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Justification in the New Testament Outside the Pauline Corpus^{*}

Stephen Motyer

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'Justification' is a theme so distinctively associated with Paul that not much study has been undertaken of the theme in the rest of the New Testament.¹ At first sight this is encouraging, and suggests that this paper might be relatively brief, but appearances are illusory. In fact this subject raises so many issues, and calls for engagement with so many texts, that I can only offer an outline treatment which is bound to be more suggestive than conclusive.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

We first have to tackle the inevitable problems of method which confront us as we approach a subject like this. There are three possible ways of proceeding:

1. *We could simply survey the use of the δικ- word-group in the rest of the New Testament.* This is the simplest method, the one adopted by F.F. Bruce in his essay on the subject, which originated as a paper at a Tyndale Fellowship New Testament study-group in 1951. But we encounter an immediate difficulty. For it cannot be assumed that, outside Paul, the δικ- word-group is in fact used to give expression to a doctrine of justification. To make such an assumption is to fall foul of the 'word-concept' fallacy, identified so forcefully by James Barr,² but so easily overlooked. John Reumann, the author of one of the few comprehensive studies of the word-group, is alive to the difficulty, but finds it hard to avoid making the simple equation 'righteousness' = 'justification' in effect, for his study was conceived as a contribution to the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue on justification.

Benno Przybylski avoids the trap. He argues precisely that Matthew does not express a doctrine of justification by his use of δικαιοσύνη. In fact he charges several scholars with falsely Paulinising Matthew's use of the word, and with failing to see that Matthew uses it in an un-Pauline way to signify simply the moral demand that God lays upon mankind.³

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* A paper first presented to the Tyndale Biblical Theology/Christian Doctrine Group on Wednesday 4th July 1990.

¹ There are brief studies by F. F. Bruce, 'Justification by Faith in the non-Pauline Writings of the New Testament', *EQ* 24 (1952), 66-77 [http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/justification_bruce.pdf]; T. Preiss, 'Justification in Johannine Thought' in *Life in Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1954), 9-31, and E. Grasser, 'Rechtfertigung im Hebraerbrief' in J. Friedrich, W. Pöhlmann and P. Stuhlmacher (eds.), *Rechtfertigung*. FS E. Käsemann (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1976), 79-93. There are, however, several studies of 'righteousness' outside Paul, most notably John Reumann, *Righteousness in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); A. Descamps, *Les Justes et la justice dans l'évangiles et le christianisme primitif* (Louvain: Gembloux, 1950); and B. Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and his world of thought* (SNTSMS 41; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

² In *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

³ Przybylski, *Matthew*, 105-107. Matthew alone among the synoptics uses the noun δικαιοσύνη, which occurs at 3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; 21:32.

But Peter Stuhlmacher falls into the error, and illustrates the pitfalls in this area: he concludes from Matthew's different use of δικαιοσύνη that he was unable to develop a 'sola gratia' doctrine.⁴ For Stuhlmacher, salvation by grace alone is inextricably bound to the 'righteousness' terminology, and so cannot really come to expression in any other way. Przybylski is aware of the danger and does not deny to Matthew a doctrine of salvation by grace alone—but maintains that it is not expressed by use of the δικ- word-group.

Przybylski illustrates a preferable approach: he does not link words and concepts tightly to each other, but seeks to compare Paul and Matthew as wholes, and then to draw conclusions about their respective use of the 'righteousness' terminology. This suggests our second possible method:

2., *We could ignore the δικ- word-group altogether, and look for the same idea expressed in other words.* Such an approach would compel us to adopt an holistic method of comparison, allowing each New Testament author to use language in a unique way appropriate to his setting and purpose. on this basis, a comparison may then detect points of contact which would not have been suspected simply on the basis of the vocabulary used.⁵ This is essentially the approach adopted by, for instance, Eberhard Jüngel, Theo Preiss, Roger Mohrlang and Erich Grasser in their contributions to this debate.⁶ However, we need to enter two qualifications or cautions before quickly endorsing this approach wholesale.

First, an endeavour like that expressed by the title of this paper sets its own agenda. We are seeking 'justification' outside the Pauline writings. 'Justification' is a theme so deeply embedded in Paul's gospel and ministry to the Gentiles that, even if we found equivalent concepts differently expressed in other New Testament authors, we could not immediately claim to have found 'justification' there. This is the claim implicit in the title of Preiss' famous article, 'Justification in Johannine Thought'. He argues that John's use of forensic metaphors forms a substantial parallel to Paul's more restricted use of one legal metaphor—justification. But his title then claims too much, for it stifles at birth the question why John's vocabulary differs from Paul's so markedly.⁷

This means that, in this case, we cannot wholly separate the concept from the words. The words themselves must have some control on the debate, from a New Testament perspective: we cannot really talk about justification in the New Testament without reference to the

⁴ P. Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 189-191.

⁵ This is the method adopted by E. P. Sanders in his epoch-making work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1977), which has the subtitle *A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*. He criticises comparisons of Paul and Judaism which have simply dealt with reduced 'essences' (often expressed by mere slogans, like 'faith or works', 'letter or Spirit'), or with individual motifs (*op. cit.*, 12). Instead he seeks to look at each in its own terms and then 'to compare an entire religion, parts and all, with an entire religion, parts and all' (*op. cit.*, 16). The same method seems desirable for the comparison of the individual writers of the New Testament.

⁶ E. Jüngel, *Paulus and Jesus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976). He regards the gospel of justification as the essential equivalent to Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom; Preiss, 'Johannine Thought'; R. Mohrlang, *Matthew and Paul: A Comparison of Ethical Perspectives* (SNTSMS 48; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Grasser, 'Rechtfertigung' (see note 1). Also N.A. Dahl, 'The Doctrine of Justification: its Social Function and Implications' in *Studies in Paul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 95-120 (note his opening statement of method, p 95: 'Words such as righteous, righteousness and justify can appear outside the context of the doctrine of justification, and the substance of the doctrine can be present even where the technical terminology of the doctrine is missing').

