

away with the tendency of individuals and groups to try to grasp more than their share of available benefits and less than their share of inevitable burdens; that work for the general good by a group or an individual would always require rather an arduous and sustained self-commitment; that barriers to the general good, re-inforced by the mystifications of ideology, would always continue to be raised by those not prepared for the requisite degree of self-sacrifice—which means nearly all of us in nearly all conceivable circumstances. This is not a plea for conservatism; we need urgently profound changes in the constitution of society if we are to survive. It is just to suggest that, in drawing up a programme of change, we should advert not only to Marx's insights but also to what appear to be his oversights.<sup>20</sup>

# Justification and Verification

by Geoffrey Turner

In this article I want to draw attention to one particular argument used by some modern Protestant theologians, an argument concerning the verifiability and falsifiability of Christian belief. This argument consists of an appeal to the Pauline idea of justification, but the difficulty which the argument raises concerns the meaning which is given to 'justification'. The concept of 'justification' can acquire rather different meanings from the contexts in which it is used; that is to say, the meaning which 'justification' has on any particular occasion depends on the character of the position which it is being used to attack. Let us look at some of these positions in order to see what differences of meaning 'justification' may have.

Paul gave the first peculiarly Christian exposition of the idea of 'justification' in his letter to the Romans, though he had previously used the idea in a more rudimentary fashion in his letter to the Galatians. Paul used the idea to distinguish Christianity from any other form of religion, particularly that of Judaism. He says that justification, i.e. the state of being righteous which allows us to stand

<sup>20</sup>A system of thought at once rigorous and flexible enough to provide an *Aufhebung* of Marx's view of human nature, while providing room for the discoveries of Freud and his disciples, is urgently needed. In fact this has been provided by Bernard Lonergan in *Insight*, a really great book which ought to be much more widely read. In conclusion, my thanks are due to Fr. Herbert McCabe, whose advice has mitigated some of the crudities of the first draft of this article.

before God without fear of condemnation even though we are technically still sinners, comes through faith and not through works of the Law (the Jewish *Torah*). In so far as we try to justify ourselves before God by performing pious practices and carrying out morally good behaviour, we will not succeed either in performing these works successfully or in being judged to be righteous (Rm. 3.20). But in so far as we abandon any attempt to make ourselves righteous before God, in so far as we accept that God makes us stand uncondemned, we will be judged to be righteous (Rm. 3.21-6). We will succeed because God cannot fail. In a nutshell, Paul says that it is God who justifies us, we do not and cannot justify ourselves. Justification comes through faith, faith that God will justify us and has justified us. So for a Christian justification is always by faith and not by works—*justificatio sola fide*. Morally good works should come as the fruit of that justification and are a necessary accompaniment of it (Rm. 6.1-23), but they are never the *cause* of it. It can be argued that this doctrine of Paul's is the central point of the New Testament so far as its doctrinal content is concerned. Certainly it is that which distinguishes Christianity from any other form of religion (Karl Barth has argued that it is this which prevents Christianity from being a 'religion', in his rather unusual sense of the word<sup>1</sup>), and certainly it is a *sine qua non* of authentic Christian belief.

Friedrich Gogarten has used the idea of *justificatio sola fide* in his argument with conservative orthodox Protestants over the legitimacy of using critical-historical methods in biblical scholarship.<sup>2</sup> The representatives of Protestant orthodoxy whom Gogarten was attacking were really a remnant of an essentially nineteenth century theology whose intellectual respectability has been put in severe doubt in the latter half of that century. They argued that scripture was the revealed Word of God, that the whole of it was inspired by God, and that consequently scripture could not be tampered with. They would allow textual critics to piece together the best possible text, but they would not allow the truth of the content of scripture to be doubted and subjected to the secular methods of critical history. They argued that one must subject oneself in faith to the content of scripture; it judges us, we do not judge it. And naturally they appealed to the Protestant principle of justification *sola fide* to buttress their argument. However, Gogarten appealed to the *sola fide* principle in support of the opposite conclusion, that critical-historical methods should be used in order to establish the truth about Jesus as it is mediated to us by the evangelists. Gogarten maintained that the independence and responsibility of the sciences is logically derived from Luther's insistence on justification *sola fide* because in the history of Western culture Luther's principle shattered the medieval Church's control over the world and made man and the humane

<sup>1</sup>*Church Dogmatics* 1.2, pp. 280-361.

