

Was Paul a Lutheran?

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‘**W**AS PAUL A LUTHERAN?’ might seem a strange, even anachronistic, question. How could he have been? The real question is: Did the great reformer read the great apostle accurately? This is, I think, a good question as we stand on the very threshold of the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. As such, 2017 will be a significant year for all the Churches. It will mark an event which has borne immense fruit for Christian discipleship over five centuries. This fruit is not confined to faith: without the Reformation the political, economic, social and cultural history of Europe and the world would have been very different.¹ It will also remind us of a wound in the Christian polity. In the two thousand-year history of Christianity, the churches of East and West have been separated for half that time and the churches of the West have been out of communion for fully a quarter of that time. We are all aware that this is far from ideal and we work hard for understanding, mutual respect, reconciliation and, we hope, eventual restoration of communion.

The evangelical ideals and missionary hope of the Edinburgh conference of 1910 are still alive today. The Christian project – which is *not* the project of any Church but of Christ – is harmed by our lack of communion. St Paul himself captured the core of that project in these words:

1. See, for example: David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are so Rich and Some so Poor*, New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.

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And all these things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and who has given us the ministry of reconciliation. In other words, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting people's trespasses against them, and he has given us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His plea through us. We plead with you on Christ's behalf, 'Be reconciled to God!' (2 Cor 5:18-20 NET²)

Our proclamation of this great message of reconciliation is compromised, not to say undermined, by our own evident lack of reconciliation.

There has been immense progress towards reconciliation in the last fifty or sixty years. One of the great milestones is the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. This is an officially signed and fully recognized agreement on the central theological issue of the Reformation. It is itself now almost twenty years old and, alas, not much has happened as a consequence. However, some fruits are already evident in the number of Churches which have signed up and further confirmed this historic achievement. As a mark of progress to date, the present bishop of Rome will be in Sweden, a guest of the Lutheran Church, to mark the anniversary of the Reformation.

THE REFORMATION

The Reformation cannot be simplified. This is evident from the continued flow of studies which try to bring together the causes, sequence and consequences. The huge tome by Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700*,³ is only one, splendid example of the richness and complexity of this 'event.' As such, the Reformation cannot be reduced to one cause, one theological idea, one person, or one event. Nevertheless, 1517 *was* immensely significant. The context was that of late mediaeval Catholicism. As is now commonly recognised, the practices of late mediaeval Catholicism were

2. All citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New English Translation. This may be found on the web: <https://bible.org>. No translation ever satisfies biblical scholars. However, the NET does translate Paul according to the insights of the New Perspective.

3. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700*, London: Allen Lane, 2003.

themselves the fruit of a longer evolution. These included the early practice of commuting penitential practices by prayers, the theology of indulgences, and such devotions as pilgrimages, relics, and above all the Mass as a propitiatory sacrifice. Late mediaeval Catholicism may not have been in as ruinous a state as commonly believed, if Eamon Duffy is to be relied upon.⁴ Nevertheless, there was indeed a theology of merit, its accumulation and its transfer, which amounted to a late flowering of Pelagianism. In careful theological reflection – then and now – a subtle case could perhaps be made but in the popular mind the practices, devotions and even the theology fell easily into a mercantile mind-set.

In particular, the preaching of indulgences was promoted by the German Dominican Johan Tetzel. In modern High German, Tetzel is said to have proclaimed: ‘As soon as the money in the coffer rings, the soul into heaven springs.’⁵ The preaching of indulgences triggered the explosive reaction of an Augustinian, Martin Luther. He based his objection to the mercantile model of merit on the letters of St Paul. The teaching of St Augustine on grace, familiar from the Pelagian crisis, was also in view. In Luther’s developed theology, he famously countered Catholic teaching with his great triad of grace alone, scripture alone and faith alone.

