Justification and the Constitution of Consciousness: a new look at Romans and Galatians

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1. Introduction

One of the difficulties in understanding St Paul's treatment of Justification is that the theme appears in two 'second order' documents: the epistles to the Galatians and to the Romans. These are obviously not secondary in terms of their importance, but they are second-order reflections, interpreting something that the recipients already knew. It is clear that, from time to time in his letters, St Paul makes explicit references to the initial Kerygma, the first annunciation of the salvation brought by Christ, but treats it as something already known. The frequency with which the formula 'Do you not know?' occurs points to this. When Paul berates the Galatians (Gal 1:9; 3:1—5) it is in terms of their infidelity towards that which they had received, or their bad interpretation of it. Famously, Paul on occasion (as in 1 Cor 11:23—26) repeats part of the original Kerygma—in that case what he himself had given in Corinth.

The exegetical problem remains: what we have is an interpretation of the original kerygmatic package, an interpretation of what was evidently a very powerful, exciting message, frequently accompanied (so it would seem) by signs and wonders of one sort or another. Yet our faithful interpretation of this interpretation demands that we supply a good deal inductively. There was clearly a message of salvation centred in Christ crucified (1 Cor 2:2); it was from this that the ecclesial life was to flow; and it was from this that the signs and wonders abounded. It was clearly from this also that interpretations or misinterpretations arose which led Paul to formulate his doctrine of Justification.

One of the difficulties in interpreting Paul on Justification is the apparent confusion of those who assume the Apostle to have been taking nothing for granted in his exposition to the Galatians and the Romans. It is my contention that he in fact took an enormous amount for granted—of what they already knew, the hyms and slogans they already chanted. It is only in the light of what they knew that the interpretation offered in the discussion of Justification makes sense.

So the exegetical task is, in the first place, the recovery of the Kerygma, and this does not mean the recovery of some formula such as 'The Kergyma consists in the proclamation of the death and resurrection

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of Christ'. Such a formula, while obviously true, is not the whole truth. This is so because, for the Kerygma to have been the effective and powerful message it obviously was, it must have offered an experience of salvation, or a key to understanding the personal and social reality of those who heard it, so that 'their eyes were opened' (Lk 24:31) or 'they were cut to the heart' (Acts 2:37) ... to take two Lucan examples of reactions to post-paschal preaching.

What, then, were the conditions that made it possible for the message 'Jesus Christ died and rose again for the salvation of mankind' to produce the effects it obviously did, and lead to such interpretative discourses as St Paul's on Justification? It is this question which is being considered here.

2. Girardian hermeneutics and the Kerygma

The now much-discussed hypotheses of René Girard seek to explain the existence of social order, as well as the psychogenesis of the members of a given society, in terms of mimetic desire leading to the mechanism of the surrogate victim (or scapegoat).

Briefly, and in far too reduced a form, the idea, as deepened by J.M. Oughourlian independently of Girard in *Un Mime Nommé Désir* (Paris: Grasset, 1982), is as follows. Imitation (*mimesis*) in space and time constitutes (in an infant) memory, then language, and thus consciousness. The 'I' or 'me' which we all develop is constituted by imitation of the *desires* of others, which are therefore previous to it. The 'me' is a highly changeable construct, radically dependent on the desires of others, a fact which each 'me' usually does not recognize except to a very limited extent. Rather, each 'me' insists on the originality of its own desires, and insists that they are proper to it and spring from 'me'. This failure to recognise (*méconnaissance*) has been philosophically enshrined in most of the philosophical traditions of the West, with their myths of the transcendent, or even pre-existent, 'ego', taken to be radically free from dependence on what is other than itself.

