowledge of God in this connection, Moberly notes that 'first and foremost, it is always necessary to discern whether the recipient of trust is genuinely trustworthy. Trust can be misplaced, sometimes disastrously, and some knowledge of character is necessary to place trust well' (Moberly 2020: 204). Likewise in the historically last of the New Testament gospels, the distinction is a purely analytical one, serving to identify Christ as trustworthy and salvifically present through the trust which receives him (John 1:12–13). Mediating between trust and trustworthiness is a particular relationship: 'in faith itself Christ is present' (*in fide ipsa Christus adest*; Mannerman 1989; Braaten and Jenson 1998). Articulated for clear understanding as needed to sustain proclamation and faith in the new community of the gospel, the Christ identified by theological labour is articulated in doctrine (Helmer 2014), the 'articles of faith' which confess him before the world. The correlation between the faith which believes and the faith which is believed – and the cost of their modern separation into private attitudes on the one side and self-proclaimed orthodoxies on the other – may be surveyed as follows.

3 The state of the question

3.1 Augustine and the one true faith

In Augustine's theology, the distinction between *fides qua* and *fides quae* was intended to clarify the relationship between the 'one faith' of Eph 4:5 and the many, varying faiths, little and great, of the multitude of believers:

We certainly say very truly that faith has been impressed from one single teaching on the hearts of every single believer who believes the same thing; but what is believed is one thing, the faith it is believed with is another. (*The Trinity* XIII.1.5; Augustine of Hippo 1996: 345)

The rise to pre-eminence on this basis of the notion of 'the one true faith' had already gained momentum from controversies internal to Christianity. This began with Gnosticism, but became especially prominent with the Arian and Pelagian crises which prompted the church to create ecumenical doctrinal definitions of faith, such as in the Nicene Creed. As mentioned above, by the time of early scholasticism, Christianity faced fundamental intellectual challenges to its scandalous belief in God known in the flesh of Jesus. Yet the rallying cry to the one 'faith which is believed' (*fides quae creditur*) was inadequate to such challenges:

[T]he disputes and developments of the 11th and 12th centuries, in particular the Eucharistic controversy and its repercussions, made it impossible to identify or to assert the one true faith as simplistically as its spokesman had been doing before the complexity and ambiguity of such an assertion came clearly into view. (Pelikan 1978: 215)

The unresolved difficulty concerned understanding of the present Christ (*Christus praesens*).

Indeed, ambiguity about what is obligatory belief in this regard was exacerbated by a tendency to understand faith intellectually, as assent to supernaturally revealed propositions that are merely taken on authority. Faith understood so one-sidedly could hardly play the role that it does in the New Testament literature, as the letter of James had classically pointed out: 'you believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder' (2:19). As the medieval Eucharistic controversies concerning the presence of the risen Christ indicate, the immediacy of the trust-generating experience of Christ in word and sacrament was deferred to contending beliefs about how his presence was mediated. With this deferral, however, the intellectual understanding of faith as assent to propositions required in turn an affective addition – its formation by charity (*fides caritate formata*) – even to approximate the New Testament understanding of 'faith operating in love' (Gal 5:6).

3.2 Luther and the scandal of the fabulous

Thus, when Luther disputed this understanding of faith formed by love, he was equally disputing the interpretation of faith as primarily intellectual assent based on ecclesial authority. He argued that faith in Christ is intelligible as the receptive relationship initiated and sustained by the promising God made known by scripture; such faith in principle and in power fulfils in the believer the first commandment to have no other gods than the saving Lord who wills to be our God (Bayer 2008: 282–288). In this light, Luther follows Augustine in making his distinction by concretizing Augustine’s ‘one teaching’ of Ephesians’ ‘one faith’ as the historical apostle’s ‘one gospel’ (Gal 1:6–9). The difference lies in the *relationship* initiated and sustained in the gospel: ‘in faith itself Christ is present’ (*in fide ipsa Christus adest*). This assertion of the present Christ relativizes both ecclesial and scriptural authorities as servants of the present Lord, not vicars of an absent one. But how is the present Christ to be recognized?

In ‘A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels’ (1521), Luther maintained: ‘One should thus realize that there is only one gospel, but that it is described by many apostles’ (*Luther’s Works* 118 [vol. 35]; see Luther 1999). Luther explains:

[The] gospel is and should be nothing else than a discourse or story about Christ [...] Such a story can be told in various ways; one spins it out, and the other is brief. Thus the gospel is and should be nothing else than a chronicle, a story, or narrative about Christ, telling who he is, what he did, said, and suffered – a subject which one describes briefly, another more fully, one this way, another that way. For at its briefest the gospel is a discourse about Christ, that he is the Son of God and became man for us, that he died and was raised, that he has been established as the Lord over all things. (*Luther’s Works* 118–120 [vol. 35])

Luther cites Paul’s dependence on the early Christian narrative embedded in Rom 1:1–4 to identify Christ as ‘God’s and David son.’ Born of a woman under the law, Jesus Christ was a Jew and the One whom he addressed as Abba-Father was the God of Israel. Vindicated as the Son of this God in power by the Spirit’s raising him from the dead, the narrative – what is believed – thus serves to identify the trustworthy Christ for the sake of human believing by which the deliverance on offer is personally appropriated (see Luther 1999).

Luther proceeds to exposit the affective passion of faith by which this Christ is believed as the relation of trust, embracing the Christ who comes to embrace:

[T]he chief article and foundation of the gospel is that before you take Christ as an example, you accept and recognize him as a gift, as a present that God has given you and that is your own [...] This is the great fire of the love of God for us, whereby the heart and conscience become happy, secure, and content. This is what preaching the Christian faith means. This is why such preaching is called gospel [...] joyful, good and comforting. (*Luther’s Works* 118 [vol. 35])

The affectivity of faith in the relationship initiated and sustained by the trustworthy Christ thus secured, Luther returns to the *action* of faith:

[W]hen you have Christ as the foundation and chief blessing of your salvation [...] you take him as your example, giving yourself in service to your neighbor just as you see that Christ has given himself for you. See, here faith and love move forward, God's commandment is fulfilled, and a person is happy and fearless to do and to suffer all things. (*Luther's Works* 118–120 [vol. 35])

Resting in Christ as gift by faith issues in following Christ as example in love and awaiting Christ in hope.