Although in many respects, Martin Luther may be viewed as man of the Middle Ages, in his reading of the New Testament, he showed himself to be man of the Renaissance. It is not accidental that only one year before Erasmus had published his edition of the Greek New Testament.⁶ This turning to the original languages was itself a revolution. One example may suffice. In the Latin Bible of the day, the preaching of Jesus in Matthew 4:17 read as follows:

Exinde coepit Iesus praedicare et dicere *paenitentiam agite* [lit. do penance] adpropinquavit enim regnum caelorum. (Mt 4:17 Vulgate)

4. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580*, (second edition), Yale: Yale University Press, 2005.

5. In modern High German, ‘*Sobald das Geld im Kasten klingt, die Seele in den Himmel springt!*’ Several Tetzel chests for such ‘contributions’ survive.

6. Erasmus published an edition of the Greek New Testament in 1516. Occasionally, when he lacked original manuscripts he sometimes supplied the Greek himself.

This was accurately translated nearly 100 years later in the Douay-Rheims version of 1610.

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say: Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Mt 4:17 Douay-Rheims)

The King James Bible, quite different, is instructive:

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Mt 4:17 KJV)

When one reads the Greek, it is immediately apparent that the Vulgate, supporting the ‘work’ of penance, is *not* accurate and that the King James, promoting repentance or *metanoia*, is indeed accurate.

Apo tote ērxato ho Iēsous kēryssein kai legein: metanoēite; ēggiken gar hē basileia tōn ouranōn. (Mt 4:17 NA 28, transliteration)

This suspicion that the preaching of Jesus was about conversion and grace rather than works and merit was confirmed by Luther’s reading of St Paul. For Luther, the great letters were always Galatians and Romans. For him, these were always ‘gospel’.

GALATIANS AND ROMANS

Neither can be dated with much certainty. Usually, it is assumed that Galatians was written before Romans and that Romans is relatively late. They both treat the same topic but in interestingly different ways. The topic was triggered by a practical question: how much of the Jewish Law should Christians hold on to. In light of two thousand years of Christian history, the urgency and relevance may not seem obvious. Part of the problem lies with the word ‘law’ itself. In Paul’s hands, this could be approached in three different ways. It could mean simply the Torah, that is, the five books of Moses, including both narrative and legislations. Law, in this sense, was never set aside by Paul. It could also mean the ethical Law, as exemplified in the Ten Commandments. Even a cursory glance at the letters will tell you that Paul holds on to the traditional ethical teaching of the Torah. Finally, the Law, in the narrow expression ‘the works of the Law,’ could mean the ritual Law, the complex of purity regulations and other practices often summa-

rised as circumcision, the *kashrut* and Sabbath observance. Behind such apparently diverse understandings lies a core question, that of justification. How may a believer be in ‘right relationship’, that is, be justified, in the eyes of God? For Paul, in both Galatians and Romans, Law points to the ritual Law. In both letters, Paul sets aside this ritual Law even though he does it differently in each. Two citations may illustrate what is the difference.

I do not set aside God’s grace, because if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died for nothing! (Gal 2:21 NET)

One person regards one day holier than other days, and another regards them all alike. Each must be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day does it for the Lord. The one who eats, eats for the Lord because he gives thanks to God, and the one who abstains from eating abstains for the Lord, and he gives thanks to God. (Rom 14:5–6 NET)

In summary, Paul in Romans is teaching the same as he did in Galatians, except that he has calmed down and realised that a certain latitude and tolerance should be permitted for the sake of maintaining communion.

Martin Luther took ‘works of the Law’ to mean spiritual achievements, by means of which the believer earned the grace of God. There are quotations from Paul which lend credence to this view. Four citations may serve to illustrate, two taken from Galatians and two from Romans.

