



*Journal of
Religion & Society*
Supplement Series

The Kripke Center

Supplement 10 (2014)

The Bible, the Economy, and the Poor

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8. Justification and Justice

Reading Paul with the Economically Vanquished

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Introduction

Justification and justice in English are two words worlds apart. Located in the august dictionary of Christian dogmatics and the mundane territory of social ethics respectively, they seem to speak different languages and represent incompatible ways of reasoning – especially when it comes to Pauline or Protestant justification by faith and economic justice. Yet in the ancient languages that give voice to the biblical texts, apparently this split does not exist – justification and justice are covered by the same term: *diakaiosunē* in Greek and *šedāqā* in Hebrew. This should give us pause, especially as the Protestant understanding of justification through faith and grace claims to be based solely on scripture. Martin Luther's famous triad of faith, grace, and Christ alone (*sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus*) by definition includes scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) as its fourth pillar on which any legitimate interpretation of justification rests. Yet its exclusion of social ethics, especially economic ethics, raises questions precisely from a scriptural perspective. This requires some digging

into the deep grammar of our theological language and hermeneutical premises. *The scriptural Paul and the Paul of the Protestant tradition need to re-open their debate.* While they both might agree on the centrality of justification by faith and grace, the ethical underpinnings commonly attached to this “article by which the Church stands or falls” require new scriptural scrutiny.

As is well known, Martin Luther’s enormously consequential reading of Galatians as his favorite Pauline letter (his “Kathy von Bora”) made justification by faith the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation and subsequently Protestant theology. Over the past fifty years, however, new debates in New Testament scholarship in response to post-Holocaust, feminist, liberationist, empire-critical, and postcolonial approaches have led to significant shifts in Pauline studies that shed different light on the established interpretations of Pauline justification by faith (Ehrensperger; Zetterholm).¹ These hermeneutical landslides, often unnoticed in Theology Departments, will require a sustained interdisciplinary effort by biblical and systematic theologians to be processed and understood in their far-reaching implications for a contemporary re-formulation of the Protestant justification paradigm. Along the way, the deeply rooted schism between justification by faith and social ethics will need to be rethought from the perspective of the “economically vanquished,” i.e., the losers of our present-day global market economy: not just as an ethical but as a profoundly theological question regarding the credibility and authenticity of Christian faith today (see Bieler and Guttmann; Streufert; Chang, Duchrow, and Nessian).

Gospel versus Law – the Protestant Paradigm

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners. Yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law (Galatians 2:15-16).

“Not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Christ” (Galatians 2:15) is the classic formulation of Paul’s justification theology, second only to Romans 3:22-31, and is the core of his works/law versus faith justification theology. What “law” and “works” mean here determine the meaning of “faith.” (The terms “justification,” “righteousness,” and “rectification” are English translations of the Greek *dikaïosunē*.) Work righteousness or justification by works/law is the negative foil against which the foundational gospel of justification through faith can shine.

Yet within the social, political, and economic realities of his first-century context, what does Paul actually talk about when he rejects “law-works” (*erga nomou*)? Traditionally, the answer to this question seemed deceptively easy: the issue of law/works in Galatians obviously is closely related to circumcision and thus Judaism. Faith stands for the contested

¹ A pioneering study on the re-integration of justification theology and economic/social justice for the poor and marginalized masses of Latin America is Elsa Tamez’ *The Amnesty of Grace*. Her point of departure is the one-dimensional, individualistic and abstract understanding of Pauline faith-justification in dominant theological readings that reduce it to divine-human reconciliation and leave out inter-human (in)justice. For her, this eclipses the original and liberating message of Paul’s (and even Luther’s) justification theology within the concrete reality of poverty, suffering, marginalization and survival struggles today. “The personal anxiety of how to bring about a merciful God changes to ‘How can we bring about a just world?’” (27).