The various mimetically formed and forming 'me's can live peacefully so long as they treat each other as models, not rivals. However, in practice it is never like that, and we quickly establish rivalry between each other, desire becomes competitive, any object of rivalry quickly becomes irrelevant (which it would never do if desire were linear—i.e. based on the object—rather than mimetically based on the desire of another), and then violence is likely to ensue. Such violence, since it can in many circumstances threaten death, makes social life fragile or even impossible. Thus the community is caught in the throes of a crisis which attacks its fabric, until the group spontaneously settles upon a surrogate victim, who, because unable to retaliate, offers no threat. This victim is expelled, lynched, or sacrificed—it matters not how, the underlying mechanism is the same. Since the group spontaneously *and unanimously* settled upon the victim, blaming it in all sincerity for the group's woes and conflicts (often mythically represented as plagues etc.), the expulsion of the victim

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produces a moment of peaceful unanimity—the foundation of a new social order. Since the expelled victim is seen as having brought about this new peaceful order, this victim, so despised on its way into expulsion, *after* the expulsion becomes sacralised. That, in a crude form, is the thesis by which Girard seeks to show that human social order is based upon sacralised violence. What is important here is that the theory offers an explanation of how the formation of each 'me' corresponds to the same mechanism as the more or less disguised social violence, and is thus productive (or, rather, co-productive) of this violence, of which individuals normally see themselves as innocent. Thus Girard denies a distinction typical of western science, that between psychology and sociology, and argues that the distinction between personal and social morality typically found in western culture and ethics is false.

The importance of this thesis in the present article is that it shows *a link between the constitution of the 'me' of each one of us and the sacrificial death of the victim produced by the violence of the group.* I hope to show that a link of this kind is at the root of Paul's treatment of Justification, and, indeed, that such a link (whether it is exactly as described by Girard and Oughourlian or subtly different) is essential if the doctrine is to make sense at all.

However, before moving to that it seems important to analyse how in each 'me' there is already built in its very constitution, a reference to the social 'other' by which social order is maintained and consciousness can come into being. It is being claimed that each 'me' is already, and without exception, related to an expulsion and to the order produced by expulsion. For, as 'I' have come to be constituted, I have already learnt to imitate the functioning of desire which expels—the social 'other' is consubstantial with the consciousness of the 'me'. All of us are constituted expellers, or victimisers, and usually exacerbate this by holding on to the myth of the independent 'me' with its self-originated desires and 'original innocence'. So we refuse to share the blame for the evils of society, pointing instead always to others. This is, of course, an even greater expulsion, since we seek to expel the whole of our dependence on what is other than ourselves from our 'me'.

J.M. Oughourlian has given his own account of how our 'me' is constituted by the Other in *Un Mime Nommé Désir* (p.58). Because of the richness and importance of his idea, and the possibilities it yields for our understanding of the doctrine of Justification, a brief résumé of the passage is required (the translated quotations from it are mine).

For Oughourlian, the turning point in the process of hominisation, by which the higher ape became human, was the shift from a group which communicated by spatial imitation—by gestures, in other words—to the beginnings of imitation of what the other looked like, and then of what the other had.

This shift brought with it the threat of violence, as the anthropoids imitated each other in their appropriation of objects and of each other.

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The violence (the mimetic crisis, because brought on by imitation leading to rivalry) could only be resolved by the mechanism of victimisation, when the disorder amongst the group turned to the unanimous order of all-against-one, as they found their victim. Writes Oughourlian: 'From the collective fury, brusquely appeased by the death of the victim, there will be born for each of the assassins, in the new-found calm, that very particular quality of attention which is the first glimmer of human consciousness.'

This means that from its origin consciousness (and here it is worth noting that the French word *conscience* embraces both our words 'consciousness' and 'conscience') is attention riveted on the other, and particularly on the Other who was the victim. That is to say, the act of victimisation is constitutive of consciousness. Thus it seems to Oughourlian possible to put forward the view that every future act of consciousness will be a reconstitution of that privileged relation with the Other.