Yet we know that a person is *not justified by works of the law* but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and *not by works of the law*, because *by works of the law no one will be justified*. (Gal 2:16 NRSV)

Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit *by works of the law or by hearing with faith*? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so *by works of the law, or by hearing with faith* – just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it

was counted to him as righteousness?' (Gal 3:2–6 NRSV)

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Rom 3:20 NRSV)

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? *By a law of works?* No, but by the law of faith. *For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. (Rom 3:27–28 NRSV)*

In the context of the sixteenth century, this was interpreted to mean that good works did not generate merit and that access to justification / righteousness / right relationship with God was by means of grace and faith. In a way, Luther identified Jews/Judaizers with later Catholics. To put it graphically, we may glance at this table:

<i>Agents</i>	<i>Opponents</i>	<i>Key Error</i>	<i>Key Truth</i>
Paul	Judaizers	Works of the Law	Faith
Martin Luther	Catholics	Meritorious Works	Faith (alone)

This identification of Judaizers with late mediaeval Catholics itself generated an understanding of Judaism which Jews themselves never recognised. It is synthesized in the following points: Judaism was a religion which was hide-bound by regulations, the fulfilment of which earned the adherent God's grace, putting the person in credit before God.

- Evidence for this would be the punctilious observance of Sabbath and *kashrut*, the vast quantities of prayer to be recited daily and especially on the Sabbath.
- An unhealthy combination of smug piety and anxious fulfilment of legal requirements.
- It was even proposed that Judaism has a theology of the treasury of merits along the lines of the doctrine of indulgences, without, however, the 'benefit' of sacraments for the transfer of merit.

Precisely because Judaism never recognized itself in such a portrait, E.P. Sanders undertook significant research and published in 1977 a mighty study entitled *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.⁷ He asked himself a simple question: did early Judaism teach that, by observing the Law,

7. E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, London: SCM Press, 1977.

faithful Jews were earning merit and thus contributing to their justification before God? The book is very large but easy to read because Sanders asked the same series of question about all the Jewish documents current at the time and later. These included, for example, the Hebrew Bible, the Intertestamental literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Mishnah and so forth. In brief, Sanders found that early Judaism did not have a theology of merit but on the contrary was a religion of grace and election. Other scholars followed, such as N.T. Wright and James Dunn. It was the latter who coined the term ‘The New Perspective’ and, although now nearly half a century old, the term has become standard.⁸

Summary points of the New Perspective are:

- Judaism is a religion of grace and election.
- There is no doctrine at all of earning salvation.
- Judaism offers an interesting theology of grace which paradoxically combines gift and commitment.
- Judaism has no sense of original sin, at least in the later Augustinian understanding.

The upshot was that identifying early Judaism with late mediaeval Catholicism just does not work. Unlike later, mediaeval Catholicism, Judaism was a religious of grace.

This in turn gave rise to another question: if Paul was not opposing *meritorious* works in Galatians and Romans, what *was* he opposing? According to Sanders and the New Perspective in general, the works of the Law meant not the achievements of believers before God but were rather that identity markers of Judaism, the practice of which was a *response* to grace. Paul was indeed opposing the observance of the ritual law, that is, circumcision, the *kashrut* and Sabbath observance. These practices set aside the Jewish people over against the rest of humanity and in that regard were and remain highly effective as both identity markers and as barriers. In Paul’s mind, however, now that God has included all of humanity within his grace, the need for a people set apart by such practices no longer arises. This is what is meant by the – perhaps excessively blunt – citation above from Galatians.

8. An exhaustive bibliography is not necessary for our purpose. The reader is directed to the reading list at the end of this essay.

I do not set aside God's grace, because if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died for nothing! (Gal 2:21 NET)

In any case, the observance of these practices did not earn grace or salvation or righteousness. Instead, they were practiced as a *response* to God's gracious election of his first chosen people.

FAITH IN CHRIST OR OF CHRIST

A new understanding of 'works of Law', respectful of early Judaism, is only a part of the discussion. What about faith? Here we confront an interesting problem of translation. The expression variously translated as 'faith in Christ' or 'faith(fullness) of Christ' has generated a lively discussion. In Greek, this expression is *pistis Christou* (πιστις Χριστου) and there are two possibilities of translation. On the basis of grammar alone, this expression could be either an *objective* genitive i.e. (our) faith *in* Christ or a *subjective* genitive, i.e. the faith(fullness) of Christ, the faith which Christ himself manifested. This infrequent expression occurs in only a few places in Paul but the significance is far greater than the mere statistic would indicate.