⁷ The verb δικαιοῶ is not used at all in the Fourth Gospel, and the noun δικαιοσύνη only in one passage (16:7-11), where it is used in a clearly un-Pauline sense (pace C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1978), 488).

justification vocabulary, even if only because, amongst other things, we want to uncover the pre-history of Paul's distinctive use of the vocabulary.

Second, we cannot adopt this approach without touching on the wider issue of the diversity of the New Testament and the problems of harmony this creates. A full consideration of this is beyond the scope of this paper. Certain reflections on it are, nonetheless, important for our

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purpose, for not a few scholars have used 'justification' as a unifying category with which to deal dogmatically with the diversity of the New Testament.⁸ Käsemann and Schrage both hold that the *iustificatio impiū* (justification of the ungodly) is the 'essential core of the New Testament' ('*Sachmitte des Neuen Testaments*')⁹—even though they also hold that it is not the message of the *whole* New Testament (it does not 'cover the whole Canon'). So justification becomes a 'Canon within the Canon', a judgement upon the rest of the New Testament as well as a judgement (in some parts) about it. This is particularly clear in the writings of Siegfried Schutz, who calls upon Protestants in the name of the Reformation, to stand with Paul against the parts of the New Testament where the *iustificatio impiū* is no longer clearly taught.

The problem with this approach is that it has departed from a purely historical study of the New Testament and bestows upon the dogmatic tradition—the tradition of theological reflection on the Gospel and the Scripture—a primary importance over against the New Testament itself. The tones of the Reformation ring loud and clear in such discussions, and we realise that the reason why justification is chosen as the heart of the New Testament, actually lies outside the New Testament itself! This problem is not peculiar to those scholars who choose justification as the heart of the New Testament. The trap is there for all seekers after such an integrating category, because it is often sought for contemporary (frequently ecumenical) reasons, and so the motive is actually the desire to integrate the New Testament not just within itself but also with the wider dogmatic tradition or part of it.¹⁰

Such a desire is thoroughly laudable, but we need to be as clear as possible about where New Testament study begins and ends. It begins with an attempt to be as aware as possible of the contemporary theological and ecclesiastical impulses which constrain us, and with a heartfelt desire not to let these shape what we allow the text to say to us; and it ends when we consciously bring our theological and ecclesiastical concerns back into the picture again, and ask ourselves what Paul (or John, or Matthew) would say to us today. Between the beginning and the end lies the careful use of every means at our disposal to enable the writers of the New Testament to live again in our imagination, to allow them to be very different from us if

⁸ In addition to Jüngel (above, note 6), so e.g. E. Käsemann, *Das Neue Testament als Kanon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 405; S. Schulz, *Die Mitte der Schrift* (1976); Wolfgang Schrage, 'Die Frage nach der Mitte and dem Kanon im Kanon des Neuen Testaments in der neueren Diskussion', in J. Friedrich, W. Pöhlmann and P. Stuhlmacher (eds.), *Rechtfertigung*. FS E. Käsemann (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976), 415-442.

⁹ Schrage, 'Frage nach der Mitte,' 439.

¹⁰ See N. T. Wright's brilliant review of Käsemann's *Commentary on Romans* (1980) for an illuminating analysis of the way in which the concerns and debates of 20th-century German Protestantism have shaped Käsemann's whole interpretation of Paul: 'A new Tübingen school? Ernst Käsemann and his commentary on Romans', *Themelios* 7.3 (April 1982), 6-16 [http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/7.3_Wright.pdf]. Wright's concluding judgement is, 'Seeking to make Paul relevant..., Käsemann (like Bultmann) has laid himself open to the charge of letting Paul say only what the exegete wishes to hear' (p 15).

necessary, to allow them not to address our contemporary concerns if appropriate, simply to *let them be themselves*.

So the answer to this problem—the way to avoid the trap of ‘over-dogmatising’ the New Testament in this way—is to be rigorous in the way historical study is undertaken. For evangelicals, who want to emphasise the authoritative role of the Bible within the Church, this rigorous use of historical study is vital: for the Bible does not speak authoritatively if it is domesticated to our interests and shaped by our concerns. That leads us to the third possible approach.

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3. *We could attempt to find and describe the essential features of the doctrine of justification from a ‘whole-New Testament’ perspective, starting from Paul and from appropriate assumptions about the nature of the early church and the phenomenon of the New Testament.* This methodological proposal needs unpacking briefly, although it raises wide issues, the barest outline of which can be discussed here. The following points can be made.

First, deciding the ‘appropriate assumptions’ from which to proceed is as vital as it is difficult. They must have a provisionality about them, because they will need to be changed through increasing awareness of the phenomena to which they relate. But at the same time we need to be aware of the importance of such assumptions, which can be described as the ‘cast of mind’ of the scholar who engages with the New Testament. I would wish to work from the assumption that the early church (and with it the New Testament) is to be seen as a *single* but *complex* and developing phenomenon within the setting of first century Judaism, so that within the undoubted diversity of the New Testament, we should not expect wide divergence to appear.¹¹ Arguments to defend this assumption can be brought forward,¹² but its best test is studies like this one, where we can ask whether ‘justification by faith’ in the Pauline sense is also a fitting description of the salvation-experience offered by other New Testament writers.

Second, the phrase ‘essential features’ needs careful definition. In asking what these are, we are seeking not a carefully defined dogmatic analysis of the doctrine, but an understanding of the role the doctrine played within the setting of Paul’s ministry. In other words, we want to discover the *sociological force* of the message of justification by faith, its import and its impact within the relationships in which Paul proclaimed it.

This approach arises from insights into the sociology of language, which emphasise that language functions within a whole context, and that its ‘meaning’ inheres in that whole context. When the Speaker of the House of Commons cries ‘Order, order!’ at the beginning of a sitting (or indeed during the course of it), the word has a function as well as a meaning. In

¹¹ In spite of their combination in this statement, we need to distinguish between the earliest church and the New Testament. The church contained streams of thought and movements whose ideas are specifically rejected within the New Testament, so that the diversity of the New Testament is actually less than that of the church. I do believe that we need to find a distinction between orthodoxy and heresy in the very earliest years of the church, in spite of the popularity of Walter Bauer’s thesis to the contrary. The New Testament reflects the ‘core’ teaching of the apostles, rather than the full diversity of the communities the apostles served. J. D. G. Dunn’s important book, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: an Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1977) fails to make this distinction with sufficient rigour, it seems to me, and therefore tends to ascribe to the New Testament the diversity of the church.

