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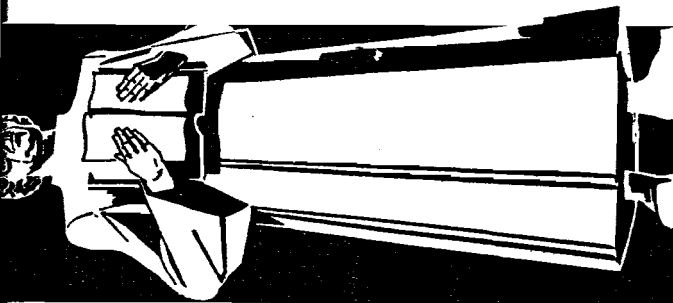
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Ritschl And Pieper On Subjective Justification: A Comparison

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THIS PRESENTATION IS AN ATTEMPT to draw a comparison between Ritschl's understanding of how a man becomes justified before God and that of an evangelical Lutheran of the 20th century. The 20th century theologian whom we have chosen follows closely upon the heels of Ritschl in time, but is epochs away from him with regard to his method and some of his thought.

I.

Scripture, Pieper asserts, places before us a certain order of justification which is unalterable, if God's plan of salvation is not vitiated but carried to fruition. First of all, there is the objective side of justification or reconciliation that has already taken place. This is an act of God, aside from man, while man was alienated from Him as sinner and His enemy. It was motivated solely by God's grace, which may be expressed in synonymuous terms as love, mercy and kindness. "Grace," according to Pieper, "denotes God's gracious disposition, which for Christ's sake He cherishes in Himself toward sinful mankind and by which He in His heart, 'before His inner forum,' does not charge man with their sins, but forgives them." (II, 7). The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, Paul writes to Timothy. As Ritschl also says, Jesus has revealed that grace. In addition it is revealed in the Scriptures in the Gospel. "According to Scripture, the message of the grace of God (Acts 20:24) and the message of Jesus Christ crucified (1 Cor. 2:2) are reciprocal terms and cover the same ground." (II, 19) Appropriation of saving grace is the subjective side of justification. Faith is the medium through which this is accomplished. Saving faith is in every case personal faith. (II, 431) Appropriation of God's grace in Christ is not an act of the community nor contingent upon it, but is definitely a matter of each individual's inmost being. His will and intellect are always involved in the act of faith, and his faith is a lot more than some "otiose quality of the heart." (II, 432) Faith is definitely an act of the individual, an *active* apprehension of the forgiveness offered in the Gospel, "whether the person is awake or sleeping, whether he be an adult or child, whether under normal circumstances when he is conscious of his faith or in the severest hours of trial when he imagines that he has lost his faith." (II, 436-7) Faith may be called a *passive* apprehension in so far as its "apprehending is not effected through human cooperation, but solely through God's operation. It would be

wrong to place active and passive apprehension in opposition to one another, for faith is both active and passive, in the sense indicated." (II, 437)

II.

Ritschl's construction of justification and its subjective side is presented in his summaries on pp. 139 and 191f. in his great work, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, III. (J&R, III) There is also a very fine recapitulation that Ritschl himself gives on pp. 167f. We take appropriate quotes as we go about our comparison with Pieper.

One of the most obvious similarities between the two systems, it seems to us, is the correlation of ethical conduct and justification. In both there is no moral life-style without God's act of justification or reconciliation. Both men also speak of justification on God's part and that of man's. Both consider them to be religious in nature, and closely related to the will. Man's relation to the world about him figures into the thinking of both men, a relationship that is exercised through the faith of man.