- Philippians 3:9
- Galatians 2:16, 20; 3:22 (3:26)
- Romans 3:22

Perhaps the best way to notice the significance of the two versions is to look at the use of the expression in context. For this, use will be made of two expressly Protestant translations, which are the New English Translation and the English Standard Version.

NET

Phil 3:8 More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things – indeed, I regard them as dung! – that I may gain Christ,⁹ and be found in him, not because I have my own righteousness de-

ESV

Phil 3:8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes

rived from the law, but because I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ's faithfulness – a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ's faithfulness.

from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith

The context in Philippians is, in all probability, once more a reaction to Judaizers. The verses just before are a great help.

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, exult in Christ Jesus, and do not rely on

m the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. I lived according to the law as a Pharisee. In my zeal for God I persecuted the church. According to the righteousness stipulated in the law I was blameless. (Phil 3:2–6 NET)

Here, what is at stake is Paul's identity as a Jew and indeed the identity of the 'dogs,' who could be either Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians insisting upon the practice of the ritual Law. The question of works of the Law *as achievement or merit* does not arise. It seems simpler to accept that here Paul is contrasting two ways of belonging, the first based on the practice of the Law and the second based on identification with the faithfulness of Christ. Paul is not contrasting faith and works – the later Lutheran antithesis – but two modes of being in right relationship with God. The first is based election and expressed in the practice of the Law. The second is based on Christ and expressed in the suspension of the ritual Law. Both 'systems' were put in place by God and in that sense both were good. However, the separation implied by the identity markers no longer makes sense in light of what God achieved in Jesus.

When we move to Romans, the famous passage in 3:21-26 is a key.

The differences between the two versions are manifold.

NET

Rom 3:21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (which is attested by the law and

ESV

Rom 3:21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the

the prophets) has been disclosed – ²² namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. ²⁴ But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

²⁵ God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed. ²⁶ This was also to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus' faithfulness.

Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

There is a major translation issue in verse 25. The Greek word used there is *hilasterion*. This is related to the word *hilasmos*, meaning expiation or propitiation. A frequent, fairly neutral, translation is 'mercy seat'. This is the sense of the word in Hebrews and in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. It means, somehow, the place or *locus* of God's mercy. We read in Hebrews, 'And above the ark were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.' (Heb 9:5 NET) It is, therefore, a piece of furniture in the Temple with symbolic meaning in the context. *Hilasterion* is much discussed and there is no real agreement. Nevertheless, the NRSV over-translates where it renders the text in this way, thereby smuggling in Anselmian ideas.

[T]hey are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice

of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. (Rom 3:24–25 NRSV)

It is possible to translate the text to mean a sacrifice of atonement only on the basis of a wider grasp of Paul's understanding of the death of Jesus. Was it a sacrifice of propitiation in the sense later common in the Anselmian tradition? It seems unlikely. The full Anselmian picture is to be found nowhere in the New Testament – not on Jesus' lips, nor in the great theologies of Paul, John and Hebrews.

A second observation underlines the tone of this reading. At this point, Paul is *not* contrasting faith and works, but rather underlining the disclosure of God's 'righteousness' precisely through the faithfulness of Jesus. The believer's response is not in view, as yet. From that point of view, it is more consistent to take seriously the words like *disclose*, *display* and *demonstrate*. Thus the faithfulness of Jesus is revelatory of God's faithful justice to all.

Of course, such a reading is disputed. In particular, v. 26 is laconic and so difficult to render. But it is instructive that even so doughty a neo-Protestant as Karl Barth felt obliged to translate at least v. 26 is this way:

Whom God set forth to be a covering propitiation, through his faithfulness by his blood, to shew his righteousness, because of the remission of sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for the showing, I say, of his righteousness at this present time: that he might be just and the justifier of him that is grounded upon the faithfulness which abides in Jesus.⁹

Thus far, we have noticed that *pistis Christou* can be literally rendered as 'the faith of Jesus'. In Philippians and Romans, the sense seems to be the faith that Jesus had, the faithfulness which he exhibited. This may then help us when reading Galatians, a key text for all students of St Paul. Martin Luther regarded his own commentary on Galatians as his very best work.