¹² See especially the important points made by Traugott Holtz, ‘Überlegung zur Geschichte des Urchristentums’, *TLZ* 100 (1975), 321-332.

fact, the bare 'meaning' supplied by a dictionary would not be much help to a Martian sitting in the visitors' gallery and wondering what was going on. He would not actually discover the meaning of the Speaker's words until he became familiar with the processes of British government in some detail. Similarly 'justification by faith' was actually an *appeal*, not a bare doctrine, and we will not understand it until we enter the minds of those who heard it and feel their reaction to it.¹³

Third, when we have done this for Paul, we can then turn to the rest of the New Testament and ask similar questions about the way in which the language of the proclamation functions in relation to its setting. Only when such study has been done is an adequate comparison actually

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possible, and only on this basis can the results claim to be more than mere surmises.¹⁴

THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF JUSTIFICATION IN PAUL: A SUMMARY

We need to cover this briefly, simply so that we may define what we are looking for elsewhere! In attempting this summary, I am begging many questions, and drawing on what James Dunn has called the 'new perspective' on Paul (and to which he has notably contributed).¹⁵

This perspective sets Paul firmly against the background of Judaism, and sees his engagement with Judaism and with the law as at the heart of his life and ministry. Such an engagement was necessitated by the fact that he set out to offer the Gentiles salvation in the name of Israel's Messiah without requiring them to become members of Israel or to submit to 'the yoke of the law'. 'Justification not by works of the law but by faith'¹⁶ must be interpreted in this social setting: a renegade son of Israel offers the blessings of Israel's religion to those who traditionally have no right to them, and without requiring of them the necessary 'works'—the lifestyle of legal observation and social commitment which is the *sine qua non*

¹³ Such an approach to Paul is becoming increasingly popular: see especially Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: a Sociological Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); also Dahl, 'Justification' (above, note 6). The point made here is a development of the vital distinction between meaning and significance so often ignored by interpreters. The significance of a word in a given context may represent a considerable reshaping of its semantic 'core'.

¹⁴ The truth of this can be illustrated from ch.9 of Dunn's book, on 'Spirit and Experience' (*Unity and Diversity*, 174-202). He finds a spectrum of attitudes towards 'enthusiasm' in the New Testament, ranging from Luke's unqualified endorsement, through Paul's cautious use of tests to discriminate the true experience of the Spirit from the false, to the Pastorals' total rejection of the charismata in the church (183f., 192-5, 197f.). Dunn seems to sharpen these distinctions in a way that goes beyond the evidence, but the essential point here is that nowhere does he ask about the effect or function that the language of Luke or the Pastorals would have had within the settings in which these documents operated. The 'presupposition pool' shared by writer and readers is a sociolinguistic phenomenon which New Testament exegetes forget at their peril. There could have been factors which made it either impossible for the message Dunn hears to have been heard also by the intended readers, or inappropriate for the writer to have qualified himself in such a way as to produce what scholarship would regard as a rounded statement of his total position.

¹⁵ J. D. G. Dunn, 'The New Perspective on Paul', *BJRL* 65 (1983), 95-122.

¹⁶ See esp. Rom. 3:20-31; 4:13-17; 9:30-10:13; Gal. 2:14-3:25; Phil. 3:2-10.

of membership of Israel, the blessed community. Instead, he asks simply for 'faith'—and takes the further step of linking salvation solely to 'faith' for *Jews*, too.

So the interpretation of a statement like 'By grace you have been saved, through faith, not of works' (Eph. 2:8) needs to be rescued from its 16th-century orchestration, and allowed to ring with its first-century harmonics: this is not a blast against the power of human achievement in favour of total dependence on God, but against the restriction of 'grace' to a distinct ethnic group and the exclusion of others. It means the explosion of the boundaries of that group; God flings wide the gates and no longer requires membership of the group for salvation. So the 'works' which defined the group, and the law which codified them, are now redundant; and a new people have come into being, defined by nothing less than *common possession of the Spirit of God*.¹⁷

The motivation underlying this dramatic ministry was clearly Christ. Paul had come to convictions about Christ which led him to disagree with those Jewish Christians who simply continued within Judaism. He believed that *dying with Christ* meant renouncing the entire heritage in which he had grown up (Gal. 2:19-21; Phil. 3:7-11), and proclaiming the re-founding of the people of God on new terms. The reason for this, in turn, clearly lay in a distinctive understanding of the death of Christ. To judge particularly from Romans 3:21-31, Paul saw the death of Christ as a 'Day of Atonement' sacrifice with universal import, which both 'established' the law (3:31) and operated 'apart from' it (3:21):

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gone was the particularism inherent in the yearly Day of Atonement celebrations. Instead, a sacrifice had been offered which dealt with the sin of the whole world once for all.¹⁸

If these are the 'essential features' of justification for Paul, what do we find elsewhere in the New Testament?

AN ATTEMPT TO APPLY OUR CHOSEN METHOD TO THE SUBJECT IN HAND

¹⁷ For this definition of 'works' as a sociological phenomenon, as marking societal boundaries, see J. D. G. Dunn, 'Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10-14)', *NTS* 31 (1985), 523-542. For this overall understanding of justification in Paul, see N. T. Wright, 'Justification: the Biblical Basis and its Relevance for Contemporary Evangelicalism', in G. Reid (ed.) *The Great Acquittal: Justification by Faith and Current Christian Thought* (London: Collins/Fount, 1980); also Wright's Oxford dissertation, *The Messiah and the People of God* (1980). Watson, *Paul* (above, note 13) proposes a view very similar to that outlined in this paragraph, emphasising the social factors more than Wright.