Faith as trust proceeds organically from the initiating 'promissory narrative' (Morse 1979; Thiemann 1987) of God's steadfast love enacted in Christ to the newborn believer's trust enabling perseverance in hope and love amid trial and testing. As in the Psalms of Israel, Christian faith, poised between an 'already' of the Word incarnate guaranteeing trust and the 'not yet' of this promise publicly fulfilled, patiently awaits the promised denouement.

The hymns that celebrate Yahweh as King shows clearly that Israel's hope is ultimately directed towards the visible and fully real appearance and triumph of Yahweh's royal authority over all the world, that it includes a radical deliverance from and transformation of the present situation, and that it includes all peoples in new, future deeds and miracles of Yahweh. (Kraus 1992: 71)

Scandalized, however, at this fabulous nature both of faith's foundation in the person of Christ and of its expectation of this person's public manifestation, Enlightenment theology (e.g. Spinoza 1998) saw the dissolution of this organic correlation in the Pauline-Augustinian tradition of faith which trusts and the trustworthy God in Christ who is proclaimed as hope for the future. Theological debates about faith in turn degenerated into opposing camps of fundamentalism and fideism, 'reactions of the dogmatism of supernatural revelation [and] the subjectivism of irrational faith' (Dalferth 2001: 268 [vol. 2]). The catalyst precipitating this devolution of theology was Kant's critical philosophy of religion (Saarinen 1989), theologized in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* as 'objective uncertainty held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness' (Hong and Hong 2000: 207), and promoted as the genuine Luther-theology by existentialist theologians after the Great War in the early twentieth century (Helmer 2019). All this forms the background to a polemic against 'the Lutheran Paul' among partisans of the so-called 'New Perspective on Paul' movement, although this polemic does not map directly onto the *pistis Christou* debate.

Christian faith for Luther, however, is not introspection but an eccentric reorientation of the self away from itself into new relationships of trust in God, love for the other, and hope for the world. As Dalferth puts it:

Christian faith, as faith in Jesus Christ rather than as the faith of Christians, is not a kind of acceptance expressing the certainty of subjective conviction but not the assurance of objective knowledge (I. Kant); it involves asserted certainty that precisely as such is never free of temptation. (Dalferth 2001: 266 [vol. 2])

The faith which believes is always afflicted just as the faithful Christ was never free of testing.

4 The way forward

4.1 Barth's innovation

Grammatically, the objective genitive reading of *pistis Christou* as 'faith in Christ' has been traditional, as Luther translated it. Fittingly, the Bird and Sprinkle volume concludes with an incisive essay by Benjamin Miters on Karl Barth's contention for the subjective genitive (Miters 2009: 291–308) which stands behind Hay's narrative reading and is poised against Bultmann's program of demythologization as a solution to the problem of the fabulous.

I live in the faith of the Son of God. My faith in him has its basis in the fact that He Himself, the Son of God, first believed for me, and so believed that all that remains for me to do is to let my eyes rest on him, which really means to let my eyes follow him. (*Church Dogmatics [CD] II/2*: 559; see Barth 1936–1975)

Barth's reading of the faith of Christ as pioneering human believing in Christ cuts in every direction. Notoriously focused on the relation of faith to works, or faith to faithfulness (and so an issue for anthropology rather than Christology), theological confusion (not only between Protestants and Catholics but also among Protestants) prevailed from the sixteenth century onward (Vainio 2008). Bird and Sprinkle's suggestion of a proxy war between corporate participationist and individualistic forensic readings of Paul's doctrine of faith is thus apt as a description of persisting theological confusion.

Representatives of the New Perspective like James Dunn embrace the objective genitive reading, inserting Paul's Christology into a covenantal, salvation-history framework. In contrast, representatives of the apocalyptic perspective, notably J. Louis Martyn, follow Käsemann in criticizing the salvation history framework of understanding (Käsemann 1978: 67–68), and embrace the subjective genitive reading (Martyn 1997: 251, 271–275, 314). The authors in the Bird and Sprinkle volume include traditional Catholics alongside free will evangelicals, both preserving a place for human freedom in response to the grace of God by rejecting the subjective genitive interpretation which they see as tending

towards a monergism of grace and universal salvation. Certain evangelicals and Catholics also express concern that attributing afflicted faith to the Son of God (as Barth clearly does) diminishes his divinity or even represents an attempt to replace it with the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, thus acutely raising the christological and trinitarian problems of the *fides quae creditur*. Simon Gathercole, however, has subjected the range of these interpretive possibilities to trenchant critique for evading the ever-scandalous element of substitution in Paul's account of atonement in Christ the crucified (Gathercole 2015). Barth did not evade this particular stumbling stone in *CD IV/1*, writing of 'the Judge judged in our place' as the very content of the faithfulness of Christ, even as this substitution of Christ 'who gave himself for our sins to deliver us' (Gal 1:4) required a revision in understanding the divine sonship of Christ (*CD IV/1*: 200–201). In short, Barth's innovation on *pistis Christou* is shrouded by a confused reception, reflecting Barth's own ambivalent relation to Luther's legacy.

4.2 The problem of the 'Lutheran' Paul

Substitution stands behind the forensic dimension of Paul's doctrine of justification: faith in Christ is 'reckoned' righteous by God because the righteous Christ was first 'reckoned' in the place of sinners, also by God – the innocent for the guilty. However, this remarkable exchange, found in Isaiah 53 does not exclude but provides for corporate participation (Pauline 'being in Christ') by way of the Suffering Servant's singular substitution. This exchange is remarkable because Christ, coming in the likeness of sinful flesh under the curse of the law, explodes the usual economy of 'tit for tat' (*quid pro quo*) and 'to each their due' (*suum cuique*), the merit economy represented in Paul's 'law of works' which distributes reward and punishment as one merits (Rom 4:2–5). In a 'marvellous duel' with this economy the righteous Christ who became a curse for others out of agape love satisfies and so justly cancels the old economy to eventuate in its place a new one of 'joyful exchange'. It is a new and joyful exchange because in superabundant grace God justly, i.e. *propter Christum*, gives the good things of righteousness, life and peace precisely to them who do not deserve according to the judgment of the economy of works (Stoellger 2017: 477–501 [vol.1]).