<sup>2</sup>*The Reality of Faith* (Philadelphia 1959) ch. 10.

sciences autonomous, and that the Enlightenment's call for the independence of science had been derived historically from the Reformation. Of course, Gogarten admitted that almost immediately Protestant orthodoxy made a new law out of the Bible, but he insisted that the *sola fide* doctrine has a logical momentum of its own in the direction of the independence of the humane sciences. It is clear that Gogarten was not just repeating the Pauline doctrine of justification. Gogarten's argument has nothing to do with faith and works. He was rather using the slogan '*justificatio sola fide*' as an *argumentum ad hominem* directed at those who already believed the Pauline doctrine in order to draw them away from their allegiance to Biblical Positivism. And by Biblical Positivism I mean the assertion that the Bible must stand alone as the authoritative Word of God, whose truth cannot be questioned from outside itself. It is clear that Gogarten's argument does not have logical force as it stands. It is an emotive argument, because he has not introduced any criteria for falsifying the assertions of the Biblical Positivists. But the point which I want to bring out is that Gogarten has used Paul's doctrine of justification as an argument against Biblical Positivism.

Rudolf Bultmann and Gerhard Ebeling have appealed to the principle of *justificatio sola fide* in rather a different way. Bultmann in 1954 appealed to Paul and Luther to support his demythologizing programme :

Our radical attempt to demythologize the New Testament is in fact a perfect parallel to St Paul's and Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from the works of the Law. Or rather, it carries this doctrine to its logical conclusion in the field of epistemology. Like the doctrine of justification it destroys every false security and every false demand for it on the part of man, whether he seeks it in his good works or in his ascertainable knowledge. The man who wishes to believe in God as his God must realize that he has nothing in his hand on which to base his faith. He is suspended in mid-air, and cannot demand a proof of the Word which addresses him. For the ground and object of faith are identical. Security can be found by abandoning all security, by being ready, as Luther put it, to plunge into the inner darkness.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas Paul said that man must trust to faith and must not seek for any security in moral action and pious practices to justify himself before God, Bultmann says that man must trust to faith alone and must not seek any security in arguments to justify his belief before other men. The chief characteristics of Bultmann's argument are that he has shifted from moral actions to 'ascertainable knowledge', and whereas Paul produced a series of arguments in his letter to support

<sup>3</sup>'Bultmann Replies to his Critics' in *Kerygma and Myth* (London 1972), 1, p. 210f.

his doctrine of justification Bultmann says that any 'security' outside faith, including any argument, is illusory and illegitimate. For Bultmann there is nothing on which man can 'base his faith', 'he is suspended in mid-air', he 'cannot demand a proof' for the truth of the content of faith. Bultmann is here using an appeal to justification *sola fide* against those who are interested in the truth or falsity of Christian claims and who want to establish criteria for determining the truth or falsity of those claims. Bultmann has taken up a position against those who insist on the importance of the verifiability and falsifiability of Christian belief. Bultmann has used 'justification' as a counterpart to 'verification' in the matter of the status of the truth of Christianity. He is in fact saying that verification is the equivalent of justification by works and that we can have justification *sola fide* or verification but not both (and he implies that verification, like justification by works, will not succeed in any event).

Gerhard Ebeling has combined Gogarten's argument with Bultmann's so that he appeals to justification *sola fide* to permit the use of critical-historical methods and to show that faith cannot be grounded on historical arguments.