This leads him to suggest that consciousness is reflexive because it is 'the coming and going between the "me" which seeks to deepen itself by the mechanism of becoming aware, and the virtual Other, always already there.' He finishes this section by noting that 'the Other is consubstantial with the consciousness/conscience of the "me" ... the very tissue of what has now become human is shot through with other-ness, that is, filled with anguish at the presence and guilt at the absence, of the Other ...'

Thus, to resume our argument, the 'me' of each one of us is constituted by the social 'other' which is based on victimising violence. It is this which constitutes our consciousness. This 'other' is not, then, something we are conscious *of*, but what enables us to be a conscious 'me' at all.

This way of thinking is, of course, utterly unacceptable to the Kantian and Cartesian philosophical traditions, and yet it would seem manifest that some such understanding is necessary if key Christian doctrines are to make sense at all, at least today.

Now to the application of these theses to Christian doctrine, and to the possibility that they shed light on the original Kerygma and help us look afresh at Paul's doctrine of Justification.

The essential Christian Kerygma is that a man, appointed Christ by God, a man who (it was gradually recognised) was also God, suffered death at the hands of men, and rose again. Or, as St Paul has it:

> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. (1 Cor 15:3—5; RSV)

In structuralist terms, we have just another of the old violent myths of humanity: it looks, to all intents and purposes, as though a group of people have expelled a particular victim, derived from him a new social unity, and have engaged in a typical post-mortem re-evaluation or

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sacrilisation of their victim, claiming him as risen. This interpretation, in showing that Christianity is just the same as all other human religions, is exactly opposed to the Christian interpretation of the same data.

The Christian interpretation of the same facts is as follows: Christ was God before his victimisation; He allowed Himself to be made a victim, not so as to appease God's anger or any other such fantasy, but because it was the only way in which God could save us from ourselves. In the crucified Christ God reveals Himself as the real victim of all our expelling violence and thus enables us to recognise who it truly is whom we expel and victimise—who it truly is on whom our consciousness, all our 'me's, are based. By raising Christ from the dead, God showed that the Victim God is not merely the revealing of our 'bad' conscience/consciousness, but its healing as well. The Resurrection is God's interpretation of Christ's death as forgiveness of our sins.

Here forgiveness of our sins means, very especially, the changing of the 'me' constituted by the mimetically violent social other into a new 'me', the new man, that is built up by imitation of Christ (as model, not as mimetic rival), and by receiving the Spirit of Sonship, so that we are 'possessed' by the 'Other', pacifically. This new Other, radically opposed to the previous other in our lives (in other words, the social order and relationships of 'this world'), constitutes and becomes consubstantial with our new 'me', so that we are transformed into Christ, or can say with Paul 'It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me.' (Gal 2:20)

Thus it might be said that the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ is a sort of divine drama played out in our midst so as to enable God to get within, and so recreate, the very structure of our conscious 'me'. Only by voluntarily making Himself our victim, showing that He knew we were going to do this to Him, and demonstrating to us that beyond our victimisation there is a divine cleansing, could God start to produce an alteration of consciousness in us that would enable us to leave the circle of our own violence and become a new creation. It is the only irruption of utter novelty into human history.

If, as I contend, the original Kerygma was something rather like this, given with all the power of those who had been greatly transformed by it, it seems we have a basis from which to re-examine St Paul's doctrine of Justification.

3. Justification in Romans

In Romans 1:17—18 we read of two sorts of revelation, that of the righteousness of God for everyone who has faith, and of the wrath of God in the persons of those wicked men who 'in injustice hold back the truth' (*tēn alētheian en adikian katechontōn*).

The Gospel reveals God's righteousness—that is, his generosity in giving His Son to be the victim who enables our sins to be forgiven and our 'me' altered. However, the Gospel only reveals God's righteousness by faith. In other words, we must acknowledge Christ as what He really is,

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God's gift for our healing, recognising that He has access into our 'me' that has been formed by others. Failure to recognise the victim seals us up even more in our *méconnaissance,* which simply is what we mean by the wrath of God, and which goes on to produce the fruits that St Paul describes in vv. 19—32.