opposite, namely non-circumcision of Paul's Gentile believers, and thus Christianity. In our passage, Galatians 2:15-21, law and law-works are obviously the commonly accepted demarcation between "Jews by birth" and "Gentile sinners" (2:15) that Paul has come to reject after Damascus when he was sent to proclaim the gospel as "good news" (*euangelion*) among precisely these "Gentiles," the non-Jewish "nations" (*ethnē*) of the Roman world (1:16).² Within the concrete conflict setting of Galatians, Paul stands against the circumcision demand of his opponents who want to turn the non-Jewish Christ followers into full proselyte Jews, acting in accordance with the prescriptions of Jewish law. The antithesis of law/work righteousness versus gospel/faith righteousness thus gradually morphed into the marker of a foundational polarity that separated Christianity (uncircumcised) from Judaism (circumcised), making Paul the founder of a new religion – and of Christian anti-Judaism (Kahl 2010: 1-27).

In a wider sense, applicable to all of humanity composed of "Jews and Gentiles," justification by faith stood against any type of human self-justification by means of "meritorious" activities. The prototype of this "achievement-based" religion was Judaism, denigrated as a religion of legalism that made people earn their salvation by meticulous observance of highly detailed rituals and rules (Zetterholm: 33-93; Wright 1997: 12-20). This reading of Galatians established the two most influential and problematic antitheses that have (mis)shaped the understanding of justification theology until today. "Faith" was defined in opposition to "practice" on an individual and social basis. As the Jews and Torah were labeled the protagonists of "work/law righteousness," anti-Judaism as "gospel versus law (Torah)" was inscribed into the very core of the Christian identity and faith construct – ironically with very "practical" and most terrifying socio-political consequences, as Christian supersessionism became complicit in the development of anti-Semitism and ultimately the Shoah (Boys).

During the time of the Reformation, another set of paradigmatic representatives of *law* and *works* entered the picture. Works righteousness not only separated Jews from Christians, but also Catholics from Protestants – the papal church was law oriented, whereas Luther and his followers relied on faith and grace alone. Furthermore, in an early codification of the clash between the "Christian Occident" and Islam/Orient, the "Mohammedan" Turks threatening to conquer Vienna and take over Europe in 1529 were also labeled as faithless and law/work-righteous, thus being lined up together with "Papists" and Jews, e.g., in Luther's introduction to his commentary on Galatians (Kahl 2010: 11-13; Boys: 67-70).³ It became clear that "law" and "works" had become the rubric under which all kinds of very heterogeneous "opponents" of proper Christianity were subsumed. Before this background, most far-reaching effects for the split between ethics and justification theology were brought about by Luther's unforgiving condemnation of the so-called "enthusiasts" of the Reformation period during the German Peasants' War (1524-26) in his writing, "Against the

² The Greek term *ethnē*, commonly translated as "Gentiles" (in line with the Jewish usage that defines Gentiles as non-Jews/non-us), from a Roman perspective comprises all conquered nations of the Roman Empire, including the Jews themselves (see Lopez).

³ On the "orientalizing" traits of Protestant justification theology, in line with Edward Said's construct of Western Orientalism, see Kahl 2011.

Murderous, Thieving Hordes of the Peasants” (Pelican and Oswald). The linkage between faith justification and social justice seemed to be ruled out as heterodox and heretic.⁴ Closely connected to his teaching of the two-kingdom doctrine as unconditional submission to established authorities, Luther here paved the way for the subsequent spiritualization, depolitization, and individualization of justification theology in the Protestant tradition (Chung, Duchrow and Nessian: 34-35).

