Walter A. Elwell, *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, (electronic ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997, c1993).

Alister E. McGrath

Michael Bauman

Alister Edgar McGrath was born on January 23, 1953, in Belfast, Northern Ireland, the only son of Edgar McGrath, a county health officer, and the former Nancy McBride. Despite a Christian background, it was not until his student days at Oxford University that McGrath, through the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union, became a Christian at the age of eighteen. His spiritual journey is best recounted in his own words:

> Although I was brought up as a Christian, I have to confess that I could never understand what relevance Christianity could have for anyone. How could accepting a few ideas as true change your life? How could believing that there was a God up there somewhere have any relevance to the real world? Between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, I attended a very religious high school—the Methodist College, Belfast, in Northern Ireland. Christian worship was very much part of the regular programme of the school, and there was no way that I, or anyone else for that matter, could avoid it. It turned me off Christianity completely.
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> Initially, my reaction to Christianity was one of indifference. I couldn't see why anyone should be interested in it, and was content to leave matters there. But I began to develop more definitely atheistic views as time progressed. In the first place, I studied the natural sciences in some detail. Initially, up to age fifteen, I specialized in chemistry, physics, biology and mathematics. Then, until the age of seventeen, I chose to specialize in pure mathematics, applied mathematics, chemistry and physics. Eventually, I became deeply influenced by the spirit of scientific materialism, and felt that God had no useful place or purpose in the universe.
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> But I also began to get interested in Marxism. I think it was when I was fifteen or so that I really became interested in its ideas, and their potential religious importance. God was just some kind of religious narcotic, designed to dull the senses of those who couldn't cope with life. But *I* could! And so I dismissed belief in God as some kind of wish-fulfilment, a crutch that inadequate people leaned upon. I also found myself especially interested in the writings of Theodor Adorno, who developed the idea that students were the heirs to the workers as the force that would bring about the new socialist world order. The events of 1968—when the student world was shaken by the Paris revolts—seemed to usher in a new revolutionary era. I very badly wanted to be part of it.
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> But life went on. In the fall of 1970, aged seventeen, I began to study in depth with a view to gaining admission to Oxford University. I sat the special examinations late that

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Michael Bauman **Bauman, Michael.** Ph.D., Fordham University. Associate Professor of Theology and Culture, Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, Michigan; Lecturer and Tutor in Renaissance Literature and Theology, Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Oxford, England.

year. Just before Christmas, I received the news that I had been awarded a major scholarship to study chemistry at Wadham College, Oxford—the home of two of the greatest chemists in England, and also a college which possessed important historical associations with Marx and left-wing causes.

I went up to Oxford in October 1971, full of excitement. Here was a new world to discover. However, I was beginning to have my doubts about Marxism. There were just too many unanswered questions. 1971 was probably the heyday of Marxist influence at Oxford, and my doubts seemed out of place. Nevertheless, I began to rethink things—including Christianity. I was invited to a meeting of the university Christian Union, and went along out of interest. It was considerably less dreadful than I had expected. In fact, I found it interesting, even *attractive,* in a way that puzzled me. It was as if I had discovered a gap, a spiritual void, in my life. I decided to learn more.

I had never given all that much consideration to Christianity, which I had tended to regard as little more than some form of spiritual narcotic to deaden the pain of life—quite unnecessary for someone like myself, who was perfectly capable of coping with things. I found myself re-opening old questions I thought I had buried, and allowing myself to listen to ideas I had never really taken seriously. While I cannot place an exact date and time to my conversion, I am sure that a significant part in that story would be due to some talks given by a visiting speaker at Oxford about half-way through that first term. The name of that speaker was Michael Green. By the time he had finished speaking, I knew that Christianity had something far more satisfactory—and far more *moral*—than Marxism to offer the world, myself included. I became a Christian, and can honestly say I have never looked back since then. If I had to identify one thing that I got right in life, it was that decision to commit myself to the living and loving God.

But I was determined to be a *thinking* Christian. My initial temptation was to abandon my study of the sciences, and study Christian theology instead. But I was advised to wait. After completing my undergraduate and research degrees in the natural sciences, I began to study theology seriously, eventually taking a degree in the subject at Oxford (1978). At that stage, the Oxford University Faculty of Theology could fairly be said to have been dominated by a gentle liberal Protestantism. Perhaps a number of its members may have seen their educational objectives to be to encourage students to abandon their evangelicalism, and become liberal Protestants, like themselves. At any rate, I found that my youthful views on the nature of Christianity were often ridiculed as unworthy of serious consideration.