Key here is the notion that faith—the recognition of the divine power present in Christ crucified capable of transforming our 'me'—is in the same category as the recognition of what is other than and previous to our desires and the constitution of the 'me' in Oughourlian's analysis. Such recognition is always therapeutic; in this case it is the source of divine transformation, or righteousness, for us. Failure to recognise—Oughourlian's *méconnaissance*—is not so much faithfulness but, as St Paul describes it, an exacerbation of our self-perpetuated self-rejection, imprisoning the truth in unrighteousness.

In chapter 2:1—11, Paul emphasises his point. He does not conclude his phenomenology of perdition by indicating a separation between 'good' and 'bad', but by pointing out that all of us, without exception, are amongst those who hold truth prisoner to iniquity and that when we judge others we only compound our failure to recognise what we owe to what is other than and previous to us—for to judge another is to suppose a privileged position of anteriority and personal knowledge of the truth prior to the other. God alone judges. He is by definition other than and prior to our desires and our 'me'.

That Paul's thought is very similar to the Girardian hermeneutic is further shown when Paul explains in 2:16 that, according to his Gospel, God judges the hidden things (*ta krupta*) of men by Jesus Christ. Those who do not have the law will find that their conscience (*suneidēsis*) bears witness and their conflicting thoughts either accuse or excuse them.

If, as my interpretation suggests, the Gospel is salvation for those who have faith, and condemnation for those who do not, then its confrontation with the conscience of each of us exactly judges the 'hidden things', showing whether the 'me' of the conscience is in denial of its dependence on what is other than itself, or is open, in recognition of that dependence. The critical point, or point of judgement, is: is our consciousness based on our victimising without recognition of what we are doing (in which case our thoughts will accuse us)? Or has it realised that we are moved by another, and is thus able to appropriate the forgiveness for our victimising present in the Crucified Christ (in which case our thoughts will acquit us)? For St Paul, it is quite clear, the 'judgement of God' revealed in Jesus Christ reaches into the constitution of our consciousness.

In chapter 3:21—26, Paul gives his most condensed account of Justification. God's righteousness is shown by His gratuitously putting forward Christ Jesus as an expiation by his blood for our redemption to be received by faith. The Law did not make anyone righteous; it only taught all those who were under it that they were not righteous, and thus revealed negatively the righteousness of God.

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The vital point here is that we have only one access to this divine drama in which God makes Himself *our* victim, and that is what St Paul calls faith. This faith is, as regards the psychological mechanism, exactly the same as that described by Oughourlian insofar as it is a recognition that this particular other—Christ crucified as divine offering to us—is the key to our consciousness of good and evil, which has heretofore been based on victimising or making oneself a victim (both of them methods of hiding one's violence from oneself). The Law, which should have served to teach us that 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (v.23)., frequently serves as a way of our dividing the world into good and bad, of our separating it into those who follow the Law and those who do not. The person who, owing to his observance of the Law, is in a position to judge others as bad (that is, considers himself made righteous by the Law) reveals that the Law does not get to the heart of man. Such a person has his identity, his 'me', still constituted on the basis of victimising, of expelling, of separation. Being convinced of the right-ness (and righteousness) of his position, it is very much more difficult for him to receive the dependence on what is other than him of the constitution of his 'me', and thus have his 'me' transformed, have it healed from its dependence on persecution.

Here it is apparent that Paul's teaching on the Law is identical with Jesus' practice in relation to the 'Pharisees', his evident predilection for sinners, and such parables as that of the tax collector and the Pharisee in the Temple (Lk 18:10—14).

In chapter 4 Paul gives two examples of people who received righteousness through their recognition that it is only Another who can transform 'me': Abraham and David. In the case of both of these their faith was in a divine promise; however, in Christ crucified the promise has been fulfilled and the gift of the Other in the only form that can break into our 'me' is available to make all of us righteous.