The highly pliable, antithetical equation of “works of the law,” which equates Jews, Catholics, peasants/Anabaptists, Muslims, and Turks with anti-faith, is perpetuated as a multi-faceted rejection of “false believers,” liberals, “un-born-again” Christians, other religions, or a-religious people in a variety of present-day settings. It has become one of the most widely applied boundary markers to distinguish the (Protestant/Evangelical/fundamentalist) Christian self from any heterodox, hetero-religious, or simply secular other. With particular force the verdict of work-righteousness, however, has been always turned against social activists of Christian or non-Christian backgrounds. Any effort to establish justice on earth beyond individual acts of charity and altruism became susceptible to the blame of self-righteousness and “self-salvation”; liberating human practice directed against the very structures of oppression and injustice is under the verdict of human *hubris* of ignoring the all-pervasive reality of sin as well as the salvation through Christ’s redemptive death “alone” that justifies solely by grace and faith.⁵

With this, Paul’s grand manifesto of justification has been turned into a major proof-text of social injustice to be tolerated in the name of faith, grace, and Christ. Paul and his letters became the dogmatic stronghold of Christian political conservatism, often used as a mighty fortress of “proper faith” in fight with a “social gospel” of structural change and liberation theology (Tamez: 25-38). Faith justification in our theological semiotics thus practically functions as the antonym of “faithless” justice work, just as theology stands against economy, Paul against politics, spirituality against materiality – and “we” as proper believers against “them” as works-righteous others. Apart from the history of Protestant Pauline interpretation(s) as outlined above, this dualistic approach is also closely linked to the introduction of Greek thought, especially Platonic/Aristotelian binaries into Christian theology that happened after Paul and “resulted in a general devaluation of the concrete,

⁴ Chung, Duchrow, Nessian make a point that although these “harsh remarks against the Peasants’ Rebellion remain an unfortunate example,” in Luther’s overall writings (e.g., on usury, Mammon, idolatry) nonetheless theology and economics are closely interwoven in an early critique of emerging capitalism (89). This means “that economic issues are not merely part of social ethics, but an indispensable part of theological reflection about god, a *status confessionis*.” For a retrieval of Luther in Protestant and Catholic Latin American Liberation theology, see Tamez: 19-36.

⁵ This was stated by German New Testament scholar Luise Schottroff as early as 1988 in a polemical response to a declaration issued by the Bishops of the Church of North-Elbia that criticized feminist theology as an expression of sinful human self-reliance that contradicts Paul’s doctrine on sin and grace. She quotes an interpretation of Pauline justification in a standard German commentary series that subsumes “Jews, idealists, and Marxists” among those who ignore Paul’s insight into the universal presence of sin by trying to transform society on their own, thus falling prey to a sinful practice themselves (see Schaumberger and Schottroff: 25-29).

material world of Christianity” (Ehrensperger: 56; see also Kahl 2010: 15-21).⁶ It furthermore reflects the separation of religion and politics as a fundamental paradigm of contemporary Western societies, including the United States, a paradigm that was entirely alien to the ancient world where Jesus and Paul moved (Horsley 2003: 6-9).

Counter-Readings: Between “New Perspective” and Empire Criticism

Over the past four or five decades, significant interpretational shifts have re-opened the debate about Paul and justification theology. Three of them are of particular importance for our topic.

First, in the wake of the “New Perspective,” the alleged “works-righteousness” of Judaism was revealed as a Christian and most notably Protestant projection. Similarly, Paul’s “anti-Judaism” was reframed as his passionate stance in an inner-Jewish debate about the proper interpretation of Torah for the community of Jews and Gentiles newly established through the redemptive action of the Messiah/Christ. Paul at Damascus did not convert from Judaism to Christianity (a term that he never uses); rather, he remained a Jew – though a disputed, marginal, radical Jew – all his life. The separation between Judaism and Christianity is a much later and gradual development. This approach that dates back to the 1970s and was spearheaded by Krister Stendahl, E. P. Sanders, and James Dunn; N. T. Wright (2005) represents a somewhat belated response to the entanglement of Christian theology with anti-Semitism and the German Holocaust. It profoundly challenged the anti-Judaistic pattern embedded in the established interpretation of Paul, most notably into his justification theology (see further, Zetterholm: 95-163).