Pistis Christou occurs a few times in the letter. We start with Galatians 3:22:

9. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Oxford: OUP, 1933/1986 p.104. It is provocative to notice that Karl Barth in some ways anticipated aspects of the New Perspective!

NET

Gal 3:22 But the scripture imprisoned everything and everyone under sin so that the promise could be given – because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ – to those who believe.

ESV

Gal 3:22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

It might be best to read the whole passage first, noting the points of controversy.

Gal 2:15 We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners,¹⁶ yet we know that no one is justified by the works of the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.¹⁷ But if while seeking to be justified in Christ we ourselves have also been found to be sinners, is Christ then one who encourages sin? Absolutely not!¹⁸ But if I build up again those things I once destroyed, I demonstrate that I am one who breaks God's law.¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law so that I may live to God.²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.²¹ I do not set aside God's grace, because if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died for nothing! (NET)

At this point, Paul is speaking somewhat over the heads of the Galatians and addressing directly the Judaizers who disturbed the congregations of Galatia. The opening vv. 15-16 are really an attempt to state the common ground of all who believe in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles.

NET

Gal 2:16 yet we know that no one is justified by the works of the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that

ESV

Gal 2:16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by

we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

The passage is dense; the repetitions are a form of insistence. Schematically, it can be read as follows:

Gal 2:15 We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, ¹⁶ yet we know that
 no one is **justified**
 by the **works of the law**
 but by **the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.**
 And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that
 we may be **justified** by **the faithfulness of Christ**
 and not by the **works of the law,**
 because by the **works of the law**
 no one will be **justified.**

In terms of who is involved, the ‘we’ passages name the common, shared conviction: we are put in right relationship by the faith of Jesus. Paul is not contrasting works and faith the Lutheran sense because effectively no branch of Judaism was teaching that the ‘works of the Law’ were meritorious in that sense.

Justification is key and the best to hand translation remains ‘right relationship.’ Justification means a wide and rich range of things, as we read in 1 Corinthians:

1 Cor 1:30 He is the reason you have a relationship with Christ Jesus, who became for us *wisdom* from God, and *righteousness* and *sanctification* and *redemption*, ³¹ so that, as it is written, ‘*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.*’

Paul is teaching that in the early dispensation, God put in place the ‘works of Law,’ as a response to election and as sign of belonging to the covenant. God has now replaced this mode of justification by that of the faithfulness of Jesus. In neither case is the primary emphasis on human effort or ownership. The ‘works of the Law’ were *God’s gift* of a

response; the faithfulness of Jesus is likewise a gift – but this time it is so to speak bridge relationship, by which we, all of humanity without distinction, may come into full relationship with God.

The remaining verses of Gal 1:15-21 are no less complex but very rewarding.

Gal 2:17 But if while seeking to be **justified** in Christ we ourselves have also been found to be sinners, is Christ then one who encourages sin? Absolutely not! ¹⁸ But if I build up again those things I once destroyed, I demonstrate that I am one who breaks God's **law**.

¹⁹ For through the law I died to the **law** so that I may live to God.

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.

So the life I now live in the body, I live because of **the faithfulness of the Son of God**, who loved me and gave himself for me.

²¹ I do not set aside God's grace, because if **righteousness** could come through the **law**, then Christ died for nothing!

We notice first of all that the outer verses 17 and 21 function as a sort of frame and they say more or less the same thing but in different ways. In both, the invitation to put back in place the works of the Law is rejected. The objection is strong: if you put them back, you demonstrate you have not understood what God was doing for us in Christ.