I realized that I had lost confidence in my evangelicalism. In effect, I had become a liberal, and went on to train for ministry in the Church of England at Westcott House, Cambridge, then firmly established as the flagship of liberal catholicism within the Anglican seminaries. My change of mind seemed confirmed by events in 1977, which witnessed the publication of *The Myth of God Incarnate* and James Barr's *Fundamentalism,* works which finally persuaded me that evangelicalism totally lacked serious intellectual content, and had been completely rejected by mainstream academic life. I firmly believed that I could not be a thinking Christian and an evangelical. Things have changed a lot since then; but in those days, there were few evangelicals in high places in Oxford. At the same time, I also took up a research fellowship at St. John's College, Cambridge, which allowed me time to develop my theological scholarship.

> I kept thinking about my faith throughout my period at Cambridge, and on into my three-year curacy at a suburban parish in the city of Nottingham, in England's East Midlands (1980–83). I found myself plagued by doubts about my commitment to liberalism. It became increasingly clear that liberal Anglicanism often amounted to little more than a conglomerate of transient theological responses to events in the academic world. It seemed as if it had no hard theological or spiritual core. As I struggled with the issues thrown up by my preaching and pastoral work, I found myself continually wondering whether liberalism actually had anything to say to the world, other than uncritically endorsing its latest trends.
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> After much mental and spiritual wrestling and soul-searching, I decided that evangelical Christianity had far more to commend it than any of its rivals. It was not merely biblically-based; it was pastorally relevant and spiritually exciting. And increasingly, I came to realize its intellectual coherence and strength. I regained my confidence in evangelicalism, and felt that I ought to encourage others to do so as well. And so I took up (1983) a teaching position on the faculty of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, now firmly established as the Church of England's leading evangelical seminary. In teaching historical and systematic theology to my students, I believe that I am equipping them for the full task of ministry and preaching in the modern world. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work in so stimulating and supportive an environment, which has formed the background to just about every book that I have written.[1]

In a personal conversation (4 July 1990) McGrath noted that his parish work at Nottingham affected him much as parish work at Safenwil had affected Karl Barth: it ended his flirtation with theological liberalism. Through this experience McGrath discovered that "unless theology is grounded in the everyday life of the people, it fails to make any sense." After receiving his B.D. from Oxford for research in late medieval theology, he became lecturer in historical and systematic theology at Wycliffe Hall. He has also served as chaplain (1983–87) at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, and as examiner (1983–86), and later as chief examiner, of candidates for Oxford's certificate in theology. He has twice been awarded a British Academy research grant (1985, 1988) for study in the Swiss Reformation. As an outgrowth of his abiding interest in German theology, from 1985 to 1989 McGrath served as the joint secretary of the Oxford-Bonn Theological Seminar. And in 1989 he was appointed theological consultant to the House of Bishops regarding relations between the Church of England and the evangelical churches of Germany. He was elected the 1990 Bampton Lecturer, the youngest to serve in that capacity in this century, and the only evangelical. That same year he was the Ezra Squier Tipple Visiting Professor of Historical Theology at Drew University.

Luther's Theology of the Cross

In order to get a grasp of McGrath's contribution to evangelical theology, we will take a brief look at four of his major works: *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (1985); *Iustitia Dei* (1986); *The Making of Modern German Christology* (1986); and *The Genesis of Doctrine* (1990). His first book, *Luther's Theology of the Cross,* is significant in three ways. First, he reverses the tendency in modern scholarship to begin by identifying theological themes or notions in Luther and then to work backward in an attempt to discover the same ideas in late medieval thought. McGrath works the other way around. He first traces the shape of late medieval theology and then moves forward to discover in what ways Luther relates to the great questions of late medieval thought. McGrath's approach is better, because it places Luther in his proper historical and theological context and recognizes that the Reformation in general, and Luther's thought in particular, arose as the result of a historical process. Only in this way can one properly evaluate "Luther's transition from being a typical theologian of the late Middle Ages to the pioneer of a new reforming theology."[2]

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[1] This autobiographical sketch was specifically written for the present volume.