Second, the community and practical aspect of Paul’s theology became focal with two landmark essays by Stendahl that vigorously recontextualized Galatians 2:15-21 within the controversy about the joint meals of Jews and Gentiles at Syrian Antioch (2:11-14), making community the focal lens for reading Galatians (and Romans) as a whole.⁷ Justification by faith was no longer the antithesis of social practice and “works” in general but the theological codification of a concrete social practice that reconciled two formerly hostile and segregated groups: Jews and Gentiles. Furthermore, its main thrust was not antithetical but aiming towards solidarity, commonality, and the transgression of hitherto existing boundaries.⁸ This scripturally well-founded statement by a leading New Testament scholar

⁶ Ehrensperger mentions especially “women and Jews, who as such were associated with this concrete, material, and ‘fallen world’” (56). One could easily add the poor and the plight of exponentially growing economic inequality to this traditional list of theologically “less relevant” issues.

⁷ “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West” dates back to an article by Stendahl published in 1960; it was complemented by a second essay on “Paul among Jews and Gentiles” that was based on a Lecture Series in 1963/64 and then became the title of Stendahl’s book that appeared in 1976.

⁸ Stendahl claims that “the doctrine of justification by faith was hammered out by Paul for the very specific and limited purpose of defending the rights of Gentile converts to be full and genuine heirs to the promise of God to Israel” (2). He laments that “this primary focus on Jews and Gentiles was lost in the history of interpretation,” leading to a highly problematic spiritualization and de-contextualization of Paul’s theology. “Justification no longer ‘justified’ the status of Gentile Christians as honorary Jews, but became the timeless answer to the plights and pains of the introspective conscience of the West. Paul was no longer seen ‘among Jews and Gentiles,’ but rather as a guide for those perplexed and troubled by the human predicament” (5).

from Harvard Divinity School and bishop of the Swedish Lutheran Church in Stockholm represents a substantial challenge to the Protestant paradigm. Paul's justification theology was not about "Jews versus Christians," but "Jews together with Gentiles" – it no longer divided two mutually exclusive identities but brought them together "in Christ." With remarkable clarity and anticipatory force, Stendahl opened new pathways for current efforts to re-conceptualize Pauline theology and Christian ethics; erasing hierarchical division and distinctions between *self* and *other* along the split-lines of ethnicity, religion, class, and gender (Galatians 3:28) was recovered as a core concern of the apostle.

Based on "scripture alone," Stendahl's argument is hard to refute. The passage on justification by faith in Galatians 2:15-21 is, indeed, inseparably tied to the conflict about the break-up of the Antiochene table community between Jews and Gentiles in 2:11-14. That means "works of the law" for Paul cannot be wrong just because they make people falsely trust in their ability to earn their own righteousness before God; what weighs equally is that such law-works in the Pauline sense are necessarily social acts of rejection and arrogance towards the neighbor. This became evident when the Jews of Antioch withdrew from the common table with the Gentiles and refused to eat together with them (2:12). *Works of the Law* according to Paul are *works of exclusion* that bolster the delusional superiority and disconnection of the "self" both with regard to God and the human "other" (cf. 4:17).⁹ The vertical dimension of pride and self-centeredness in the relation to God and the horizontal dimension of segregation towards the other belong together. "Boasting" therefore is the antithesis of faith justification and a core feature of "works-righteousness" (Romans 3:27); as such it is embedded into a profoundly competitive relationship towards the other, as Robert Jewett has shown in his landmark commentary on Romans.¹⁰ This leads to a fundamental shift in the perception of justification theology that opens it up to economic and social justice, especially as competition is one of the basic features of the current market economy that turns more and more people into losers of the economic "game," perceived as undeserving and persons without value. "God's righteousness is manifested in Christ in such a way that it shatters ordinary definitions of righteousness as conformity to a particular culture's norms. In Christ divine righteousness acts to counter the arrogance of dominant groups and the shame of subordinates. God's righteousness expresses the [Old Testament] expectation of salvation of the 'poor, the oppressed, the widow, the orphan'" (Jewett: 275).