If we return to the above-mentioned correlation between ethical conduct and justification, we come upon one of the major differences also between Ritschl and Pieper. Ritschl operates with a system in which there are two foci, and they are the religious and the ethical, or justification and sanctification. He believes that "theology, especially within the Evangelical Confessions, has laid very unequal emphasis on these two principal characteristics of Christianity." (J&R, III, 10) Throughout his writings he has endeavored to keep the two in close correlation and to maintain a balance between them. Furthermore, he asserts that "these two characteristics condition each other mutually," (J&R, III, 10) and that the realization of the perfectly religious and perfectly ethical character of the Christian life "advances through the perpetual interaction of the two elements." (J&R III, 13)

Pieper devoted much space to the discussion of these two aspects of Christianity. He kept them separate, and yet he correlated them closely, as did Ritschl. But unlike Ritschl he did not strive particularly to maintain a balance between the two. His emphasis was more on the religious, the reconciliation effected by God. He did this to avoid turning Christianity into a moralism. Ritschl's attempt to correct the imbalance that he saw led him to lay such stress upon the ethical, subjective side of justification that he finally ended up with the same one-sidedness which he accused his opponents. Critics see his over-reaction as making Christianity into a mere style of life.

If Ritschl viewed these two characteristics of Christianity as twin foci, Pieper probably saw them represented as two concentric circles with a common focal point. The common center would represent God, the inner circle the reconciliation that He effected in Christ, and the outer one subjective justification. Both aspects have their origin in God. They are both religious in that sense. However, the inner circle is different in essence from that of the outer, in

that it represents what God alone could do and has done in Christ. The outer circle represents what God and man do as a result, and only as a result, of what God has done in the inner.

The above discussion leads to another difference between the viewpoints of the two men. Ritschl considers man less passive in the whole matter of subjective justification. Pieper, along with Ritschl, seeing man as the one who receives and apprehends God's pardon (J&R, III 174), in opposition to Ritschl, will not grant any "self-dependence" or spiritual activity to man before his conversion. In Pieper man cannot help himself in any way toward his conversion and justification. In that sense he would be considered purely passive by Ritschl. Pieper considers man spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, with the result that he is alienated completely from God. He cannot by his own reason or strength effect his own faith for his justification.

When Ritschl speaks of the grace of God in the context of justification, he refers to more of an absolute grace than Pieper. In connection with God's pardon he uses such phrases as "the unconditioned operation of God." (J&R, III 174) Reading through Ritschl's discussions of the doctrines of God and Christ, one receives the notion that God's grace and Christ's work and death parallel one another in that they both have the same end. Although he speaks of the mission of Christ "as an effect of grace" and the dispensation of divine grace as being "dependent on Him," (J&R, III, 265), he continues to give the impression that Christ and God's grace were not eternally and inextricably tied together. For instance, we have these quotes: "Thus, by the meritorious value of His whole righteousness, He determines the resolve of God to open through Him for believers the dispensation of grace." (J&R, III, 265) ". . . it is indispensable to trace forgiveness to Christ in the sense that He, as the Revealer of God, through His whole conduct inspired by love to men, manifested God's grace and truth for their reception into God's fellowship . . ." (J&R, III, 608) Ritschl's constant use of the phrase "Him Who brings us the revelation of grace" (J&R, III, 167) underscores that impression. It is also heightened beyond question by his rejection of the vicarious satisfaction of Christ. (J&R, III, 429, 440-2, 484)

Pieper, on the other hand, speaks of God's ordinate will that is based inextricably upon Christ and all that He did. He cannot speak of grace unless it is in Christ. From eternity God's grace toward His creatures was in Christ, and it was the grace of God Who appeared for the salvation of all men.

Pieper would agree with Ritschl when he states that it is through a person's faith in Christ that he "incorporates himself into the community of believers." (J&R, III 192) Here both would have in mind the one universal Church. Then Ritschl switches to a visible, local community of believers when he says: "The forgiveness of sins or reconciliation with God . . . is not recognizable and operative outside the community founded by Jesus Christ, and dependent upon His specific action." (J&R, III, 607) Then he makes that community the only place where, as a member, the individual "be-

comes assured of his reconciliation with God and his Divine sonship," and he makes it both "the medium of our clear remembrance of Christ" and to exert "an impulse to the religious estimate of self which corresponds to the specific action of Christ." (J&R, III, 608)