Defenders of 'the Lutheran reading of Paul' typically reject the subjective genitive (Westerholm 2004: 305; Reumann, Fitzmeyer and Quinn 1982). In his 1535 commentary on Galatians, Luther makes no remarks about the peculiar locution, faith of Christ, in 2:20 which he translates as the objective genitive, faith in Christ. Given his context of battling an anthropological doctrine of 'doing what is in one's own power' (*facere quod in se*), which reduces the foregoing good news of the joyful exchange to a good deal in the old economy, Luther deploys the simpler contrast between faith in gracious gift and works rewarded. But this is not the end of his discussion. He dwells lovingly on the appositional

phrasing (if we follow the subjective genitive reading of what precedes) about the faithful Son of God ‘who loved me and gave himself for me’.

This self-oblation to suffer ‘the curse of the law’ on behalf of those who fail to do all that is written therein, is for Luther the interceding work of Christ which drives the apostle’s novel distinction between faith in the gift and works rewarded their due – that is, between innovative divine justice to save and the old economy which works wrath:

For he did not give a sheep or an ox or gold or silver for me. But he who was completely God gave everything He was, gave himself for me – for me, I say, the miserable and accursed sinner. I am revived by this giving of the Son of God into death and I apply it to myself. The applying is the true power of faith [...] Because of his sheer mercy and love, [he] gave and offered himself to God as a sacrifice for us miserable sinners to sanctify us forever. (*Luther’s Works* 26: 177)

Therefore, faith applies Christ as gift to oneself.

Drawing upon Krister Stendahl’s influential thesis about Western ‘introspection’ (Stendahl 1976), alleging a baleful misreading of Paul under the influence of the monks Augustine and Luther, some proponents of the subjective genitive seek to distinguish strongly between faith ‘as a relationship and praxis’, and faith as a ‘state of the heart and mind with an object’, attributing the latter to the ‘anachronistic lens’ of Augustine’s very ‘division of *fides* into *fides qua* and *fides quae*’ (Morgan 2017: 348). The strength and salience of the claim is to reject pious scrupulosity, including scruples about whether one truly believes sundry items in the creed. The claim, however, is both overstated and misplaced. It is overstated because, as previously seen, Augustine’s distinction (not ‘division’) is analytical precisely to the relationship established in the one gospel between God in Christ and the multitude of believers. Moreover, ‘a state of heart and mind with an object’ is also a relationship, albeit a truncated one. The claim is also misplaced because the monks learnt self-examination from daily recitation of the Psalms of Israel; the kind of epistemological division of subject and object which Stendahl and his followers rightly reject has much more to do with Descartes and Kant (and the eighteenth-century polarization between Pietism and Orthodoxy) than Augustine and Luther (Moberly 2020: 123).

Therefore, a better nuanced ‘Lutheran reading’ of Paul, as Pannenberg proposed, is conceivable in light of the mutually clarifying Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on Justification (Rusch 2003; Jüngel 2001). This would not be the exclusively forensic view of the Formula of Concord (Hinlicky 2012: 281–314), let alone the existentialist anthropology of Rudolf Bultmann (Hinlicky 2016: 95–102). This reading could embrace ‘faith of Christ’ as Christ’s trusting and so faithful enactment of God’s gift for those ‘weak and ‘ungodly’ (cf. Rom 5:6–10) by taking their place in order to put them in his place. The resurrection vindicated *Christus praesens* generates ‘justifying’ faith with just this liberating command

to surrender sin and death and receive in its place his historically attained righteousness and life. As Udo Schnelle asserts:

Because faith grows out of the proclamation of the gospel, it is ultimately always an act of God, based solely on the Christ event. Therefore faith cannot be the means by which a person creates the presuppositions for God's saving activity. Rather, in faith God puts a person on a new path, the ground and goal of which is Jesus Christ. For human beings faith cannot be made, but it can be lived, experienced and carried out. Faith appears as a creative activity of God in human beings, which in turn enables and requires their activity. (Schnelle 1996: 54)

Schnelle does not engage with the *pistis Christou* controversy, but he does introduce the Holy Spirit in this context as the author of human faith through the act of making the risen Christ present to speak gospel. This reference to the Spirit is compatible with a positive embrace of the concerns of the subjective genitive advocates, who in turn can scarcely deny that whenever Paul employs the subjective genitive expression he immediately relates it to the saving benefit of those human beings upon whom faith has come, who consequently now 'believe in' Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Spirit confess Him before the world (1 Cor 12:3; cf. Rom 10:9). Summarily, God does not justify *on account of* our faith (rather on account of *Christ's faith*), yet surely *for the sake of* our faith (Dillenberger 1953).

What is notable about the entire *pistis Christou* controversy is the conspicuous absence of the Holy Spirit in it (including Morgan 2017: 509), as the divine person who mediates the faith of Christ to human beings in summoning faith in Christ as its corresponding echo. The Holy Spirit is integral to the narrated faith or faithfulness of Jesus Christ enacted in his mission, and should be understood correspondingly in relation to the genesis of Christian faith. While Karl Barth is the major source of the subjective genitive interpretation, according to Benjamin Miters he saw the Spirit's work as an integral piece of the puzzle: 'Barth understands the creation of subjects as the work of the *Spirit*. If the resurrection is the universalization of Jesus's particular history, the work of the Spirit is the making present of this history to specific human persons' (Miters 2009: 306).

The solution to the problem of the 'Lutheran' Paul is this trinitarian move to the Spirit who brings the faithfulness of Christ to bear upon human beings in creating the new subjectivity of faith (Schwöbel 2017: 418–419). Such pneumatology complements Luther's christological motif of the 'joyful exchange' (*fröhliche Wechsel*), based on a Pauline text like 2 Cor 5:21: 'for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' Accordingly, for Luther the risen Christ is made present in word and sacrament by the Holy Spirit to produce faith 'where and when it pleases God' (*ubi et quando Deo visum est*; Augsburg Confession V); faithfully re-presenting his finished work on the cross, Christ is present to bear away sin and bestow

righteousness (Steiger 2000: 125–158). Luther inherits this complex of thought about exchange from the patristic ‘astonishing transaction’ (*commercium admirabile*), descending from a Pauline text like 2 Cor 8:9: ‘for you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich’. Drawing upon a corresponding patristic motif from Irenaeus and Athanasius that ‘the Logos became what we are in order that we might become what He is’, M. D. Hooker developed a model of ‘interchange in Christ’ along these lines to interpret Paul on the atonement (Hooker 1990). And that model equips us to return to the interpretation of the faith of Christ.