Second, McGrath argues that Luther's theological breakthrough, which centers on the doctrine of justification, ought to be dated early in the Reformer's career. While this thesis is not entirely new, McGrath's volume makes the most comprehensive English-language case for it.

Third, McGrath points out that Luther's theological breakthrough, though focused on the doctrine of justification, is actually a theological *program.* Once one works that program through, McGrath contends, one ends up with the *theologia crucis,* or theology of the cross, "one of the most powerful and radical understandings of the nature of Christian theology which the church has ever known."[3] Luther's theology of the cross is present, in seed form, in his theological breakthrough. This insight, McGrath says, is the principal contribution of his book. Prior to *Luther's Theology of the Cross,* scholars tended to regard Luther's breakthrough and his theological agenda as separate items.

McGrath characterizes "the prevailing state of the Christian church" in the late Middle Ages as "possessed of a tired spirituality, morally bankrupt, doctrinally confused." The confusion of which he speaks concerned the doctrine of justification. To the question, "What must I do to be saved?" the church of that day gave an uncertain answer. "This confusion," McGrath writes, "undoubtedly did much to prepare the way for the Reformation, in that the church was simply unable to respond to Luther's challenge [on this issue] when it finally came."[4]

Luther's cause was aided also by the proliferation of reform movements (such as the Brethren of the Common Life) within the church at that time and by the intense interest of the humanists (like John Colet, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, and Erasmus) in the writings of Paul, which together made the late medieval church ripe for spiritual and theological renewal. Thus, as McGrath observes, "the fuel for the Reformation had been piled up for many years: it happened to be Luther's posting of the ninety-five theses on indulgences [in 1517] which eventually sparked off the conflagration which proved to be

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2 Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (New York: Blackwell, 1985), 2.
3 Ibid., 1.
4 Ibid., 12.

the greatest intellectual and spiritual upheaval yet known in Europe"—and this even though "most of Luther's theses were quite unexceptionable" to the Roman hierarchy.[5]

McGrath argues that Luther was intent upon nurturing a threefold reformation within the Church of Rome: a reformation of morals, of spirituality, and of doctrine. Of these, Luther believed the last to be most crucial. According to McGrath, Luther's project was shaped under the joint influence of (1) Renaissance humanism and its emphasis upon the *studia humanitatis,* (2) the nominalism of the *via moderna,* and (3) the *schola Augustiniana moderna* of Luther's own monastic order.[6] To these three important elements of late medieval thought, which McGrath characterizes as the "headwaters of the Reformation," he adds Luther's own considerable theological genius.[7]

The *studia humanitatis,* though doing little to provide Luther with the substance of his reform, did provide him with its means.[8] While McGrath properly declines to label Luther a humanist, he does identify four important affinities between Luther and his humanist counterparts: their mutual rejection of scholasticism, their mutual desire to return to the early Fathers of the church, their mutual desire to return to Holy Scripture, and their mutual interest in rhetoric.[9]

Having been taught the epistemological nominalism of the *via moderna* at Erfurt, Luther adhered to it throughout his life. Moreover, according to McGrath, Luther's early formulation of the doctrine of justification employed the *via moderna*'s important distinction between, on the one hand, God's absolute power with respect to the initial set of possibilities open to him and, on the other, his ordained power with respect to the subset of possibilities he determined to actualize.

Regarding the *schola Augustiniana moderna,* McGrath argues that by Luther's time there had arisen within Luther's order a unique theology of justification which combined "much of the authentic theology of St. Augustine" with "the results of the application of logico-critical methods, such as the dialectic of the two powers of God, associated with the *via moderna.i*[10] To this school of thought, especially during his days at Erfurt, Luther was closely aligned.

Before his decisive theological breakthrough, Luther "held a doctrine of justification which was firmly set within a well-established medieval theological tradition. All that was required of man was that he humbled himself before God, in order that he might receive the gift of grace which God would then bestow upon him."[11] By thus seeing

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5 Ibid., 15–16, 19.
6 Ibid., 27.
7 Ibid., 26.
8 Ibid., 52.
9 Ibid., 50–51.
10 Ibid., 67.
11 Ibid., 92.

Luther in continuity with late medieval theology, McGrath argues, one can more readily appreciate his break from it when it occurred.