Ritschl comes on strong with regard to the community. He attributes tasks to the community that the Scripture and Pieper would give primarily to the Holy Spirit. For instance, he speaks of the community as being "the medium of our clear remembrance of Christ, and, in spite of all defects of knowledge and of religious and moral practice, exerts an impulse to the religious estimate of self which corresponds to the specific action of Christ." (J&R, III, 608) Ritschl's fear of mysticism and his epistemological presuppositions will not allow him to recognize the Holy Spirit as a Person of the triune God. Instead he reduces Him to a "principle." (J&R, 154) In relation to God Himself, Ritschl's Holy Spirit is "the knowledge which God has of Himself" and "is at the same time an attribute of the Christian community, because the latter, in accordance with the completed revelation of God through Christ, has that knowledge of God and of His counsel for men in the world which harmonizes with God's self-knowledge." (J&R, III, 605; cf. also 273, 471) According to Ritschl, conversion, which is the creation of faith in Pieper, is not accomplished by the Holy Spirit, but by an act of grace "in which God operates on one who is being converted." (J&R, III, 156; cf. also 603)

In comparison to Ritschl, Pieper affirms the Holy Spirit to be one of the three Persons of the Godhead, and attributes the creation of faith, conversion, to His working. To him He is also "the motive-power of the life of all Christians," in the words of Ritschl (J&R, III, 605), but *not* as "the power of the complete knowledge of God which is common to believers in Christ" (J&R, III, 605). He is a personal God, Who is more than "power of the complete knowledge of God," transcending the community. It is He Who is responsible for subjective justification and the new life in the individual.

Pieper also accords the Holy Spirit, as well as the Father and the Son, residence in the individual believer in Christ. Here again Ritschl's fears and presuppositions forbid him to grant any such residence of the Trinity in man. He states in one place: "Besides, the conception of the *unio mystica*, which without this false distinction is untenable, lies outside the horizon of our Church standards." (J&R, III, 21)

Denegation of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as Person in the believer strikes down the many references in Scripture (Rom. 8:16, etc.) where the Holy Spirit is given the special role of creating the assurance of faith. This reductionism by Ritschl is clearly un-Biblical, and contrary to the Reformer and the Confession to which he so often appeals. He thereby undercuts considerably the assurance of the believer, that which he is so anxious to maintain. If we have assessed Pieper correctly, he would decry this as a great loss for the Christian.

At times Ritschl and Pieper speak the same language in de-

scribing the act of justification, as in such places where Ritschl speaks of God declaring a man righteous for Christ's sake. (J&R, III, 60+) However, beneath this similarity in language there lies a dissimilarity of viewpoints. God is, from the standpoint of His justice, conceived of as a Judge Who in the act of justification declares the sinner pardoned in view of Christ's satisfaction of obedience to the Law and suffering its penalty. Pieper also closely connects justification to the grace of God and to His love and mercy, as does Ritschl. But Ritschl rejects outright the conception of God as Lawgiver and Judge in the act of justification. "The conception of God as Lawgiver and Judge, it is true, has no direct bearing on the general idea of pardon, or the forgiveness of sins . . ." (J&R, III, 86) After demonstrating that justification cannot possibly be represented as a judicial act from the analogy of the state, Ritschl concludes: "Therefore in whatever way we view the matter, the attitude of God in the act of justification cannot be conceived as that of Judge." (J&R, III, 90)

Now to turn to another topic—Ritschl and Pieper concur in their conception of faith as a matter of the will, and that it does "not include love to men, and, conceived as freedom from the law, excludes all ceremonial conditions equally with any cooperating presupposition of a legal claim before God." (J&R, III, 139) Both are saying that faith is the only means by which the reconciliation of God is appropriated. But it is a different matter when it comes to being *saved* solely by faith. For Pieper it is by faith alone without any good works whatsoever. Ritschl's system is still plagued by his concept of interaction between the two foci and their "mutual conditionedness." When Ritschl wrote of good works, he demonstrated the above in this way: "As the disposition which finds its motive in the supramundane end of the Kingdom of God itself comes within the compass of eternal life, therefore *good* works are, for one thing, manifestations of eternal life; but further, according to the law that the exercise of a power serves to strengthen and maintain it, they are organs of eternal life . . . Moreover, the homogeneity of both sides is shown by their peculiar interaction or mutual conditionedness." (J&R, III, 518) In actuality, therefore, this is no longer being saved solely by faith, but grants man some part in an act that completely beyond his capabilities. This impression is deepened further by the following discussion of the personal conviction of faith by Ritschl:

Faith in Christ can be expected only in maturer life. As the general attitude which corresponds to reconciliation, it embraces all the particular acts of reconciling faith, patience, and humility, by which our standing in grace is put to the proof. These are not something alongside of faith in Christ, or something which merely results from it, but are the forms in which faith in Christ is applied to the life which the believer leads in the world. (J&R, III, 599)

As for the nature of faith, Pieper certainly would include "emotional conviction" (J&R, III, 101, 108, 598) in the sense of

a manifestation of saving faith. But whether he would raise its importance to the level to which Ritschl raises it is doubtful. Ritschl seems to elevate "emotional trust in God" to a criterion of true faith. In fact, he describes faith chiefly in terms of certainty which is to be interpreted as "a feeling of pleasure" (J&R, 142), or trust in Christ as "passionate personal conviction" (J&R, 592).

Furthermore, Ritschl augments saving faith with an element that we find neither in Pieper nor the New Testament. He writes: "The individual can therefore appropriate the forgiveness of sins by faith *only* when he *unites* in his faith at once trust in God and Christ, *and the intention to connect himself with the community of believers.*" (J&R, III; *underlining ours*) Here a completely new element of intent to join the community is folded into faith—a thing which is contrary to one's own personal experience in coming to faith, and which Luther (contrary to Ritschl's interpretation of him) and most of the orthodox theologians did not do.

In the two following statements of Ritschl he seems to give value judgment a place in faith that Pieper would be very cautious about:

The ground of justification, or the forgiveness of sins, is the benevolent, gracious, merciful purpose of God to vouchsafe to sinful men the privilege of access to Himself. The form in which sinners appropriate this gift is faith, that is, the emotional trust in God, *accompanied by the conviction of the value of this gift for one's blessedness*, which, called forth by God's grace, takes the place of the former mistrust which was bound up with the feeling of guilt. (J&R, III, 108; *underlining ours*) To believe in Christ implies that *we accept the value of the Divine love*, which is manifest in His work, for our reconciliation with God, with that trust which, directed to Him, subordinates itself to God as His and our Father; whereby we are assured of eternal life and blessedness . . . In so far as trust in Him includes a knowledge of Him, *this knowledge will determine the value of His work for our salvation.* (J&R, III, 591; *underlining ours*)

Pieper contends that *fiducia* (trust) is the constitutive element in faith.

As we read and re-read Ritschl we find him making some sort of distinction between faith and trust, despite some of his statements to the contrary. (J&R, III), 111, 139, 168, 192, 591) If this were true, he and Pieper's theology would part ways.

Ritschl correlates justification and eternal life in a special effort, which he thinks was "overlooked by the Lutheran divines." (J&R, III, 122) As seen above, Pieper places them in a close relationship that resembles that of Ritschl.

III.

In our comparison of the two men, we have found in general a number of points of agreement and disagreement. Both men have supplemented each other in some respects. But there is no doubt

that Ritschl has considered the whole matter of subjective justification in a more detailed and original fashion. But that is not to say that he obtained the same balance as Pieper, judging from our reading of the Bible. His categories and presuppositions led him into reductionism on the one hand and augmentation on the other. In his commentary on the statements of Scripture, Pieper naturally stressed some things that did not interest Ritschl, and left out others that were of great interest to Ritschl. We admire Ritschl for expounding in such depth on so very an important subject. It is too bad that his writing contained the very serious deficiencies that it did concerning original sin, the Holy Spirit, the vicarious satisfaction of Christ, the relationship of objective and subjective justification, justification and sanctification, and others which did not come under the purview of this paper. Ritschl's most serious deficiency remains to be his handling of the atonement of Christ, failing to elicit the assurance that is in the fact that Christ for our sake was made to be sin, Who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21) Without the New Testament understanding and emphasis of this, we have something less than what Christianity should be, something less than Ritschl had hoped to make of it.