4.3 A holistic case for the subjective genitive

Drawing upon Hooker, Teresa Morgan discovers that, when trust is understood as a relationship, the primacy of trust (*fiducia*, *fides ex corde*) in early Christianity is articulated christologically (Morgan 2017: 427–428). She finds the faithfulness or the faith of Jesus Christ operating in multiple relational dimensions, inclusive of eliciting personal faith, to be lived communally. This discovery of the christological articulation of faith as a social reality, moreover, explains the rise of credal Christianity, the *fides quae creditur*. Any act of trust, Morgan repeatedly reminds, implicitly contains beliefs about who and what is trustworthy (e.g. 2017: 427–428); such beliefs must become explicit and articulate in trial and testing if trust is to persevere under duress. Writing in reference to the Gospel of John, for example, she observes that the propositional “believing that” occurs within relationships, potential or actual, between Jesus and the elect, and its content is no more nor less than the identity of Jesus which leads the elect to trust in him’ in spite of the enmity of the unbelieving world (Morgan 2017: 439–440).

Equipped with this analytical apparatus, Morgan notes that ‘faith of Christ’ always occurs in dense passages expositing Paul’s controversial doctrine of justification by faith. What would be the point of the objective genitive reading of *pistis Christou* this context? Paul knows very well how to say, ‘believe God’ in the sense of taking God at his word, or ‘believe in Christ’ in the sense of taking Christ as God’s word; moreover, he regularly follows the unusual expression, ‘faith of Christ’, with reference to such human believing. Is the objective genitive rendering to be regarded as stylistic variation or repetition for emphasis, ignoring the force of its atypical form? What would be the point, however, if it is not redundant? Paul is then deliberately introducing the unusual locution to indicate a *relationship* between the lived faith of Christ, baptized in the Spirit for his messianic work of love for others, and the Spirit-induced faith of believers also operative in such love for others.

Particularly in Galatians, Romans, and Philippians – in other words where the doctrine of justification is in controversy and the subjective genitive locution occurs – Morgan

identifies a mediating 'model of Jesus as doubly faithful to and trusted by God and humanity to explain how his death and resurrection save those believing from their sins' (Morgan 2017: 437). In other words, the faith or faithfulness of Jesus was simultaneously his relation of filial obedience to God and of loving loyalty to sinners. In sending his Son to this uncanny end, God trusts, indeed entrusts, his own fatherhood (cf. Barth, *CD* IV/1: 419), to the Son's faithful course, even to death on a cross, and so by the Spirit vindicates their mutual relationship of trust in his resurrection/exaltation. Resurrection is vindication of the faith of Christ. The proclamation of this event of divine victory for us consequently elicits a new community in this multidimensional trust. The Christian faith thereby is recovered as a social faith, the faith of the 'Israel of God', a beloved community generated and constituted in new bonds of trust, established and so centred upon the enacted faith of Christ.

Morgan sees that Paul affirms that God justifies one 'out of the faith of Jesus' (2017: 290). Grammatically it is very strained to translate this as 'the one who has faith in Jesus'. It is slightly less strained to understand it as 'the one who is righteous because of the *pistis* of Jesus', leaving open whether the *pistis* of Jesus is towards God or human beings' (2017: 290). How then is *pistis Christou* to be understood? She answers:

God trusts Christ (by implication) to act as an expiation for human sins. Christ is faithful and obedient toward God, very possibly also towards the human beings whose acquittal he makes possible. Human beings put their trust, probably both in God and Christ [...] Through the *dikaiosyne* of God, the bilateral *pistis* of Christ, and their own *pistis* the faithful are made *dikaioi*. (Morgan 2017: 290)

Thus Paul uses *pistis* in Galatians 'to refer to the relationship of trust/belief between God, Christ, and the faithful, the pledge or assurance secured by Christ which binds them together, the bond formed by the pledge, and the community formed by the bond' (Morgan 2017: 290). Fulfilling a wish of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one may at last see fulfillment in Morgan's account of the 'social interpretation of all the basic Christian concepts' (1998). That indeed points the way forward. Its reformatory potential for the existing churches of Euro-America, fragmented and in the throes of a high-lethal legitimacy crisis, is evident. The implications of this recovery of the coherence of Paul's doctrine of faith will be discussed in the next section.

5 Implications

5.1 Faith and the fabulous

Recalling the incredulity of the Enlightenment and the decline of theology to fideism, Morgan (2017) argues that early Christian faith is warranted; it is never a fideistic faith in faith, an irrational leap in the dark. No matter how incredible the reasons for believing may

seem to contemporary people, faith was motivated by experience of Jesus, the experience of the preaching—portraying of crucified Jesus by the apostles of His resurrection, and the concomitant experience of the gift and gifts of the Spirit, demonstrating the will and power of God to save. The genuine difficulty lies elsewhere. The grand finale of this experienced ‘beginning of the gospel’ (Mark 1:1), the glorious Parousia at which the dead in Christ rise to meet him in the air (Mark 13:26–27; cf. 1 Thess 4:16–18) is indefinitely delayed (Mark 13: 8–9). Thus the immediacy of primitive experience warranting faith active in love and hope came to be mediated by apostolic witness, handed on as tradition, codified in scripture and baptismal creed, and safeguarded by faithful overseers descending from the apostles, resulting in ‘early Catholicism’.

For Morgan, the relational understanding of faith as trust generated in the experienced reality of Jesus Christ by the Spirit is therewith increasingly deferred to, even to the point of being fully eclipsed by, an increasingly propositional understanding of faith as truths supernaturally revealed by God to be held intellectually. But this latter provides no motive; it is inherently unstable as a non-adjudicable appeal to authority, and in time came to reflect protracted, polemical evolutions of complex and competing doctrinal systems. In *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant (1799) objected that even if there were a true revelation, finite beings possess no criterion by which to discriminate a true revelation from an imposter. The original proclamation of the resurrection as the vindication of Jesus, a vindication extended to believers in the genesis of their corresponding trust, and experienced in the work and witness of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26–27; Gal 3:2–5) becomes unintelligible. The daunting objection, ‘[w]here is the promise of his coming?’ (2 Pet 3:3), questioned whether it is all a ‘fable’; the objection is deflected but never answered by the appeal to supernatural authority in the possession of an institution as dogma.