The *sola fide* of the Reformation doctrine of justification both contains a rejection of any existing ways of ensuring present actualisation, whether ontological, sacramental or hierarchical, and also positively includes an understanding of actualisation in the sense of genuinely historic, personal encounter. If this encounter with the historic revelation takes place solely in hearing the Word, then the shattering of all historical assurances that supposedly render the decision of faith superfluous is completely in line with the struggle against the saving significance of good works or against understanding the working of the sacrament in the sense of the *opus operatum*. The *sola fide* destroys all secretly docetic views of revelation which evade the historicalness of revelation by making it a history *sui generis*, a sacred area from which the critical historical method must be anxiously debarred. In the Reformers' view, both revelation and faith are discovered in their genuine historicalness, and that quite definitely means that faith is exposed to all the vulnerability and ambiguity of the historical. Only in that way and only for that reason can genuine encounter with the historic revelation be attained in faith and only in faith.

As everywhere in Reformation theology, so also here in regard to the relation to history, the assent to lack of guarantees is merely the reverse side of the certainty of salvation *sola fide*.<sup>4</sup>

When Ebeling says that we cannot look for guarantees for faith in history he means that the demands of faith cannot be supported or

<sup>4</sup>'The Significance of the Critical Historical Method for Church and Theology in Protestantism' in *Word and Faith*, p. 56f.

verified by an appeal to historical facts as they are uncovered by critical history. As faith, and the Church's proclamation which lies behind faith, cannot be verified by history—and Ebeling does not think that faith could conceivably be verified by anything else—faith and the Word which proclaims faith (i.e. both scripture and the Church's proclamation) must be self-authenticating. To say that faith must be self-authenticating means in effect that faith cannot be authenticated, it cannot be justified, it cannot be verified. To this extent both Ebeling and Bultmann share the presuppositions of the Theology of the Word of God (known also as Dialectic Theology) whose chief proponent was Karl Barth. Ebeling and Bultmann, like Barth, have attached themselves to a form of Theological Positivism. However, they cannot carry that label quite as simply as that. They have not isolated theology *in toto* from the strictures of critical-historical method. Both Ebeling (in the quotation above) and Bultmann believe that historical criticism can in principle falsify the claims of Christianity. There is, however, an important difference between Bultmann and Ebeling at this point. Bultmann thinks that critical history need only assert that Jesus died on the cross and, by implication, lived on earth before that; for the rest the Church's kerygma is quite independent of historical research. Ebeling believes that there must be a closer correspondence between the results of historical research and the content of kerygma to the extent that historical research should not falsify any essential part of the kerygma, for if there were a radical disjunction between history and kerygma, the kerygma would indeed be falsified by history.<sup>5</sup> It is clear then that neither Bultmann nor Ebeling have proposed a Theological Positivism as such, but they do propose a Positivism of Faith or, better, a Positivism of Revelation—a charge which Dietrich Bonhoeffer brought against Karl Barth<sup>6</sup>—though admittedly the charge of positivism can only be brought against Ebeling in a modified form because of his willingness to accept that faith can be falsified from outside itself. But Ebeling has in fact accepted the worst of both worlds: he has accepted that historical research can falsify Christianity, but he has not accepted that it can verify Christianity. However, *justificatio sola fide* for both Ebeling and Bultmann is an *argumentum ad hominem* for the self-justifying character of faith and is an argument which will only appeal to those who are already Christians, to those who already have faith, to those who already accept the principle of justification by faith. It is not an argument which would have any appeal for non-Christians.

There are, then, in our brief survey, three meanings for 'justification': (i) *justificatio sola fide* = rejection of justification by works (Paul) (ii) *j.s.f.* = rejection of Biblical Positivism (Gogarten) (iii)

<sup>5</sup>Theology and Proclamation, p. 62f.

<sup>6</sup>Letters and Papers from Prison (Fontana edition, London 1953) pp. 91-2, 95, 106-10.

*j.s.f.* = rejection of all attempts to verify faith (Bultmann and Ebeling). Now I should want to argue that justification (i) *must* be believed by all Christians—in order to be Christians at all; that justification (ii) *should* be believed by all Christians—in order to be authentically Christian; and that justification (iii) *should not* be believed by any Christian—in order to be rationally Christian.