Third, and most significant, a new contextual dimension of Paul's overall missionary project emerged: the Roman Empire.¹¹ Galatia was a Roman province and its inhabitants, Jews, ethnic Galatians, and other ethnicities, were firmly shaped by the reality of colonial domination and exploitation on many levels. What if the "law of exclusion" and its "works"

⁹ The exclusionary aspect of law as a chief reason for Paul's law critique is strongly emphasized by Tamez and reflected in the original subtitle of her book in Spanish (1991): *La Justificación por la Fe desde los Excluidos* (*Justification by Faith from the Perspective of the Excluded*).

¹⁰ Jewett explains "boasting" in Romans 3:27 as "the normal means of maintaining one's honor in the face of competition" in a cultural setting where this was the general practice modeled in particular by the Roman system of perpetual self-glorification (295).

¹¹ As an introduction to the empire-critical work on Paul and Roman law that was pioneered by Dieter Georgi and Jacob Taubes, see Horsley 1997, 2000, 2004; Jewett; Elliott; Taubes; Crossan and Reed.

that Paul criticizes is primarily Roman law rather than Jewish Torah? What if he contests, from a Torah-based and messianic Christ-perspective, the way in which the Roman order segregates and separates people in order to secure Roman domination (the famous *divide and impera* – “divide and rule”)? What if the circumcision conflict in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Galatia that shapes Paul’s most famous letter is not a conflict about Jewish law per se but about the deceptive mechanisms of co-opting Torah in the service of Roman *nomos* and making the conquered participate in the structures that perpetuate their defeat – in this case the continuing separation and mutual contempt between “Jews” and “Gentiles”?

Rome built its rule over the nations (including the Jews) precisely on the hierarchical and antithetical law of competition, combat, and contempt that Paul sees erased “in Christ” and that resurfaced at Antioch when the Jews separated themselves from the common table with the Gentiles – maybe because their new table order and commonality was an anomaly within the social parameters of a Roman city, the capital of the province of Syria? What if the debates and conflicts between Paul and his opponents, rather than simply pitting “Jews” against “Christians,” refer much more to the complex inner-Jewish negotiations of how far one could accommodate and assimilate Torah to the requirements of Roman Law – or how far one had to resist “in Christ” the social models and idolatrous modes prescribed by the law of the imperial colonizers.¹² Roman law sanctioned the worldwide order of conquest, colonization, and exploitation as justified by divine consent. In this order the victory over defeated nations like Jews or Galatians demonstrates the support of the gods for Rome, an alliance embodied, ritualized, and tangible in the emperor who was universally worshiped as supreme god and “son of God.”¹³ Undoubtedly, the “New Perspective,” combined with empire-critical and post-colonial approaches pushing beyond it, amounts to an entire reformulation of Paul’s overall theological construct and persona.

The Dying Galatian: An Icon of Roman Law and Colonial Economy

An image illustrates the implications of this complex paradigm shift and facilitates the process of critically re-imagining Paul’s Galatian circumcision conflict from the social, cultural, and economic perspective of the “vanquished.” The sculpture of the *Dying Galatian* (or *Dying Trumpeter*) shows a defeated and mortally-wounded warrior sunk on his shield. A torque around his neck, his nakedness and wild hair are all visual markers of his Celtic/Galatian/Gallic identity, which both Greeks and Romans saw as prototypically barbarian and aggressively hostile to the gods, laws, and assets of civilization. The blood trickling from a wound underneath his right chest together with the sword and a broken war trumpet that fell from his hands signal that his battle is positively over and for good, inviting the spectator to proudly identify with the invisible victor who struck the deadly blow against an enemy of law and order. The image, preserved in a Roman marble copy from the late first

¹² On the “mixed” communities of circumcised and uncircumcised Christ-followers as “anomalies” within the civic and imperial order, leading to the circumcision demand of Paul’s opponents as an “evasive action” to establish at least minimal conformity, see Winter: 141-42; Nanos: 257-71; and Kahl 2011: 219-22.