Nonetheless, biblical faith trusts in a deliverance which seems scandalously ‘fabulous’ (to borrow the category of the pagan theologian, Varro, which Augustine discussed in *City of God*). For Augustine, scripture’s anthropomorphic portraits of the deity acting and reacting within the history of humanity seemed in need of a definite demythologization. Thus he began a tradition: the fabulous deliverance of God promised in scripture was transposed by a metaphysical notion of perfect simplicity of being, salvation consisting in the beatific vision thereof. This move to demythologization by Platonic metaphysics, with increasing purchase, particularly characterized the subsequent Western tradition. It was not resolved by the Reformation’s reiteration of justifying faith as the relational faith alone which trusts Christ alone, since it left unclarified its own dependence on the miraculous person of Christ which it proclaimed as trustworthy and articulated in christological doctrine. Indeed, against a metaphysically more rational two-subject Christology, a one-subject account of the fabulous person of Christ, with the attendant doctrine of the personal communication of idioms, was the warrant particularly of the Lutheran tradition’s chief doctrine of justification

(Bayer 2008). The communication of idioms in Christ is the basis of the existentially motivating joyful exchange with believers.

Accordingly, Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologization (in post-Enlightenment mode transposing fables into existentialist anthropology rather than Platonic metaphysics) was not innovating so much as bringing to radical completion a tendency within Western theology from its outset.

But the price of that 'denarratization' is final silence before the ineffable, the 'God beyond God'. Tillich rightly urged that the alternative to Bultmann's demythologization is rather 'deliteralization' (Tillich 1967: 152), although he did not see how deliteralization is already proceeding in the Gospel of John and the trinitarian Christology of the early church developing on that basis (Hinlicky 2011). Taken as a whole, the dramatic representations of New Testament 'mythology' refer to the God who comes from God to include creatures in the life of God. What is genuinely fabulous, in other words, what is truly and properly fascinating, and an endlessly engaging mystery is the eternal life of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, in which faith already participates, by the way of the Spirit's work of faith which unites with Christ the Son, if Gal 2:20 is taken straightforwardly. If so, however, pilgrim faith which has 'not yet arrived' fully and publicly at its eternal destiny in the life of God, is endlessly afflicted on this earth on which the cross of Jesus stood, on trial for confessing his righteousness against the injustice of the world even as the grace which sustains perseverance is militant (Ziegler 2018).

5.2 The militancy of grace

The theme of 'faith's fabulous' interlocks with the militancy of grace, as may be seen at the origins of Israel in the deliverance at the Red Sea:

But Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.' (Exod 14:13–14)

The phrase 'the Lord will fight for you' may be taken as the 'gospel told beforehand' (Hinlicky 2021: 7), summoning up obedient faith in ancient Israel. Grace is the Lord who fights for us. Gerhard von Rad helpfully distinguished here between 'the magical', that is the manipulation of impersonal powers by an occult knowledge of causality, from the 'eminently personalistic character [...] strongly voluntaristic' of Moses' YHWH. Israel ventured a trust (not without risk from the human perspective) upon 'Yahweh's freedom and unpredictability' in exercise of Yahweh's power to save. Von Rad concluded from the exultant refrain in the Song of the Sea, 'Yahweh is a warrior; Yahweh is his name', that 'confident trusting in the action of Yahweh had its actual origin in the holy

war and that from there it took on its own peculiar dynamic character' (von Rad 1990: 70). For this genesis of faith in the gospel promise of Yahweh who fights for us, the element of the fabulous is no less dispensable than the militancy of its protagonist: 'in the holy wars Israel did not arise to protect faith in Yahweh, but Yahweh came on the scene to defend Israel' (von Rad 1990: 71).

It is not different in the historically first Gospel of Mark, which probably uses the biblical book of Joshua as a template (Marcus 2005; 2009: 406, 421, 499, 758, 763, 765). As in Joshua, the reign of God is on the march in the Spirit-baptized Jesus, crossing the River Jordan into Galilee to do battle, fighting for sinful and possessed Israel by forgiving sins and expelling polluting spirits. The healings of Jesus are to be understood as acts of war against the *regnum diaboli*. Moreover, in these healings enacting the reign of God against usurping powers, faith plays a notable role, not only in welcoming the controversial Jesus but in enabling the welcomed Jesus to do the good which the reign of God purposes for the suffering and captivated creature.

The role of faith in the Synoptic stories of healing culminate in the account of the distressed father in Mark 9:24 who cries out, 'I believe; help my unbelief!' in response to Jesus' statement of faith's fabulous, 'all things are possible to the one who believes' (9:23). Noting the similarity to the question about the *pistis Christou* in the scholarly dispute about Paul's meaning, Joel Marcus (2005) observes that 'exegetes are divided about the import of this response: is omnipotence ascribed to the father's faith, providing the cure of his son, or that all things, including this exorcism, are possible for "Jesus, the man of perfect faith"?' And just as with the lexical, grammatical and exegetical impasse in Pauline studies, Marcus asserts that we have 'conflicting signals in the text [...] the Markan evidence about the meaning of the phrase "the one who believes" is equivocal' (2009: 661). Marcus comes to the salutary theological resolution that:

Jesus's statement is deliberately ambiguous and is meant to leave room for both interpretations: firstly, the father is being asked to turn his attention from his own seemingly hopeless situation to the Faithful One who holds all power in his hand, and secondly, that act of reorientation is itself called "faith". (Marcus 2005: 662)

The man's petition is then:

an acknowledgment that he belongs to the faithless generation that has rejected Jesus's claims and a recognition that if he is to attain faith, it must come from as a gift from above. He is, then, in Luther's great phrase, *simul justus et peccator* [...] a citizen both of the old age with its miasma of skepticism and despair, and of the new age. (Marcus 2005: 663)

This 'new age' is that which had dawned with Jesus' mission into Galilee. The militancy of grace comes as an incision; healing grace cuts into the faithless generation, a

cauterization of severe mercy which wounds in order to heal, initiating a *divided self* as old and new ages collide in all those gifted with and burdened by faith in Christ. While Matthew and Luke develop their own nuances in the theology of faith, they build upon this narrative foundation laid in the gospel of Mark, which puts the question of faith posed to the disciples (8:29) to all readers: who is Jesus Christ for us today? (Bonhoeffer 1998).