¹⁸ For a nuanced expression of this view, see U. Wilckens, 'Christologie und Anthropologie im Zusammenhang der Paulinischen Rechtfertigungslehre', *ZNTW* 67 (1976), 64-82. In contrast, Watson, *Paul*, does not identify any christological motivation behind Paul's break with Judaism. For him, Paul's decision to preach a law-free Gospel to the Gentiles was motivated entirely by social factors—precisely, the exigencies of the mission-field, where the Gospel was rejected by Jews and concessions needed to be made in order to make the Gospel more attractive to Gentiles. This turns Paul's own account of his motivation into post facto rationalisation. The trouble with this is not an *over*-emphasis on the influence of 'social' factors but, paradoxically, an *under*-emphasis on them. In his laudable concern to oppose the distorting influence of Lutheran presuppositions in the interpretation of Paul, he denies the real influence of theology and religious experience in the social sphere. At any rate we ought to allow that Paul himself honestly conceived of his motivations as theological (specifically, christological). Ideas can have a life of their own which can break through the constraints of social frameworks—and this is precisely what we see in Paul. We do not get closer to understanding him if we deny the power of ideology in his formation.

We cannot cover every non-Pauline text. In this section we will ask mainly about the pre-Pauline roots of the doctrine, and then in conclusion glance briefly at Hebrews and at John.

The Pre-Pauline Roots of Justification

Research into the pre-Pauline roots of justification has tended to concentrate on the possible quotation, by Paul or others, of pre-existing formulae which contain the 'righteousness' terminology—especially in Romans 3:24f; 4:25 and 1 Tim. 3:16.¹⁹ John Reumann and Peter Stuhlmacher, indeed, make this the source of the Pauline emphasis, tracing the origin of Paul's thought to the early hellenistic Jewish Christian community, in which (so Stuhlmacher) the traditions of Jewish apocalyptic (reflected also at Qumran) were the basis for a style of faith in which 'the righteousness of God' figured as a technical term for the covenant faithfulness which he had now shown in Christ.

Stuhlmacher's magisterial study draws a line from the OT traditions of the צְרִיקַת יְהוָה, through apocalyptic Judaism to Qumran, the early hellenistic Christian church and Paul. His analysis is most illuminating, but, as this summary of the movement shows, bypasses the figure of Jesus himself and thus poses acutely the problem of the relationship between Jesus and Paul in this respect. Stuhlmacher recognises the problem this causes, and tackles it, but significantly only as a *hermeneutical* problem at the end of his book. It does not figure at all in the main body of his study, where he is dealing with the tradition-history behind the Pauline doctrine, because he does not believe that Jesus' teaching figures as a significant factor in its formation.²⁰ So, in the Käsemann tradition, he seeks to unite Jesus and Paul dogmatically by discerning, in Jesus' proclamation of the forgiveness of the ungodly, an assertion of God's *right* (to act however he will), which he argues is an *essential equivalent* to Paul's use of 'the righteousness of God'. He does, however, underline the clear differences: Jesus does not stand in the apocalyptic tradition, whereas Paul is steeped in it, and particularly, Jesus' offer of forgiveness does not bypass the Temple, the cult and the law, whereas Paul proclaims justification by faith apart from all these things.

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How much truth is there in this? It is undeniable that Jesus did not prominently use the technical language of justification, which may well have come to Paul primarily through the channels Stuhlmacher describes. However, I believe that he overdraws the contrast between Jesus and Paul, and that the 'whole-context', sociological approach suggested above offers a more helpful way of tracing the connection between them. In reply to Stuhlmacher, I would like to propose and defend the counter-thesis that *the essential Pauline doctrine of justification finds its historical origin in the preaching of John the Baptist, mediated to Paul through the preaching of Jesus himself*. The arguments in favour of this thesis have a cumulative force, and can be set out as follows.

Qumran

¹⁹ Also possibly 1 Pet. 3:18; Rom. 8:29f; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11, and 2 Cor. 5:21, but these are less certain as quotations. See Reumann, *Righteousness*, 27-40 (see note 1), Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit*, 185-188 (see note 4).

²⁰ E.g. *Gerechtigkeit*, 245f. (see note 4), commenting on the parable of the tax-collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14), with its significant use of δικαιιοῦσθαι (v. 14): 'Historisch führt von Jesus zu Paulus kein erkennbarer, traditions-geschichtlicher Weg, auf welchem dieses Gleichnis, oder wenigstens seine Terminologie, für Paulus verbindlich werden konnte'. We consider Stuhlmacher's exposition of this parable further below.

It has long been noted that we meet in the Dead Sea Scrolls a concept of justification remarkably close to that of Paul.²¹ There is a similar emphasis on human sinfulness, on hope in 'the righteousness of God' for salvation, and on the eschatological, personal and forensic nature of justification.²² There is an emphasis too on the community dimension of it: the members of the Qumran sect thought of themselves as the community of the justified, in much the same way as Paul conceived of the church. They and he both linked justification with predestination, and, most significantly of all, *formulated their doctrine of justification in the context of a polemic against the Jerusalem cult, and the consequent absence, from their community life, of the traditional means and symbols of atonement.*

The similarities between Paul and Qumran can easily be over-played. The differences quickly become apparent when one realises that 'atonement' was made at Qumran by the life of obedient commitment to the community and its teaching.²³ Against this background, an exact parallel with the Pauline doctrine is impossible. But the very fact that they developed a theology of atonement, and of justification, *apart from the cult* makes a fascinating parallel to Paul. Assessing it, Georg Klinzing goes so far as to argue that Qumran was the source of the New Testament conception of the church as a Temple.²⁴ This is almost certainly to press the evidence too far, because the Qumran sect did not think of themselves as a replacement Temple. In fact, they expected the restoration of the Jerusalem cult, with themselves in charge.²⁵ But we ought to give thoughtful weight to the fact that the language of justification came naturally to hand, in a situation where the cult was no longer the locus of atonement.