At the end of this chapter Paul explicates the divine drama once again: God revealed to us ourselves as the murderers of God (Jesus being 'handed over for our trespasses') yet showed that this was not the end of the story. For those who recognise the truth about themselves, God who raised Jesus up is offering the transformation of our 'me' in making us righteous.

The new 'me' therefore is at peace with God (5:1) and able to grow towards sharing the glory of God, through rejoicing in sufferings, no longer either a victimiser or a self-victim. Having been made righteous, we are able to avoid the wrath of God, in other words the exacerbation of the violent 'me' locked into *méconnaissance* of its dependence on what is other than it. It was Christ's death which reconciled us to God, and we can now grow in his life as sons of God ourselves.

Here Paul is marking the transition from Justification to Sanctification. This, in the Oughourlian terminology, would correspond to the transition from the recognition and acceptance of that dependence

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on what is other than us which can transform our 'me', to the birth and constitution of the new 'me' no longer constituted by persecution. In chapter 6 Paul indicates very precisely his understanding of the fundamental 'heteronomy' of the human condition—in other words, our subjection to what is other than and external to ourselves. He does this using terms comparable with Oughourlian's analysis: we are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. The new 'me' is not freed from relatedness to, or dependence on, the other, but the Other to which it is now slave is God, who constitutes the new 'me', teaching us to imitate Christ, to obey Christ's commands. (Not, of course, that the Other who is God is 'other' to us in exactly the same sense as 'other' in our previous statements, since God does not exist 'over against' us as other creatures do; however, our new relationship with other creatures is an Other of the same sort.) Our task is to let the new 'me' govern our behaviour, which is still in so many ways conditioned by the old 'me'.

In chapters 7 and 8 St Paul explains and describes the formation of the new 'me' in its battle with the old 'me' (8:13—the putting to death by the Spirit of the deeds of the body). The Spirit groans within us who are still to some extent captive to the old 'me', prisoners of the Other that is opposed to God (namely what St Paul calls 'the flesh' or 'the world'). We wait for our complete adoption as sons of God and the redemption of our bodies, when they will be completely subservient to the new 'me'. Paul once again emphasises the anteriority of God's love to our 'me' (8:28—30). Before even we were justified—in other words, before we had access to the recognition of God's righteousness manifested for us—we were known, predestined and called. There merely remains our glorification, in which process we are involved even now, in the midst of all the persecutions of the present time. None of these persecutions can reach to the heart of the new 'me' which is in transformation, for we have been freed from condemnation. God makes our new 'me' righteous; the dead and risen Jesus *is* intercession for us. The new 'me' in formation is utterly free from the world of persecution, expulsion and counter-persecution—the cycle of violence in which humanity lives. The Other which is consubstantial with the 'me' (see the quotation given earlier from Oughourlian's *Un Mime Nommé Désir,* p. 58) is, in the case of the justified, Christ, from whom, by definition, our new 'me' is utterly inseparable.

Paul returns in chapter 10 to the theme of Righteousness in his discussion of the theological place of the Chosen People after the coming of Christ. Here again, the same understanding underlies his analysis. Christ is the *Telos* of the Law (v.4); that is, He brings it to an end, makes it redundant, and is its completion and purpose. This, as we have seen, is because, unlike the Law, He can get within what constitutes our 'me' so that it may be constituted anew.

The access to salvation is near to us, but comes from outside, from the Other. The access is that recognition by which our hearts appreciate

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what was meant by God raising Jesus from the dead: it is this which makes us just. But, the transformation begun, we go on to make a public confessing *in language* of what we have recognised, for our recognition is not just an interior transformation but the beginning of a complete alteration of our relation to the whole public world in which we live, and which had, until our justification, constituted our 'me'. Our public *prise de position* is the beginning of our salvation: it means that we are ashamed of the world and our complicity in it, not put to shame by the world. The Other who saves us is other than the world from which we proclaim our salvation (vv. 8—13). Again St Paul's teaching is the teaching of Jesus, here the teaching as recounted by St Matthew (10:32—33): 'Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.'