¹³ For a critical re-reading of Galatians within its Roman imperial context as a letter to conquered and co-opted (ex-)barbarians, see Kahl 2010 and 2011; for the conflict between Paul’s monotheism and imperial religion, see Kahl 2010: 138-48; for the presence of emperor cult in Galatia and its role in general, see Hardin and Peppard.

century CE, was created in Pergamon (Asia Minor) around 240 BCE after a victory over “marauding” Galatian tribes of Anatolia who, according to established ancient historiography, were terrorizing the region; they had entered Asia Minor in 279/78 BCE after century-long migration movements that started somewhere in Western Europe. These Galatians, and with them our *Dying Trumpeter*, are the direct ancestors of Paul’s Galatians.¹⁴



Dying Galatian, Capitoline Museums, Rome. Photo by Jean-Pol Grandmont.

The sculpture, together with its twin-image of the *Suicidal Galatian* (a chieftain killing his wife and himself), subsequently became the prototype for a whole iconographic paradigm of anti-barbarian warfare and victory, and an icon as much of the Roman Empire as of Western civilization. As a coveted trophy it was cherished for its inherent power of attributing righteousness to victorious kings, conquerors, usurpers, and dictators of all kinds who from ancient times well into modernity loved to portray themselves as the saviors of nation and civilization against dark forces of chaos and destruction.¹⁵ With its intimate link to Paul’s Galatian letter, this sculpture of the defeated Galatian warrior, seen through the eyes of the victorious, is literally a “body of evidence” that there is still another law “at work” in Galatia than just Jewish Torah, namely Roman law. This *nomos* is the most powerful law of victory and subjugation that continuously needs, constructs, and stages to the public view an inferior, unrighteous “other” in order to celebrate and justify its own (unjust) works of

¹⁴ It is indicative of the prevailing disembodiment of New Testament Studies that this intimate relationship between the *Dying Galatian* and the Galatians behind Paul’s letter has been rarely noticed nor theologically explored. For an introduction to the iconography of the *Dying Galatian* within the history of Greco-Roman anti-barbarian warfare, see Smith: 99-104 and Kahl 2010: 31-82; for the general history of the Galatians in Asia Minor, see Mitchell.

¹⁵ This includes Napoleon who carried the sculpture to Paris in 1798. The sculpture was copied innumerable times at European courts and elsewhere (see Haskell and Penny: 224-27, 282-84; Kahl 2010: 78).

triumphant self-hood, including imperial conquest and colonization. The *Dying Galatian* presents the normative imagery of Galatian bodies and Galatian history, meant to shape the (self)image of those who inhabit the Roman province of Galatia, including Paul's addressees in the "churches of Galatia" (Galatians 1:3); it shows the defeated their collective origin, their place and their duty, discouraging rebellion and promoting subservience (see further Kahl 2011: 213-22; Niang).

The status of Paul's Galatia as a Roman province, notoriously downplayed in theological commentaries as a mere historical footnote, is much more than that, no matter whether Paul's congregations are located to the south or north of this province – a question that received disproportionate attention instead. At the time of the letter in the early or mid-50s, this province had been in existence for about 75 years; it was established by Emperor Augustus in 25 BCE, only two years after the Roman Empire came into being. The foundation of the Galatian province sealed a process of gradual cooptation by Rome that began with a devastating massacre of 40,000 tribal Galatians in central Asia Minor in 189 BCE, but subsequently reached out specifically to Galatian elites who eventually took on the role of Rome's successful client rulers across Asia Minor, policing and "adjusting" their own and other peoples according to the laws and requirements of Roman supremacy (Kahl 2010: 169-207; Mitchell).