John the Baptist

The links between John the Baptist and Qumran have often been commented on.²⁶ There seems to be a general consensus that John could

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well have been a member of the Qumran community before receiving his distinctive prophetic call. But studies of the relationship focus (to my mind) on rather peripheral matters, such as

²¹ See W. S. LaSor, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 168-173; O. Betz, 'Rechtfertigung in Qumran', in J. Friedrich, W. Pöhlmann and P. Stuhlmacher (eds.), *Rechtfertigung*. FS E. Käsemann (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976), 17-36; Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit*, 148-153 (see note 4); Dahl, 'Justification,' 97-105 (see note 6).

²² See for instance the important hymn at the end of the *Community Rule*, esp. 1 QS 11: 2-15, and passages in the *Hymns* like IQH 4:34-38; 7:26-31; 11:29-33.

²³ See for instance 1QS 3:6-11. It looks as though they thought of themselves as making atonement by their obedience, not just for themselves, but also for 'the Land': see 1QS 8:3, 6, 10; 9:4-5. This last reference is particularly interesting: 'They shall atone for guilty rebellion and for the sins of unfaithfulness that they may obtain loving-kindness for the Land without the flesh of holocausts and the fat of sacrifice. And prayer rightly offered shall be as an acceptable fragrance of righteousness, and perfection of way as a delectable free-will offering' (translation from G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 74).

²⁴ G. Klinzing, *Die Umdeutung des Kultus in der Qumrangemeinde and im New Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971).

²⁵ There are some references in the Damascus Document to the offering of sacrifices (CD 9:14; 11:17-20; 16:13), but it is by no means clear that these references imply the actual offering of animal sacrifices at Qumran. They may relate to the time before the community withdrew from Jerusalem, or (more likely) to the conditions which they expected to obtain when the community's Priesthood was installed in the Temple in Jerusalem (see IQM 2:1-6, the passage in the *War Scroll* which describes in outline how this was to be organised). Archaeologists have discovered no altar at Qumran.

²⁶ See, e.g., C. H. H. Scobie, 'John the Baptist' in M. Black (ed.), *The Scrolls and Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1969), 58-69; F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1956), 141-144 [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_dss_bruce.html]; W. S. LaSor, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 142-153.

John's asceticism, his use of baptism (paralleled at Qumran by the emphasis on ritual washings), his message of judgment pictured as fire, and his use of Isaiah 40:3 (also applied to themselves by the Qumran sect²⁷). A far more vital parallel emerges when we reflect on the social context and force of John's message. He offered the forgiveness of sins in the wilderness, apart from the central cult, simply on the ground of repentance.

There is a clear prophetic background to John's appeal: like Hosea, he summons Israel back to the wilderness, the place of her early fellowship with Yahweh (cf. Hos. 2:14), and like Hosea, speaks radically against Israel's confidence in being the covenant people (cf. Hos. 1:8-9). The cult takes a back seat in Hosea's proclamation (cf. Hos 5:7, 6:6), and similarly, John bypasses the cult with his 'Do not presume to say to yourselves...' (Matt. 3:9) and his offer of forgiveness and restoration there and then in the desert. His baptism is therefore far more than a ritual washing. Taking place in the Jordan, it points to the re-establishing of the nation. This is how Matthew presents it, at any rate, with his emphasis on the passing of the whole nation through the Jordan in a baptism which parallels the entry into the Land. It is an act of covenant renewal *with no cultic expression apart from the baptism, divorced from the 'Place' of God's choice*, in fact taking Israel back to the period before Jerusalem had ever been chosen as the Place where God would set his Name (cf. Deut. 12:8-11).

He clearly had a great initial impact (Matt. 3:5-7), but later encountered hostility from the religious leaders. 'Why did you not believe him?' was Jesus' question and accusation (Matt 21:25, 32). Frances Young's explanation of this change of heart is the uncomfortable nature of John's appeal for repentance: he touched such a raw nerve that people turned against him.²⁸ But if this is the reason, it is hard to explain why he had such a wide initial following—unless this aspect of the Gospels' presentation of John be simply denied. But this would be to fly in the face of the evidence of Josephus, also. John may have eventually lost his life because his appeal for repentance was too strong for Herod Antipas, but it seems unlikely that this was the reason why the Pharisees, who had earlier responded in droves to his cry, were later prepared to admit that they had not believed him (Matt. 21:25). A better explanation is that they were more than prepared to respond to his appeal for moral reformation—what Pharisee would not?—but not to the other aspect of his message, which may not have appeared so clearly at first—namely, that God was calling his people to a new encounter with him *which meant leaving the Jerusalem cult behind and meeting him outside its ordinances*.

This point can be underlined by pointing to the attraction John, like

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Jesus, held for 'tax-collectors and prostitutes' (Luke 7:29, Matt 21:32). Again, the social dimension of this needs to be explored. John's appeal reached out to and embraced those who were marginalised, not just from society in general, but from the cult in particular. Those in a state of permanent uncleanness would be effectively, if not formally, barred from participation in the cult. Yet John apparently made no distinction between them and the Pharisees, and offered forgiveness on the basis of repentance to them also.

Jesus

²⁷ 1QS 8:13-14.

²⁸ Frances M. Young, 'Temple Cult and Law in Early Christianity', *NTS* 19 (1972-73), 325-338.

Jesus steps right into this tradition! For him as for John, the coming of the Kingdom of God meant the offer of forgiveness, especially to outcasts, simply on the basis of repentance. Norman Perrin has well drawn out the social and theological significance of this feature of Jesus' ministry:

Jesus welcomed these outcasts into table fellowship with himself in the name of the Kingdom of God, in the name of the Jews' ultimate hope, and so both prostituted that hope and also shattered the closed ranks of the community against their enemy. It is hard to imagine anything more offensive to Jewish sensibilities. To have become such an outcast himself would have been much less of an outrage than to welcome those people back into the community in the name of the ultimate hope of that community. Intense conviction, indeed, is necessary to explain such an act on the part of Jesus, and such an act on the part of Jesus is necessary, we would claim, to make sense of the fact of the cross.²⁹

But he may not have hit the nail precisely enough on the head. Wherein exactly did the offence consist? Perrin suggests that it was simply the offer of forgiveness, Jesus' radical *acceptance of, and table-fellowship with, the unclean*, which offended the Jews. But E. P. Sanders acutely observes that the Jews were more than prepared to offer forgiveness and re-absorption to repentant sinners, on the appropriate terms and conditions. Rather, it was forgiveness *without the normal requirements of sacrifice and restitution* which gave offence.³⁰ As with John, so with Jesus: it is the *bypassing of the cult* which is the first and primary implication of his proclamation of the Kingdom.