That breakthrough concerned, first of all, Luther's concept of the righteousness of God (*iustitia Dei*), which McGrath, unlike many previous scholars, tends to date early rather than late in the Reformer's career. McGrath does so by emphasizing Luther's early texts, like his *Dictata,* rather than his autobiographical reminiscences as an old man. As McGrath reconstructs it, while Luther began his theological career within the pale of the *via moderna*, by about 1514 he began a spiritual and doctrinal journey that by 1518 led to the *theologia crucis.* As a consequence of Luther's new answer to the question of what was meant by Paul's phrase "the righteousness of God," the entire substance of Luther's theology "had to be reworked, leading eventually to the theology of the cross. … The old wineskins of the theology of the *via moderna* were simply incapable of containing the new wine which Luther introduced."[12] That theological reworking included a number of significant changes in Luther's teaching, among which are the twin notions that we are passive in the work of justification and that we are held captive by sin and are incapable of attaining righteousness apart from grace. Any contrary notion Luther denounces as Pelagian.

McGrath identifies five distinctive features or ideas of Luther's theology of the cross: (1) it is a theology of revelation, and as such stands in opposition to all theologies of speculation; (2) this revelation is indirect and concealed from all but the eye of faith; (3) this revelation is found most arrestingly in the cross of Christ, and not in human moral activity and human reason, which the cross shatters; (4) the eye of faith detects the hidden God in the passion and cross of Christ, the sole reliable source of knowledge of God—to search elsewhere is to fall prey to the *theologia gloriae,* the only alternative to the *theologia crucis;* and (5) God makes himself known through suffering, whether that of Christ or that of the Christian.[13] To this final characteristic idea of the theology of the cross, Luther attaches his doctrine of *Anfechtung,* the soul-shaking despair by which God disabuses us of our self-sufficiency and readies us to turn from ourselves to Christ.[14]

McGrath correctly discerns the central role played in Luther's theology of the cross by the hidden God, the *Deus absconditus,* who reveals himself most plainly in the apparent clash of contraries; for example, his strength is made known through weakness, his wisdom through our folly, and his love through judgment. For Luther, the *Deus absconditus* is hidden both in and behind his revelation.[15]

Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification

The first full-length treatment of its kind, McGrath's two-volume *Iustitia Dei* is "a bibliographical essay which records, correlates, and where possible extends the present state of scholarly work on the development of the Christian doctrine of justification." In volume 1 he outlines the development of the doctrine of justification within the Western theological tradition to the eve of the Reformation, and in volume 2 he traces it from the Reformation through the modern period. In so doing, McGrath intends, among other things, to correct two errors: (1) the misconstruing of the nature of late medieval theology, and (2) the imposition of a historically naive interpretation of Pelagianism upon the theologians prior to Luther— errors which McGrath addressed in less detail in *Luther's Theology of the Cross.*

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[12] Ibid., 99.
[13] Ibid., 149–51.
[14] Ibid., 152.
[15] Ibid., 165–66.

As McGrath sees it, the doctrine of justification is the theological epicenter of the Christian church. It "encapsulates the essence of the Christian faith and proclamation, locating the essence of Christianity in the saving action of God towards mankind in Jesus Christ."[16] That saving activity entails three propositions: (1) God is righteous; (2) man is a sinner; and (3) God justifies man. "The quintessence of the Christian doctrine of justification," says McGrath, "is that these three propositions do not form an inconsistent triad."[17] Having thus defined the subject matter of his inquiry, McGrath carefully delineates the multiple nuances of the concept of righteousness in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin before turning his attention to the relevant portions of the works of Augustine, whom he considers the fountainhead of Western theological speculation on this topic.[18]

Unlike many theologians before him, Augustine rejected the Greek notion of αὐτεξούσιον and its Latin equivalent, *liberum arbitrium,* which before his time had dominated Christian thought on justification. He also rejected the correlation commonly perceived to exist between human moral effort and justification.[19] Instead, as his lengthy quarrel with Pelagianism demonstrates, Augustine believed that an individual's justification is ultimately based upon God's eternal decree of predestination, that human faith is a gift from God, and that human free will is compromised by sin and unable to lead to justification unless it is liberated by grace.[20] According to McGrath, Augustine held that humans have free will, but not the power to accomplish good—"The free will is not lost, nor is it non-existent: it is merely incapacitated and may be healed by grace. In justification, the *liberum arbitrium captivatum* becomes *liberum arbitrium liberatum* by the action of healing grace."[21] "Central to Augustine's doctrine of justification," McGrath stresses, "is his understanding of the 'righteousness of God,' *iustitia Dei.* The righteousness of God is not that righteousness by which he is himself righteous, but that by which he justifies sinners. The righteousness of God … is so called because, by bestowing it upon man, God makes him righteous."[22] Like some of the Greek theologians, Augustine conceived the scope and intention of justification to be “the restoration of the entire universe to its original order, established at creation.”[23]