5.3 The theodicy of faith

If the person of Jesus Christ is for us in faith the saving righteousness of God, the scriptural problem of the theodicy of faith asks how the saving righteousness of God succeeds in its purpose of blessing for all nations. This is not a rational or philosophical theodicy justifying the Perfect Being by showing this world to be the best of all possible. But 'through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness' (Gal 5:5). A generation ago, Jürgen Moltmann argued that the theodicy of faith is the 'theology of hope' (Moltmann 1967). And it is present in the theology of the Reformation in sharpest expression of the fabulous: 'There is a life after this life; and all that is not punished and paid here will be punished and repaid there; for this life is nothing more than a precursor, or, rather, a beginning, of the life that is to come' (Luther 2000: 316; see also Reinhuber 2000). This militant statement of the fabulous is theodicy, a doxological justification of the faithful God who justifies the sinner by faith which corresponds to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

5.3.1 The curse of the law

More recently, N. T. Wright, from the perspective of (an apocalyptically chastened) 'covenant theology' (1991: 156), holds that Paul does *not* say (as Martyn does), 'the law cursed Jesus, but the resurrection showed the law to be wrong'. Rather, Paul's argument 'actually *depends on the validity of the law's curse*, and on the propriety of Jesus, as Messiah, bearing it on Israel's behalf' (1991: 152). Here Wright refers to the *divine* validity of the curse. The 'Torah was correct to pronounce the curse. It merely did not have the last word' (1991: 153). Needless to say, if that reconstruction of the coherence of Paul's theology holds, it significantly informs the sense of 'the faith of Christ' and of the evil which it defeats.

Here the 'curse of the law' designates no insubordinate attack on faithful Jesus by wayward 'elemental principles' (*stoixeia*) of the rebellious cosmos, the Torah among them. It is rather the 'covenantal curse, Israel's curse, being taken on by Israel's anointed representative in an act which itself symbolized very precisely all that the curse of exile stood for. The death of the king, hanged on a tree in the midst of his own land' is no abstract curse falling on abstract sin, but the God of Israel's own curse upon Israel's failure, the Messiah absorbing in one concentrated blow Israel's punishment (Wright 1991: 153). What transpires is not the punishment of individual transgressors, Wright stresses,

but of the corporate failure of Israel to be blessing and light to the nations. Thus this verdict can be executed – or satisfied – in the cross of the Messiah, in the process setting free the promised blessing of all nations made to Abraham:

The dual problem caused by the clash of Torah and Abrahamic promise is given a dual solution: blessing for the Gentiles, which they had looked like being denied, and new covenant for Israel, which she had looked like failing to attain. (Wright 1991: 154)

This is the *theological* fulfilment for Paul, not of random proof texts, but ‘of the whole paradoxical history of Israel’ (Wright 1991: 155).

Agreeing with one of the chief claims of the New Perspective, Wright explains that ‘Paul, like all first-century Jews, had a “plight”, though it is not to be identified with that of the puzzled existentialist, or for that matter of the conscience-stricken Protestant’ (1991: 261). Rather the plight was ‘the sorry state of Israel’, which provoked a painful question of theodicy regarding ‘the covenant faithfulness and justice of the creator God who had called her to be his chosen people’. For Paul, as for most Jews of that time, ‘as long as Herod or Pilate ruled over her, Israel was still under the curse’ (Wright 1991: 261) and the God of Israel had failed so far to deliver and renew Israel.

Wright also acknowledges, however, the apocalyptic discontinuity: the Damascus road event not only turned persecutor to apostle but in the process turned the inherited covenantal theology on its head, challenging ‘the normal Jewish analysis and understanding of its plight at its root’ (Wright 1991: 261). Paul comes to see the obedient and suffering way of the Messiah as ‘the necessary if paradoxical outworking of God’s plan, to save the world by focusing its problems, through the Torah, first on to Israel and then on to her Messiah’. At the same time, however this apocalyptic incision was no absolute ‘*novum*, a Christian invention. It was based on Torah, Prophets, and Psalms, read ([Paul] would have said) with eyes now at last unveiled’ (Wright 1991: 262). In other words, it was read *apocalyptically* just as the divine Sonship of the Crucified One is the content of the *apocalypse*.

Wright’s analysis of the ‘curse of the law’ represents a real advance in the *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation-history) approach inherited in the New Perspective from Stendahl and programmatically laid out by Dunn. This is in part because Wright takes up the paradoxical discontinuity in the history of salvation demanded by the apocalypse of crucified Jesus as God’s Son to Paul (Gal 1:15), yet without succumbing to virtual dualism, i.e. Marcionism, in the interpretation of the ‘curse of the law’. Moreover, this approach has the virtue of taking Paul’s Second Temple theological context seriously, ‘the belief-structure which informed and directed [Paul’s] life and work, and through which he perceived the world’ (Wright 1991: 262). Wright thus understands apocalyptic not only as the contemporaneous

‘worldview’ of covenantal theology but also, one may say, as the mother of Christian theology in Paul.

5.3.2 The just live by faith in God’s faithfulness

Reading the scriptures of Israel in light of the Messiah’s cross uncovered a dramatic tension, indeed a dilemma in the heart of God articulated classically by the prophet Hosea (11:8–9), which Brueggeman described (and left unresolved) as a veritable ‘disjunction’ in the life of God, a ‘massive Holy Problem’ (Brueggemann 1997: e.g. 268–272). Athanasius’ work, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, raises questions such as what God in his goodness was to do. Ignore human infidelity and let the creation go to ruin? Condemn the unfaithful and so confirm the ruin? (Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 6; see 1979). How was God to maintain and deliver the promise to Abraham for the blessing of all nations?

The theodicy of faith was taken up by Paul programmatically in the citation from Hab 2:4 embedded in Rom 1:17, ‘the one who is righteous will live by faith’. The disputants in the *pistis Christou* controversy have fought to an impasse over the question of whether the righteous one who lives by faith is to be identified as Jesus Messiah or by the preceding reference to ‘everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek’. But sound and fury over this ambiguity obscures Paul’s thematic invocation of Habakkuk’s theodicy of faith on the way to the great affirmations found in Rom 8:18 and following: ‘I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us’. The theodicy of faith lives now in tense hope of patient waiting and eager longing for the promised denouement when ‘the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God’ (8:22). Even now in this interim, believers ‘know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose’ (8:28), inasmuch as the purpose of God is that nothing in all creation ‘will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (8:39). While this concluding statement moves in the direction of deliteralizing the foregoing, it is no less fabulous for that.