This parallel between John and Jesus gives us the precise clue to the interpretation of the parable of the tax-collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14). Here the contrast is not so much between (a) unrepentant self-righteousness, and (b) true repentance and dependence upon grace (so Bruce³¹), as between (a) presumption upon covenant membership and (b) justification by faith *apart from the cult*. On the one hand, the Pharisee (in the Baptist's terms)

²⁹ N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 103.

³⁰ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 200-208. In support of his thesis, Sanders points in particular to Matt. 9:9-13 par., Matt. 9:14-17 par., and Matt. 8:21f. par.—passages in which repentance and discipleship are clearly related, not to the demands of the law, but to the person of Jesus himself. He could also refer to Mark 2:1-10, Luke 15:11-32, and the striking Mark 11:20-25 where, having just cursed the Temple, Jesus identifies *the heart of the true believer* as the locus of true prayer. Sanders recognises (*Jesus*, 207) that Mark 1:44 par. might count against his proposal—Jesus' instruction to the cleansed leper to go to the priest and offer the required sacrifice 'as a witness to them'. Sanders' own suggestion is that this apparent exception to the rule simply serves to highlight the predominant absence of such instructions. But more telling comments might be made. Jesus has already flouted the purity laws in touching the leper and 'cleansing' him. The command to offer the legally-prescribed sacrifice cannot therefore be motivated by respect for the law. Rather, having told the man not to tell anyone about his miraculous cure, Jesus then reveals the exception to this prohibition: there must be a 'witness' to the priests, the guardians of the laws of purity, who must learn of a radical new solution to the problem. There is at large a man who, when he touches the impure, does not himself become infected, but absorbs and 'cleanses' the impurity! Far from being an exception to the rule, therefore, Mark 1:44 par. actually supports the case Sanders makes. Sanders in fact denies the parallel I have drawn between Jesus and John the Baptist. Whereas Jesus takes this radical attitude to the normal requirements of sacrifice and restitution for the penitent, 'John was the spokesman for repentance and righteousness ordinarily understood' (206, his emphasis). This, however, simply does not fit the evidence. There is no indication whatever that John expected or encouraged those he baptised to go back from the Jordan to the Temple to offer the necessary sacrifices for their sins. 'Bear fruit that befits repentance' (Matt. 3:8) has no cultic dimension at all, so far as we can tell. Rather, as indicated above, John stands in the prophetic tradition which marginalised the cult as insufficient to meet the urgency and enormity of the current need.

³¹ 'Justification,' 66-69 (see note 1).

'presumes to say to himself that he has Abraham for a father', while the tax-collector 'stands at a distance'—un-

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able to participate in the cult, although present in the Temple—and is like a stone simply raised up to be a child of Abraham (Matt. 3:9).

Joachim Jeremias finds in this parable evidence 'that the Pauline doctrine of justification has its roots in the teaching of Jesus'.³² I would concur with this judgment, but not for the reason Jeremias gives. He bases his view simply on the appearance of the verb δικαίωω, used of the tax-collector: 'this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God' (Luke 18:14). However the use of this verb, so important for Paul, seems almost incidental to the essential parallel to be discerned here. The point can be made with reference to the criticism that Stuhlmacher directs at Jeremias' view here. He argues that the parable has an assumed cultic setting, so that its radical content consists in the assertion that it is the tax-collector, rather than the Pharisee, who attains forgiveness through (for instance) the Day of Atonement, which we might imagine to be the occasion which has brought them both into the Temple. For Paul, however (so Stuhlmacher), the possibility of cultic forgiveness has vanished entirely, so that Paul moves in a different thought-world.³³

Stuhlmacher undermines his objection, however, by his admission that, in this parable, Jesus sets himself in the position of the priest who declares God's verdict on his behalf: 'justified!' This is undoubtedly true, but *necessarily undermines the position of the actual priest who, given the situation Jesus pictures, would pronounce precisely the opposite verdict*. Within a cultic setting, therefore, and by use of cultic imagery and language, the actual cult is being exploded. This is underlined by the statement that the tax-collector 'stood at a distance' (Luke 18:13), which expresses alienation from the cult. Stuhlmacher overlooks the fact that because of his social marginalisation, a tax-collector's actual participation in the Day of Atonement would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible. Yet *he* is the one justified, and the other is not.

At the other end of the comparison, it is untrue to suggest that the cult has faded from the circle of Paul's interest. He may no longer believe in the possibility of cultic justification, but it was precisely in that area that his battle lay, as he fought for his law-free Gospel against those who wanted to bring his Gentile converts and mission under the yoke of the law.

So I would suggest that this parable does indeed express the essence of the Pauline doctrine of justification, but not merely—indeed, hardly at all—because of the use of δικαίωω. We need to let the social context fill out the semantic range of the verb here, as also in Paul, and in both cases we find a polemic against the cult at the heart of its significance.

Looking further afield in the teaching of Jesus, it is worth pausing on the suggestion of Martin Hengel that there is an implicit polemic against the cult in Mark 10:45, reflected also in the trial charge against Jesus

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³² J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 141.

³³ Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit*, 244f. (see note 4).

(Mark 14:58).³⁴ Hengel argues that Jesus here starts a hare, by making himself the locus of redemption in contrast to the Temple. The hare runs through to Stephen in Acts 7, representing the Hellenists of the early Jerusalem community who, Hengel suggests, taught that Jesus was an effective sacrifice which now made the Temple redundant. Hengel finds this understanding of the cult expressed in the pre-Pauline tradition underlying Romans 3:24f., where Day of Atonement language is applied to the cross, and 'the righteousness of God' is active in conferring justification on all who believe.