I have already brought out the difference between Ebeling's use of 'justification' and Paul's use of 'justification' sufficiently to show that the rejection of Ebeling's argument does not entail the rejection of Paul's argument. Why then should we reject Ebeling's use of 'justification'? Because Ebeling has failed to introduce any criteria for legitimating faith, and indeed has precluded the possibility of such criteria. He allows that the *content* of faith can be authenticated to the extent that it must agree with the results of critical historical research, but such a factual agreement is not in itself a sufficient reason for committing oneself in faith. If there can be no reasons for faith, if there are no criteria for verifying faith, then faith is made arbitrary. When Bultmann says that there can be no 'proof' for faith he is using the word in a very particular way. He means that there can be no rigorous logical proof for faith, a proof without any weakness. That much is obvious because only a deductive proof could have that sort of logical certainty, and Christian faith is essentially a contingent affair because it has its factual base in history. Any demonstration rising out of history must be an empirical inductive argument and its conclusion can only be a hypothesis which will have some measure of probability: the conclusion may be highly improbable, possible, or very probable depending on the actual material unearthed by historical research. Bultmann thinks that such a probable demonstration would not suffice for the certainty which faith demands.<sup>7</sup> Bultmann and Ebeling are quite correct on that point, but if they exclude all criteria for verifying faith they cannot expect anyone to have faith. Faith would then be the result of a mere whim or of some other purely subjective experience. This experience might be a sufficient legitimation for the individual who has faith, but he can never expect anyone to share that experience and that faith. In effect Bultmann and Ebeling do introduce experience as a legitimating criterion for faith though they do not call it that. They suggest that faith results from our raising existential questions about self-understanding which find a satisfactory answer—and the only satisfactory answer—in the Church's kerygma as it is reported in the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> So in fact Bultmann does not make faith quite arbitrary, but he does make it entirely subjective. Yet if Christianity is to re-

<sup>7</sup>This, of course, goes back to Lessing's statement: 'Accidental truths can never become the proof for necessary truths of reason', from 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power' in *Theological Writings*, ed. by Henry Chadwick, p. 55.

<sup>8</sup>'Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?' in *Existence and Faith*, pp. 347-9.

main intellectually respectable it must support its claims in some way, it must offer some suggestion of how belief might be verified. A demonstration of the truth of Christian belief need not, and indeed cannot, have complete logical rigour, but we can only expect others to have faith if we can provide some hint, some suggestion, some argument for the truth of Christianity. Most people outside the Church would accept this, so that while they would agree with Ebeling that Christianity is at risk from the results of historical research, they would not be prepared to share Ebeling's unsupported faith. In reality Ebeling believes that Christianity will not be falsified by critical history, but this alone is not a sufficient reason for belief when there is a total absence of verifying criteria.

The position on the impossibility of verifying faith represented by Bultmann and Ebeling is common to almost all German Protestant theologians since the nineteen twenties; it is common to Barthians, Bultmannians and post-Bultmannians. There has, however, been an important move away from this position recently in German Protestant theology by those theologians who have been influenced by Wolfhart Pannenberg, who teaches Systematic Theology at the University of Munich. Pannenberg distrusts any claim to authority which cannot justify itself whether that claim comes from the Church, from the Bible or from the Church's kerygma. He turned away from the Theology of the Word of God in the late nineteen fifties as a reaction against the authoritarian claims for revelation put forward by theologians of that school. For example, in Bultmann's case, Pannenberg thinks that scripture must be depositivized before it can be demythologized. He thinks that the demythologizing programme has been too fainthearted in not removing authoritarian claims for scripture, and too undifferentiated in not recognising 'the extremely heterogeneous contents of the Christian tradition'. Pannenberg writes :

The question concerning the revelation of God, as it has been reformulated on the basis of the Enlightenment, is not seeking for some authoritarian court of appeal which suppresses critical questioning and individual judgment, but for a manifestation of divine reality which meets the test of man's mature understanding as such.