This passage in Romans is also militant. A glance forward in time from Habakkuk to the Third Isaiah aids in clarifying the former’s theodicy of faith. Pointing to Isa 59:15b–21, ‘The Divine Warrior in Battle Attire’, Ben Witherington III (2017: 295–296) observes that the situation addressed ‘is that of God’s people suffering some injustice, and because there seemed to be no human remedy, God decided to intervene [...] God cannot abide forever [human wickedness] so he decides to go to war against it’. The militant God of love and justice must be against what is against love and justice. YHWH’s intervention against lovelessness and injustice is the salvation-bearing righteousness of God, the covenant faithfulness presupposed in Paul’s scriptural world. Habakkuk presupposed Israel’s ancient knowledge of the divine Warrior when he opened his oracles by posing the question of God’s justice: ‘Oh Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you

“violence!” And you will not save?’ (Hab 1:2–4). It is crucial to understand that Habakkuk’s protest against YHWH’s apparent indifference in overlooking grievous injustice (cf. Rom 3:25b–26) is instigated by Habakkuk’s knowledge of YHWH and his covenant with Israel (Gowan 1976: 39). He affirms Israel’s knowledge of God in the very action of protest against God’s apparent silence:

O Lord, you have marked them for judgment; and you, O Rock, have established them for punishment. Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they? (Hab 1:12b–13)

Consequently, Habakkuk’s protest to God reflects ‘the way of faith [as] perseverance, insisting that there must be an answer, refusing to give up on the truth of what we believe about God, refusing to give way to cynicism or unbelief’ (Gowan 1976: 39). The militancy of grace amid structures of malice and injustice issues in the perseverance of the righteous.

Habakkuk thus receives an answer from YHWH in 2:4, which should probably be translated as ‘the righteous live by their faithfulness’, or perhaps, ‘by my faithfulness’ (referring to YHWH). Paul alters the statement of Habakkuk in Rom 1:17 to suit his own theology: ‘the one who is righteous will live by faith’. Acknowledging these problems

does not mean that Paul was wrong in taking Hab 2:4 as the great theme verse for his teaching about justification by faith. He did change the emphasis, undoubtedly, in the direction of ‘faith’, what one believes, but that is not a drastic departure from the Old Testament for the ‘faithfulness’ which it expects is surely faithfulness to nothing else but God’s truth in which one believes [...] In the Bible there is no ground for separating faith, what one believes, from faithfulness, how one behaves. (Gowan 1976: 41)

The important point is that Habakkuk’s revelation comes in answer to the question raised at the beginning of the book: how long?

God’s answer *leaves* us in that time of waiting to which 2:2–3 refer. The end has not come yet. God has already assured us that the waiting *will* come to an end; that we do not wait in vain. And now he tells us how we can get through that time. In this set of contrasts he has defined the difference between those who believe in him, the righteous, and those who do not. The righteous are they who remain faithful to their God precisely during those times described by Habakkuk in his first chapter, times when faith doesn’t make sense. (Gowan 1976: 46)

So God’s answer to Habakkuk is light shining in the darkness which the darkness does not overcome.

5.4 Johannine movement to the *fides quae creditur*

These ideas from Habakkuk are applied in John's gospel to those believing in Christ: '[b]ut these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name' (John 20:31). The Gospel of John illustrates the movement in early Christianity towards the articulate explication of the implicit beliefs presenting the trustworthy Jesus encoded in the narrative account of the Synoptics. Yet John's well-known avoidance of the nominal form, faith, in preference for the verbal form, believing, indicates the unity of trust and knowledge in his gospel. With the Greek 'that' (*hoti*) clause, 'that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God' (John 20:31), we have the outspoken *fides quae creditur* (the faith which is believed) but inseparable from the *fides qua creditur* (the faith which believes). Christ's fabulous person warrants trust in this belief, as he is inseparable from the 'myth' which feeds into the faith in him.

The Gospel's concluding confession of Jesus as 'Lord and God' conveys the experience of doubting Thomas face-to-face with the crucified but risen Jesus (John 20:26–28) and extends it to readers of the Gospel as the dominical blessing is pronounced upon 'those who have not seen and yet have come to believe' (John 20:29).

As an extended midrash on the synoptic traditions, John continues the interlocking themes he has inherited from the Synoptics of the militancy of divine grace precipitating the apocalyptic conflict on the earth between the realms of darkness and light, but here it is the explicit faith in Jesus which, being articulated and confessed christologically, now extends the *krisis* on the earth. With exclusive sharpness, John focuses all the fabulous elements of the early Christian traditions with their scriptural antecedents onto the singular person of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. The militancy of grace is personified in the person of the Johannine Christ and prosecuted henceforth by his Advocate Spirit.

The Gospel of John consequently played a decisive role in the history of Christian doctrine by interpreting the synoptic account of the 'beginning of the gospel' as the incarnation of the divine Word, in other words the execution of the 'providential management' (*oikonomia*) of God, the mystery hidden from the ages but now apocalypsed in Christ (Rom 16:25–27; Eph 1:7–14). As Stuhlmacher argues:

Over against the first three gospels, the Gospel of John represents a new phase of tradition. It assumes (especially) the Petrine tradition [...] as familiar, continues it critically, and supplements it in the perspective of faith [...] the early Church considered the Gospel of John as the true, spiritual Gospel, whose witness of truth encompasses and culminates that of the other three gospels. (Stuhlmacher 1988: 13; cf. Brown 1979: 163)

Likewise, Dunn notes that 'John has served as a bridge between the beginnings of Christianity in Jesus, and the orthodox faith which achieved definition at Nicea and

which has provided the dogmatic basis of Christianity ever since' (Dunn 1991: 294; also Grillmeier 1975: 26).