It would certainly fit into the overall picture of Jesus' ministry we have painted, if he saw his own death as a sacrifice which made the cult redundant. In this respect he would then go further than John, who can be satisfactorily interpreted in the context of the prophetic tradition of polemic against the cult. A full consideration of this is beyond the scope of this paper, but high on the list of supporting considerations would be the possibility that he saw himself as the Isaianic Servant, for which there seems to be plenty of evidence.

'Righteousness' Terminology in the Synoptics

A wider look at the appearance of the 'righteousness' language in the Gospels supports this general approach. It is interesting to note how many of the texts have an association with John the Baptist. In fact, of the 15 occurrences of δικαίω and δικαιοσύνη in the synoptics (including parallels), no fewer than seven have such an association (Matt. 11:19 par. Luke 7:35; Luke 1:74f.; 7:29; 16:15f.; Matt. 3:15; 21:32).³⁵ This is a phenomenon which requires explanation; and the most likely seems to be that, even though not specifically recorded, John used 'righteousness' language to express the positive side of his message, linked to the coming Kingdom. In other words, alongside his message of condemnation at the coming judgment, which is recorded (Matt. 3:7-12 pars.), he proclaimed the possibility of 'justification' at the judgment, using the 'righteousness' language in the way with which we are familiar from the Qumran texts (though without the sectarian connotations). The relationship between such eschatological justification and the baptism presently undergone is hard to define, and maybe John did not spell it out. His hearers simply responded to his summons to repentance and renewed obedience, and would (I suggest) have understood the baptism he administered as a *prophetic sign*, conveying an assurance of acceptability before God in the light of the imminent judgment, to be received gladly as they committed themselves to renewed *practical* righteousness.

That John made use of 'righteousness' language in this way is also suggested by Matthew 12:33-37. This passage seems to reflect the language, style and themes of John's preaching. Particularly noteworthy are the use of the images of the tree and of fruit-bearing (Matt. 12:33,

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cf. 3:8, 10), the polemical appellation γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν (Matt. 12:34, cf. 3:7), and the strong emphasis on imminent judgment (Matt. 12:36, cf. 3:7, 10). Against the background of these reminiscences v. 37 gains added significance: 'By your words you will be justified (δικαιωθήσῃ) and by your words you will be condemned.' [ἐκ γὰρ τῶν λόγων σου

³⁴ M. Hengel, 'The Expiatory Sacrifice of Christ', *BJRL* 62 (1980), 454-475; idem, *The Atonement: A Study of the Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, ET 1981).

³⁵ To these references we may add Luke 1:17 and Matt. 5:10-12, where John seems to be implied because he has just been presented as a persecuted prophet (Matt. 4:12).

δικαιωθήσῃ, καὶ ἐκ τῶν λόγων σου καταδικασθήσῃ.] The likelihood is strong that John too expressed himself in the terms employed by Jesus here.

And if John employed 'righteousness' language in this way, then light is shed on Matthew 21:32, the statement that he came 'in the way of righteousness'. We can see in this phrase a reflection of the content of his preaching, as well as a judgment about his significance. And we can reach a conclusion in the debate about the precise nuance of δικαιοσύνη here: is it used with a purely ethical force, reflecting the moral emphasis of John's preaching, or does it reflect OT and Pauline usage and mean that John expressed in person and mission the saving righteousness of God?³⁶ The answer would be both: because in the preaching of John we see the proclamation of imminent judgment, implying the prospect of condemnation or acquittal, allied to an emphasis on moral reformation and self-preparation; and as God's agent in announcing and preparing the people for the imminent Day, John is himself the expression of the saving righteousness of God.³⁷

In summary, Paul found ample precedent for his law-free Gospel in the traditions of Jesus and of John. It was their implicit polemic against the cult, and its positive counterpart of the offer of forgiveness simply on the ground of repentance and faith, which gave him the theological rationale for his formulation of justification by faith as the basis of his Gentile mission. This may have been mediated to him by Hellenistic Jewish Christianity, as Stuhlmacher and others maintain. But behind this Hellenistic Jewish impulse we do not have to look, with Stuhlmacher, solely to apocalyptic Judaism, but can look to Jesus himself as the source, and behind him to John the Baptist. It was John who gave essential expression to Justification by faith, by offering forgiveness to the repentant in the *wilderness*, away from the great centre of Judaism, perhaps in continuity with Qumran sectarianism.

Did John baptise any Gentiles? Would he have done so, had any presented themselves to him for baptism? If he had baptised Gentiles, how would he have regarded their status? It would be good to be able to give unequivocal answers to these questions, for then we would be able to sharpen up the parameters of the comparison between John and Paul. Luke 3:12-14 records that tax-collectors and soldiers (almost certainly Roman) were alike convicted by his preaching and sought his guidance for their lives. But whereas the tax-collectors 'came to be baptised' (v.12), Luke does not mention this in the case of the soldiers. One suspects, however, that the theological Rubicon was crossed in the

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acceptance and baptism of the tax-collectors (and prostitutes) alongside the rest of the people, so that John would have happily baptised any soldiers who sought to take that step, and would have regarded them as forgiven as a result.

³⁶ Stuhlmacher's *Gerechtigkeit* (above, note 4) is rightly famous for its emphasis on this force of righteousness in the New Testament, following and refining the work of Käsemann. But strangely he does not interpret this verse in this sense, although he finds this meaning in Matt. 6:33 and 5:6. In 21:32 (and 3:15) he finds a reference to the lifestyle commended by John and Jesus (*Gerechtigkeit*, 188-191). There would be more reason for this in 21:32 than in 3:15 (NB 'way'), but even so the idea of *John as an example to imitate* is hardly there, and this interpretation allows the statement only to summarise part of John's message (the ethical element), leaving out entirely the eschatological proclamation, which was arguably the main thrust of his preaching.

³⁷ This is probably also what 'fulfil all righteousness' in Matt. 3:15 means. Jesus stands alongside John in his ministry and baptism, as the means whereby God is acting to deliver his people from the wrath to come and reform their life.