This, I hope, shows that the understanding of our heteronomy (cf. above on ch. 6) present in Romans, or, more exactly, the understanding of the heteronomous constitution of the 'me' and of the alteration to it made possible by Christ's death which is present in Romans, is extraordinarily close to the explanation of the mimetic constitution of the 'me' in the works of Girard and Oughourlian, and that the two throw light on each other.

4. Justification in Galatians

The same understanding is, of course, present in St Paul's earlier work, his epistle to the Galatians, but the context is slightly different. The Galatians appear to be building up again the structure of the Law, and accusing Paul of being a transgressor for knocking it down (2:15—18), but Paul replies with force that his 'me' formed by the Law has died. It was crucified with Christ. Paul recognised in the crucified Christ the truth about his old 'me', so that his old 'me' lives no longer, but his new 'me', consubstantial with the Other which constitutes it: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (2:20).

He then explains in further depth the relationship between the Law and Christ, producing the famous image of the *paidagōgos*. However, we move from pupils to sons: our new life means that God is not 'exterior' to us, as was the case with the Law, but 'interior' to us; our new 'me' is Christ. Paul deepens the image by explaining once again our radical heteronomy: we were 'enslaved to the elemental spirits of the universe' (4:3), and now, by our receiving adoption, by recognising a different heteronomy, a different Other, we have become sons. Paul beseeches the Galatians to have nothing to do with what would make them return to their previous heteronomy, to their old 'me' formed by the 'weak and beggarly elemental spirits'. Any complicity with a manner of seeking righteousness that is based on anything other than Christ crucified denies the efficacy of Christ's death, and separates the 'me' from Christ (5:4). The new 'me' can only be formed and constituted by recognition of the

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transforming efficacy of the crucified Christ as being the Other on which the 'me' depends. Anything else is the old 'me'.

The new 'me' can only be formed in freedom, which means the service of the new Other—God and our brothers and sisters, completely set free from the contamination of mimetic rivalry which leads us to bite and devour each other (5:15). The new 'me' overcomes the patterns of behaviour and attitudes that depended on the old 'me'—the 'me' formed from mimetic rivalry and the mechanism of expelling the surrogate victim.

Once again Paul's understanding of Law, Righteousness, and Life in the Spirit reveals an implicit understanding of the human condition which is either identical with that offered by Girard and Oughourlian, or so near to it as to make little difference. All the main Pauline themes can be seen to be translatable into the idiom of what Oughoulian calls an 'interdividual' psychology (in other words, a psychology no longer based on the subject but on the relationship between human lives), while in no way being reduced by this psychology. In fact, a number of passages which are incomprehensible within the framework of our longstanding dichotomies between the individual and the social, the material and the spiritual, the psychological and the religious, at last come to make a unified sense. It would seem no longer correct to say that many central Pauline themes strictly only make sense within the context of a vanished thought-world. The hermeneutic offered by Girard and Oughourlian has a great deal to offer in enriching our understanding of the Pauline texts.

Singular Iniquities: Josephine Butler and Marietta Higgs

Hilary Cashman

A little over a century ago Josephine Butler was beginning to learn, with reluctance and dismay, the extent of organised child prostitution in Britain. When she tried to convey what she had learned she was often reviled as dirty-minded, corrupting and unwomanly. Her work did much to erect legal protection for children, but the possibility and practice of child sexual exploitation continued, as shown in the case notes of bodies such as the NSPCC[1]. In 1987 a tide of hostility was unleashed against another woman, paediatrician Marietta Higgs, who had in the normal course of her work discovered signs of sexual abuse in a small and statistically unsurprising proportion of the children she cared for.

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