Yet in modern times many have thought that John represents a dubious 'Hellenization', that is, an intellectualization of Jesus' simple trust in the divine parent into a complex of incredible beliefs about God and Christ (Harnack 1961: 96–97 [vol. 1]). While a shift seems to occur with John 1:1–14 away from the Synoptic language of the Son and the heavenly Father to that of God and his co-eternal Word, this apparent shift bedevils those who fail to read John as deliteralizing theological commentary on the Synoptic traditions (Hoskyns 1947), originating in the expulsion of Jewish Christians from the synagogue after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans (Martyn 2003). For John emphatically, indeed massively, retains and develops the analogy of Jesus' relation to God as that of a son to a father, just as he leaves all reference to the Logos behind after the prologue. Upon hearing John speak of this eternal Logos who became flesh, readers are to 'come and see' (1:46) what this language means in the story which follows. It is not at all the case, then, that John imposes some drastically different scheme, say, that of Mind to the Thought of itself which it generates like a copy (and then a Thought of the Thought, and so on in a great chain of conceptual forms emanating from the One to the many, as in Neo-Platonic philosophy). That would indeed be a kind of 'Hellenization'. For we would then allow an abstract and impersonal metaphor from mental life to override the father-son analogy – a figure of social life. Then a psychological trinity, so to say, would displace the narrative figures of Jesus the Son and his Abba Father, the God of Israel, and their Spirit-Advocate, effacing the society of divine persons and rendering a charade the dramatic and decisive history of mutual trust that transpires between them in the gospel narrative reaching out now to include by making believers.

Johannine theology of the Incarnate Logos does not represent a turn away from the simple Galilean gospel of Jesus to Idealist metaphysics. The crucial statement in John 1:14 continues, interpreting its own meaning: '[...] and we beheld his glory, the *glory as of a father's only son*, full of grace and truth' (emphasis added). The claim here is for the visibility of the object of faith in a specific way. This claim to visibility, for the seeing or knowing of faith which perceives the glory of God in the man Jesus, represents the real problem for understanding the deliteralized fabulous of the Fourth Gospel. Without faith, one sees in Jesus a Jew, apparently deluded, impaled on the imperial stake, and completely finished. However, thus resurrection faith alone enables one to see the glory of God coming down to the depths to accomplish here the work of creation's redemption. In this respect, moreover, the confession of faith is theodicy, a doxological justification of God giving all glory for the glory of this grace and truth incarnate in Christ. The theodicy of faith reflects back the militancy of grace to its author by the confession of faith protesting here and now in the afflicted world on behalf of justice promised. At the same time, this protest

draws its very breath from the Spirit-breathed hope of the fabulous new creation in the gift of 'eternal life'.

6 Conclusion: Trinitarian faith, language of the deliteralized fabulous

The gospel of the faith of Christ *comes*; it comes on the scene as an incision or an 'invasion'. The good news of the resurrection vindication of the crucified Jesus is the power of God for salvation breaking into structures of malice and injustice to set free their prisoners, revealing the righteousness of God 'from faith for faith'. To speak of an 'incision' is to deliteralize without denarrativizing the apocalyptic fabulous; the fabled 'end of time' becomes the *kairos*, the *krisis*, the inbreaking of the 'time of the end'. Where and when the Easter-vindicated faithfulness of Christ is proclaimed, it eventuates by the Spirit human reconciliation to the purpose of the God known in the militancy of his grace. Reconciled as believers, the faithful justify God's judgment, giving God the honour and glory that is his due, a real though inchoate righteousness accruing to their faith in Christ in that it corresponds to the faithfulness of God in Christ. Now the future day of judgment has already transpired (Rom 5:1) and so the hope of righteousness on the earth is secured as the certainty of faith in Christ. Justification by faith in Christ is no longer the uncertain goal but already the sure foundation of newness of life (Oberman 1986). Thus, the reign of God comes whenever and wherever God's will to give righteousness, life and peace is received and therefore done on the earth.

In Morgan's analysis of the Gospel of John, she observes that:

it seems possible that 'doing' truth and being 'in' truth are alternative ways of expressing the idea of divine participation which occurs in the 'farewell discourses', when Jesus speaks of himself as in the Father, the Father in him, himself in his followers, and the followers in himself and in God (14.20, 17.21; cf. 17.22–23). As God is truth (reality, reliability) and enacts truth, so perhaps by trusting/believing in God and Jesus, Jesus's followers themselves become part of the ultimate truth and reality of the divine. (Morgan 2017: 432)

Pauline justification by faith is Johannine participation by believing when the word 'God' is itself deliteralized to refer to Jesus and his Abba-Father, YHWH of Israel, and their Advocate-Spirit who has reached out to include those who by faith enter into their circulation (*perichoresis*) of love. In this way the trinitarian language of Christian faith asserts and confesses the deliteralized fabulous of the gospel narrative, referring to the God who comes from God to include creatures in the life of God.

This reconstruction of the coherence of *fides qua* and *fides quae* has critical implications for dogmatics as the grammar of Christian language.

A story of the divine and of divine-human interaction constitutes, among other things, a language or dialect, within which those who trust/believe form thoughts and express them, articulate relationships, and act them, and interpret the world around them. Like any language, such a narrative both interprets experience and determines it. (Morgan 2017: 434)

The traditional articles of faith, however, have frequently been misunderstood as if representing literally faith's fabulous foundation and goal, requiring intellectual assent to worldly propositions rather than enabling linguistic participation in the story of God's way to humanity. Taken as supernatural truths revealed by God, pre-critical dogmatics made a circular argument, convincing only to those prepared for a sacrifice of the intellect justified religiously as an intellectual good work worthy of divine approbation. This hermeneutical error, destructive of faith in the faithfulness of God to the divine purpose of universal blessing, must be left behind.

In reality, the articles of faith serve within Christian discourse the sole grammatical purpose of identifying who the God of the gospel is, what is his goodwill and why he is trustworthy. A *critical* dogmatics, then, sifts the dogmatic tradition for what is truly essential to this purpose and rigorously understood, laying no burdens on conscience to believe unintelligible things in heteronomous submission to putative authority, ecclesial or scriptural. Genuine divine authority is established eschatologically. Accordingly, critical dogmatics exercises enormous ontological restraint in restricting its cognitive reach to the pragmatic task of identifying the God of the gospel by distinguishing him from idols and demons. It guards against the tempting transposition to the metaphysical in order to keep its feet squarely on the earth on which the cross of Jesus stood. It makes but one cognitive claim with ontological import: the God of the gospel is to be identified as the Father of the Son on whom he breathes his Spirit, so that united with the Son by the Spirit, believers by faith may glorify God now and forever.

Attributions

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