A Glance at Hebrews and at John

It will be helpful to dip a toe into other New Testament waters, to see if the overall picture we have drawn bears any fruit for the debate about the unity and diversity of the New Testament.

Hebrews

Erich Grasser's interesting and perceptive essay on justification in Hebrews³⁸ illustrates the dangers consequent upon extracting Paul from the real social dynamic of his situation. He argues that Hebrews applies essentially the same message of grace *to the cult, rather than to the law*, in order to encourage weary Christians. The difference between Paul and Hebrews lies, he rightly suggests, in the different situations each was addressing—but then he interprets Paul in good Lutheran fashion as the opponent of human achievement in the name of a *sola fide* Gospel. He fails to see that Paul would not at all sense the distinction he makes between the cult and the law. For all that the technical language of justification appears only marginally in Hebrews,³⁹ it is in fact a massive argument in support of the theological heart of the Pauline doctrine—salvation is now available only through faith in the sacrifice of Christ, which implies the redundancy of the old covenant with all that it entailed, in particular its cult.

John

A certain amount has been written on justification in the Fourth Gospel, all tending to underline John's use of forensic metaphors to make up for the paucity of 'righteousness' language.⁴⁰ The situation is very complex for our question, because what 'righteousness' language there is, is focused on Christ, rather than on the believer.⁴¹ Κρίσις depends on a right judgment about Christ (3:18-19), and in all likelihood δικαιοσύνη in 16:8, 10 (its sole appearance in John) applies to Jesus, although some have wanted to give it a Pauline sense.⁴²

Of course this central Christological emphasis is entirely at one with Paul's: for both, it is the coming of Christ which calls the world to judgment and reveals God's way of salvation for all mankind. But we have to recognise that Paul does not use righteousness language with reference to Jesus.

However a holistic comparison of the two shows them both with an

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identical attitude to the cult, because of their Christology. The significance of the Jewish festivals, especially Tabernacles and Pentecost, for the Fourth Gospel has long been noted, but this has been treated as a marginal feature of the Gospel, perhaps simply as an incidental structural detail. It is significant that Severino Pancaro's massive book on the law in John contains no consideration at all of John's treatment of the festivals.⁴³ Once again, law and cult have been separated in a way alien to the culture out of and into which the New Testament was written. In fact, I would suggest that John's treatment of the cult and cultic images is

³⁸ Grasser, 'Rechtfertigung' (see note 1).

³⁹ The verb δικαίω is not used. Δικαιοσύνη appears 6 times, but only once used in a way close to Paul's distinctive usage (11:7).

⁴⁰ Seminally, Preiss, 'Johannine Thought'; also A. E. Harvey, *Jesus on Trial: A Study in the Fourth Gospel* (London: SPCK, 1976); Reumann, *Righteousness*, 143-46.

⁴¹ This is underlined in a recent thesis on the subject, according to the review of it published in *TLZ* 113 (1988), 315: Stephen Amador, *Gerechtes Gericht and Gerechtigkeit im Vierten Evangelium* (Diss. Tübingen, 1986).

⁴² See above, note 7.

⁴³ S. Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1975).

central to his presentation of Christ throughout the Gospel, from the 'tabernacling' of the Word in 1:14 to the suggestive giving of the bread in 21:13.⁴⁴ The treatment of these themes is subtle. John does not simply reject the cult wholesale in favour of Christ, but in just the same way as Paul with his 'Christ is the end of the law' (Rom. 10:4), regards Christ as the 'end' of these things for salvation, as catching up and expressing their true meaning in himself, so that only those who believe in him experience that which the cult signifies and promises.

SUMMARY

We have sought to develop a holistic method of comparison, whereby the 'meaning' of each part of the New Testament is held to inhere within the total social situation of the writing. We have proceeded from the *presumption* that the New Testament speaks with one voice into the varied situations its writers faced, and we have sought to test this presumption in a preliminary way in relation to the doctrine of justification, so vital for Paul in the context of his Gentile mission. We have found that, far from moving beyond Jesus' proclamation in going to the Gentiles, Paul draws on the *essential impulse* behind the ministries of both Jesus and John the Baptist, and to some extent their language too, in regarding Jesus as the full and final sacrifice which makes adherence to the cult (and membership of Israel) unnecessary for Gentiles. We have also observed that a case can be made for the view that the same impulse lies at the heart of Hebrews and of the Fourth Gospel.

I suggest, then, that justification takes us right to the heart of Christianity's self-definition over against Judaism, starting with the preaching of John the Baptist with which it all began. Throughout the New Testament, we identify this *attitude to the cult* as the touchstone of authentic Christianity, and we find the same attitude in all the major New Testament witnesses, and at the heart of Paul's distinctive formulation of justification by faith.

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⁴⁴ In addition to the highly significant treatment of Passover (chs. 6, 11, 19), Tabernacles (chs. 7-9) and Dedication (ch. 10), we may point to many other such uses of cultic themes: the identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God (1:29, 35); the transformation of the waters of purification and the following debate about purity, linked to the theme of baptism and the use of 'water' imagery (2:1-11; 3:5-6, 25ff.; 4:10 etc.); the 'cleansing' of the Temple (2:13ff.), which foreshadows the later treatment of (especially) Tabernacles; the debate about the relative significance of Jerusalem and Gerizim (4:19), with its highly pregnant 'neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem...' (4:21); the healing at Bethesda (5:1ff), with its crowd of invalids for whom the 'feast of the Jews' (5:1) can do nothing, so that they have to wait for a separate intervention from God (5:7)—and the debate about Sabbath observance that follows (5:9ff.); the Sabbath-day healing of the blind man and the challenge to the authority of the Pharisees, the keepers of the tradition (chs. 9-10); the ironic way in which the decision to kill Jesus is based on a desire to preserve the cult (11:47-53); the prophecy of the incompatibility of synagogue membership with being a disciple of Jesus (16:1-4); the pregnant use of Temple imagery in the so-called (and not ill-named) 'high-priestly prayer' (ch. 17). In fact, this engagement in different ways with the cult is a much neglected aspect of the Fourth Gospel.