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[16] Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification,* 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1:2.
[17] Ibid., 1:5.
[18] Ibid., 1:17.
[19] Ibid., 1:18.
[20] Ibid., 1:25.
[21] Ibid., 1:26–27.
[22] Ibid., 1:28–29.

Augustine’s theology exercised considerable sway over much of the subsequent speculation concerning the doctrine of justification. In many ways medieval thought on this issue “may be regarded as a systematic attempt to restate and reformulate Augustine’s theology to meet the needs of the new era then developing.”[24] This was done by translating the Pauline/Augustinian taxonomy of the aspects of salvation into the language of legal and moral discourse.

The characteristic medieval concept of justification, McGrath observes, “refers not merely to the beginning of the Christian life, but also to its continuation and ultimate perfection, in which the Christian is made righteous … through a fundamental change in his nature, and not merely his status.”[25] This view, the systematic development of which began in earnest in the twelfth century, stands in contrast to the later Reformation conception, which carefully distinguished between justification and such other aspects of salvation as regeneration and sanctification. So different are the medieval and Reformed conceptions of justification that we must be careful not to tie them too closely together or to locate the notions of the latter too fully in the former.[26] Having issued this warning, McGrath suggests that the early medieval views of the *iustitia Dei* can be classified under three headings: the subjective, the objective, and the Pelagian. The subjective view, which McGrath connects to Ambrosiaster, identifies the *iustitia Dei* as the “righteousness by which God is himself righteous”; the objective view, originating with Augustine, identifies it as the righteousness that God gives to the justified sinner; and the Pelagian identifies it as “the divine attribute by which God rewards man according to his just deserts.”[27]

Turning to Anselm’s later view, McGrath notes that both the *Proslogion* and the *Cur Deus homo?* assert that God’s mercy is rooted in his justice, and that God wills and does only what is in strictest agreement with his nature, a consideration which ought to be the controlling factor in our contemplation of the divine activity. This view gave way to the theory of *ius diaboli,* which contends that God was obligated to respect the devil’s rights to our fallen race. Christ’s death on the cross for our sin was, so to speak, a payment to Satan.

Aristotelian notions of justice made their way into scholastic theology by the mid-thirteenth century, thinkers such as Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas being their most notable proponents. In Thomas’s case they surfaced as opposition to the voluntarist conception of *iustitia Dei,* which, as expounded by theologians like Duns Scotus and Gabriel Biel, insisted upon “the priority of the divine will over any moral strictures by declaring that God's will is essentially independent of what is right or wrong. … The divine will is thus the chief arbiter and principle of justice, establishing justice by its decisions, rather than acting on the basis of established justice."[28] Thomas averred, by contrast, that the ultimate standard of justice is *sapientia,* right reason. "For Thomas, the deliverance of mankind through the death of Christ is the most appropriate mode of redemption, and can be established as such on rational grounds."[29] The voluntarist notion, he believed, was both arbitrary and blasphemous.

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[23] Ibid., 1:36.
[24] Ibid., 1:38.
[25] Ibid., 1:41.
[26] Ibid., 1:51.
[27] Ibid., 1:51–52.