In light of this, the *Dying Galatian*, with the blood trickling from his mortal wound, is a victory monument that displays the "body politics" of colonialism; it targets the Galatians collectively as losers and part of an inferior species of humanity, whose lives are no longer theirs but at the mercy and disposal of their conquerors and overlords. Their bodies are there to be used and abused, exploitable and expendable, drained of their lifeblood and life-force, which are then channeled into the economic circulation system of the empire. Within the Roman order, they are the defeated and, as such, the slaves of the victorious by law and divine will. As conquered enemies their dying on the battlefield manifests the immovable decree of the gods. They can be sent to die in the Roman arenas, or to be sold on the slave markets with their women and children for work in the mines, fields, or houses of rich Romans to accumulate wealth for their owners. All of this is completely lawful and justified by divine consent and decree. If they continue to work the fields in their native regions, they have to pay heavy tributes to Rome and cooperate with the indigenous power apparatus, including the provision of soldiers for the Roman army. They and their land with all its wealth and natural resources now belong to Rome.

Justification and Justice

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! (Galatians 3:1).

It is only before this background that the full implications of Paul's justification theology as the "good news" of a radically emancipatory counter-identity for the vanquished nations of the Roman world can be seen. He puts before the Galatians' eyes an *other* image, the image of "Christ crucified" (3:1). It is the image of a Jew whose dying as a "visual event" has much in common with the *Dying Galatian*, including its public character: both were, or were destined to be, Roman subjects that have resisted the Roman order. Therefore, they needed to be punished with the full force of Roman law, in full view of a large audience and

as a lesson to be taught to other provincial subjects with rebellious inclinations.¹⁶ However, the image, as it enters Paul's messianic vision, undergoes a dramatic transformation. The crucified is the resurrected Messiah, i.e., the death of the transgressor and enemy of the Roman order is reverted into life. God appears no longer in solidarity with the winners but as an ally of the doomed who are at the bottom of the Roman stratification system. Within the logic of the images, this reversal de-legitimizes the law that justifies economic exploitation and colonization of "losers" and "no-bodies" (cf. Corinthians 1:26-31), like the *Dying Galatian* and his contemporary descendants of all nations, circumcised and uncircumcised alike.

The resurrection of Jesus "out of the dead" is the first theological statement that Paul makes at the beginning of Galatians (1:1), and it has game-changing implications for the culturally, politically, and economically vanquished of the Roman Empire. It communally restores their mutilated, abused, and commodified bodies to messianic integrity by integrating them into the crucified and resurrected "body of Christ," reclaiming them from their deadly subservience to a blood-sucking and life-devouring empire. It makes them subservient no longer to a law of death but to the law of life that, for Paul, is the law of love (5:14) and the "law of Christ" (*nomos Christou*; 6:2) spelled out as "faith working (*en-ergoumenē*) through love" (5:6). Law and works in general are irreconcilable with Pauline faith and grace, but the works and law of love (as opposed to the works and law of competition/exclusion) are the indispensable embodiment of faith.

From Paul's perspective, Christ has inaugurated a completely different order of justice and justification than the one embodied in the sculpture of the *Dying Galatian*; it is closely related to the liberating logic of Exodus, but has opened it up for the "others." Both Jews and non-Jews, all of them vanquished nations (*ethnē*) under Roman rule, can be justified and set free (or redeemed) from their enslavement. This redemption happens apart from the imperial law of conquest and competition, of segregation and self-righteousness through a new practice of messianic solidarity: the one/self has to carry the burden of the other and "thus fulfill(s) the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). Faith (as opposed to works of the law) is *both* the belief and the faithful practice of self and other becoming one and alive in the broken body of the crucified and resurrected Christ (3:28) – including the broke(n) bodies of *Dying Galatians*.¹⁷

This is a radical counter-imagination that draws on the biblical traditions of Genesis, Exodus, and the prophets. It is not a slave rebellion that Paul promotes, nor armed resistance against Rome that would flare up one decade later in the Jewish War of 66-70 CE, leading to the most disastrous destruction of Jerusalem and Judaism in Palestine. Nonetheless, Paul is on a mission that fundamentally contests and subverts empire from within. His collection for the "poor" in Jerusalem is the most prominent example of an

¹⁶ The antithetical correspondence between the two images of "Christ Crucified" and the *Dying Galatian* has been first observed by Balch. For the importance of public visibility of crucifixions and Roman capital punishment, see Hengel: 50.