On the use made by Dialectical theologians, of the concept of 'hearing' the demand for faith made by scripture and the kerygma, Pannenberg says :

I can only understand such hearing to be a cipher for that abandonment of one's own judgment which is required in submission to authoritarian claims. I confess that for similar reasons I mistrust the characterisation of faith as 'obedience' and by the same token the

celebrated prohibition against questioning behind the kerygma for its legitimation.<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere in the same article (pp. 269-71) Pannenberg gives reasons for deciding against unjustified claims to authority on the part of revelation and in favour of presenting criteria for verification:

He who believes in Jesus has salvation in Jesus in whom he trusts, without regard to the question how it stands with his historical and theological knowledge of Jesus. The presupposition is, of course, that fellowship with Jesus really mediates and assures salvation. The research and knowledge of theology, or at least of the theoretical disciplines of theology, deal with the truth of this presupposition of faith. Such a knowledge is thus not a condition for participating in salvation, but rather it assures faith about its basis. It thereby enables faith to resist the gnawing doubt that it has no basis beyond itself and that it merely satisfies a subjective need through fictions, and thus is only accomplishing self-redemption through self-deception. To this suspicion, and to the trial which it must mean for faith which understands itself from God's act, one can simply object with Bultmann, that faith is 'obedience' to an authority beyond oneself. For the question is why just *this* authority should be accepted, while the claims of other positions are rejected. Thinking which has appropriated the questions of the Enlightenment can no longer be content with asserted authorities. It must ask about the adequacy of the claims of authority, and also about the reasons which are suited to be convincing about the trustworthiness of such claims. It is at this point that theological knowledge, for which the work of theological research strives, makes its contribution to faith. It is concerned that faith remain pure faith, which can trust the antecedently given truth of the basis which supports it, and which will not, as groundless 'decision', deteriorate into the 'work' of an illusory redemption of oneself. . . . In this situation precisely the 'obedient' decision to accept the Christian kerygma is transformed back into an act of putting oneself at one's disposal, as long as one cannot give any reasons why one should not instead become a Buddhist, or a Marxist atheist, or simply a secular humanist who does not find any need for an appeal to Jesus. What is needed are the reasons for the decision of faith.

Pannenberg has tried to provide 'reasons for the decision of faith' in 'the self-manifestation of divine reality' in the resurrection of Jesus as an historically probable event which acts as a legitimation by God of the eschatological message which Jesus had previously preached. And

<sup>9</sup>'Response to the Discussion' in *Theology as History: New Frontiers in Theology*, Vol. 3, ed. by J. M. Robinson and J. Cobb, p. 229f.



it also acts as an historical demonstration (though not a logically rigorous demonstration) of the existence of the God who raised up Jesus. Pannenberg has gone into this matter of verifying Christian faith in some detail in his work on Christology *Jesus, God and Man* and in a number of articles which have appeared in the first volume of *Basic Questions in Theology*. My purpose here is not to examine the plausibility of these arguments but simply to show that there exists in modern Protestant theology a position which radically rejects a Positivism of Revelation and which would not accept the rather strange meaning which has been given to 'justification' by Rudolf Bultmann and Gerhard Ebeling.

# English Bards and a Scottish Previewer: David Hume

by Dayton Haskin, S.J.

'It is a tide which has turned only once in human history. . . . There is presumably a calendar date—a *moment*—when the onus of proof passed from the atheist to the believer, when, quite suddenly, secretly, the noes had it'.<sup>1</sup>

Thus George Moore, Tom Stoppard's brilliant, bespectacled version of the modern moral philosopher. In *Jumpers*, Stoppard has managed to do with contemporary Anglo-Saxon philosophy what he did earlier in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* with modern literary criticism—to make of an academic discipline a playing field for his sport, and of its preoccupations so much grist for the artist's mill. Stoppard's wit draws the finest of lines between the serious and the outlandish; and his irreverence makes for good fun—at the expense of his earnest protagonist. But George wins us, albeit the way a warm puppy wins us; and we can summon a measure of sympathy for his plight. George moves in a world where all his colleagues benignly presume that intelligent people outgrow belief in God; and so, he feels defensive about his commitment to a deity fashioned of old by the philosophers.

<sup>1</sup>Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers* (London, 1972), p. 25.