In inner verses 19-20 are harder to unravel. To taking just verse 19 for a moment. Paul may be accused here of excessive density. In effect, there are four 'narratives' in here which overlay each each other. Laid out separately, they may perhaps make more sense:

- Jesus himself was a victim of the Law but he now 'lives to God.'
- Jesus' death marked the end of the time of the Law, that is, the time of Gods exclusive calling of one ethnic group, God's first chosen people.
- In his encounter with Christ, Paul himself discovered God's new project, God's outreach to all humanity 'without distinction.'
- Finally, Paul's mission is inspired by Jesus' death and resurrection and is, at the same time, a continuation of God's outreach beyond the Law.

In that complicated sense, Paul can say that he has died to the Law

in Christ, and that he now lives to God, *in Christ*. His Law-free Gospel is precisely God's outreach done through the conversion and apostolate of the apostle himself. Paul had a great synthetic mind; sometimes, this tendency to compact expression descends into obscurity, or, as here, into impenetrable 'telegraphese'.

That, in turn, helps us to understand the next few verses. Paul lives because of Jesus' faithfulness, which has created a bridge relationship with God. The inner life of that bridge relationship is captured in the unique expression 'who loved me and gave himself for me.' It is another window on Paul's reception and appropriation of his so-called conversion.

None of this is to say that the faith of the individual is not important for Paul. As we read in Romans, and in many other places:

For with the heart one believes and thus has righteousness and with the mouth one confesses and thus has salvation. (Rom 10:10 NET)

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS: DOES IT MATTER?

This conversation matters first of all for Jewish-Christian dialogue. It restores Judaism as a religion of grace and election. Along the way, it provides a contextual reading of Paul. It entails that the sixteenth century lens – the metaphysics of grace – is not really the issue at the time of Paul. Instead of the vertical of metaphysics, Paul was handling the horizontal of belonging. In turn, this means that a long tradition of reading Paul – Augustinian, Scholastic and Lutheran – is set aside. It does not mean these traditions did not raise real questions. It means, more simply, that such important later topics do not reflect the challenges faced contextually by the historical Paul.

So, was Paul a Lutheran? The New Perspectives disturbs one of the biblical pillars of the Reformation. To repeat, it does not mean: (1) that Paul did not value the faith of the individual; (2) that the sixteenth century issues did not matter. But it does, however, mean that the central challenge revolving around merit and grace was not Paul's issue. Luther did not, and perhaps could not, read Paul in the context of Paul's own day. This yields a somewhat disappointing balance on the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. It was and remains a significant ecumenical milestone – perhaps the greatest, thus far. However, it does

deal with justification in the light of the sixteenth century debates and reconciles Lutheran and Catholic anxieties *on the basis of the sixteenth century issues*. All is not lost, of course. The New Perspective opens up a different basis for dialogue between the traditions. The faithfulness of Christ could readily become the basis for communion, offering a spirituality based not on *anyone's* faith but rather on the faith of Christ himself. The faith of the individual believer is, in this view, still central.

Much more could be said. To be perfectly honest, not everyone has agreed, as a glance at the reading list will reveal. At the same time, this 'new' way of reading Paul lays the ground for a fresh understanding of our salvation in Christ's death and resurrection. The question – really for another day – is, if not the Anselmian vision, then what?¹⁰ The construction of a contemporary theology of salvation, rooted in Paul's teaching, has the potential to make redemption powerfully relevant for today, an understanding based on God's compassionate solidarity with humanity in Christ.

In the years after Sanders' study, many critiques have been voiced. However, his restoration of Judaism as a religion of election and grace remains a cornerstone. It means that 'works of the Law' cannot be naïvely equated with the practices of late mediaeval Catholicism. In itself, that triggers a question about the meaning of *pistis Chirstou* and its likely meaning. These two points are the major cornerstones of the New Perspective and they remain valid.

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10. Anselm of Canterbury wrote his *Cur Deum homo?* in the years from 1095 to 1098. In it, he elaborated a theory of redemption which became immensely popular, becoming eventually the standard account of redemption in the West. Everyone wishing to understand Western Christianity should read this book. Translations are easily available.

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