¹⁷ For a comprehensive treatment of Paul's justification theology as messianic transformation of the competitive, combative and consumptive self-other binary underlying the dominant law, see Kahl 2010: 245-89.

alternative economic practice that he plants among his communities, modeling new attitudes and new ways of challenging the socio-economic consensus of Roman society.¹⁸ His advocacy for serving one another as “slaves” (Galatians 5:13) – rather than aiming at subjugating the other to one-self as a master (arguably the supreme aim of the Roman slave-holding society) – transforms the bodies and minds of Roman subjects into a new subjectivity open to radically challenge the rules and laws of Rome by an alternative order of solidarity and mutuality. Paul calls this order “new creation” (6:15). Justification and justice are no longer divided by walls of separation that Paul constantly tries to erase as they creep up again and again (2:18). The integrity of the messianic event and his whole theology are at stake.

Conclusion

Paul’s criticism of law does not refer to Jewish law or any other religious or secular practice per se, but to the imperial law of combat, competition, and murderous consumption or exploitation that can “hijack” any religion (including Christianity), and any human practice. This law constantly reproduces and naturalizes the split of humanity into deserving and undeserving, good and bad, righteous and sinners, legal and illegal, winners and losers. The law dissects humanity into bodies that are justified to consume and bodies that are justifiably consumed. The *Dying Galatian* is the quintessential icon of this split and the law behind it, as much as the crucified Christ is its irrevocable subversion. “Faith” thus means the renunciation of the “works of the law” that require the presentation and continuous production of unrighteous others in order to demonstrate one’s own righteousness; faith overcomes this vicious circle of self-justification and other-incrimination by accepting and confessing one’s own complicity with the all-pervasive system of “sin” – egotism, self-glorification, and self-separation that are inseparably tied to the law (Kahl 2011: 206-207).

The “law of death,” as it was paradigmatically embodied in the *Dying Galatian* two millennia ago, today makes us “see” a societal order as justifiable (or even divinely sanctioned) where more and more people unjustly lose their houses, jobs, livelihoods, or lives; their healthcare or their access to proper education, to clean air, water, and unpolluted soil; their entitlement to the privilege of being “legal” and getting their share of the life-sustaining resources of the earth. This is where Paul at Damascus starts to “see” the world differently and where his justification theology becomes an intervention into the “order of things.” A statement by Dieter Georgi is a fitting conclusion:

It has been a fatal side of much of Protestant exegesis that the rational as well as the utopian elements of Paul’s understanding of justification have been weakened and even covered up. As Paul transforms his understanding of justification into a praxis and theory of the collection, the climate of a pragmatic utopia becomes apparent. In the terminology of established Reformation theology, Paul’s reflections on the collection and on money, if

¹⁸ For a stimulating exploration of the Pauline collection as an elaborate intervention into the established rules for the flow of money in the ancient world, see Georgi 2005 and Welborn; for a more comprehensive treatment, see Georgi 1992. For the economic context of Paul’s congregations and the implications of poverty for Paul’s theology, see Meggitt; Longenecker; Longenecker and Liebengood 2009.

brought out in their full historical meaning, qualify for the verdict of “enthusiasm” as it was leveled against revolting peasants, Anabaptists, and spiritualists. . .

Paul argues emphatically for a God engaged in the human demise and impoverishment; Paul fights against a distant and unengaged deity. The deficiency of the pagan deities in his eyes would not be that they were too human but that they were too little involved in the human dilemma. Justification is not important merely between God and the individual but comes about and manifests itself in the interrelatedness of God, the world, and all humanity (2005: 302).

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