With regard to the subjective appropriation of justification, "the medieval tradition followed Augustine of Hippo in insisting that man has a positive role to play."[30] The precise nature of that role, however, was the subject of continued debate, centering primarily around three issues: (1) the nature of human free will, (2) "the necessity and nature of the proper disposition for justification," and (3) the proper understanding and application of the axiom that "God will not deny grace to the man who does his best."[31] This discussion developed in conjunction with an equally important elaboration of sacramental theology, which understood justification as a process beginning in baptism and continuing in penance.[32] By tying justification so closely to the sacramental life of the church, medieval theology began more strongly to assert that there is no justification outside the church.[33]

After discussing the concepts of grace and of merit, McGrath directs his attention to the medieval debate surrounding the dialectic between divine freedom and divine obligation. For theologians of the *via moderna,* the soteriological upshot of this debate was that "the present established order, although radically contingent, is totally reliable. God is not obliged by any external constraints to justify man: however, having determined to do so by a free and uncoerced act of self-limitation, he abides by that decision."[34]

McGrath turns next to various perspectives on the relation between predestination and justification. He begins with Augustine's view, which is, in essence, "that man's *temporal* election, or justification, is the consequence of God's *eternal* election, or predestination."[35] Gottschalk later expanded Augustine's view into double predestination, which was ardently opposed by both John Scotus Erigena and Hincmar of Rheims.[36] Later still, Duns Scotus argued that "predestination was an act of the divine *will* rather than the divine *intellect,"* the soteriological implications of which led William of Ockham to speculate that "reprobation is based upon a quality within man, rather than an act of divine will."[37] Johannes Eck, Luther's noted opponent at Leipzig, tended to "refer predestination to justification" by insisting that one may be assured concerning predestination by performing good works.[38]

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[28] Ibid., 1:64.
[29] Ibid., 1:63.
[30] Ibid., 1:70.
[31] Ibid., 1:70, 83.
[32] Ibid., 1:91.
[33] Ibid., 1:99.
[34] Ibid., 1:124.
[35] Ibid., 1:128.
[36] Ibid., 1:130–33.

McGrath then delineates five major schools of thought concerning the doctrine of justification: the early Dominican school, the early Franciscan school, the later Franciscan school, the *via moderna,* and the heterogeneous Augustinian school.[39] He closes the first volume of *Iustitia Dei* with a brief account of both the continuities and discontinuities existing between the theology of the Middle Ages and that of the Reformation. The continuities he identifies largely as issues relating to the mode of justification; the discontinuities pertain primarily to its nature.

Volume 2 documents the development of the doctrine of justification within the Christian tradition from 1500 to the present, a period of remarkable diversity of opinion on this issue. According to McGrath, the Protestant doctrine of justification is characterized by three prominent features: (1) the definition of justification as "the forensic *declaration* that the believer is righteous … rather than the process by which he is *made* righteous"; (2) the "deliberate and systematic distinction between *justification* and *sanctification* or *regeneration";* and (3) the view of justifying righteousness "as the alien righteousness of Christ, external to man and imputed to him."[40]

McGrath describes the young Luther's understanding of the righteousness of God as "essentially identical to that of the *via moderna."*[41] By 1515–16, however, Luther had made a decisive break with this theology on at least three fundamental points: Luther insisted that we are passive rather than active in our own justification; he insisted that human will is incapable of attaining righteousness apart from grace; and he rejected as Pelagian the notion that on our own we can do whatever there is in ourselves.[42] Luther also asserted that "iustitia Dei is not to be understood as the righteousness by which God is himself just, but the righteousness by which he justifies the ungodly."[43] As McGrath encapsulates it, Luther's essential insight is that "God himself bestows upon man the gift of fides Christi."[44] The gospel has the effect of destroying all pretense of human righteousness by insisting that we must lay hold of a righteousness that is not our own—the iustitia Christi aliena.[45]

After a brief comparison between the thought of Luther and Augustine on this point, McGrath turns to the early Lutherans' doctrine of justification. He describes, in turn, the

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[37] Ibid., 1:134, 137.
[38] Ibid., 1:144.
[39] Ibid., 1:158–79.
[40] Ibid., 2:2.
[41] Ibid., 2:4.
[42] Ibid., 2:6.
[43] Ibid., 2:7.
[44] Ibid., 2:8.
[45] Ibid., 2:12.

Augustinianism of Andreas Karlstadt and Johann Bugenhagen, the forensic overtones of Philipp Melanchthon's views, and the Osiandrist, Stancarist, antinomian, Majorist, and synergist controversies. McGrath then begins his survey of the early Reformed views on justification by noting the Erasmian moralism of Huldrych Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and Johannes Oecolampadius. There follows a discussion of John Calvin's explicitly forensic conception that "man is not made righteous in justification, but is accepted as righteous … on account of the righteousness of Christ outside of man." This view McGrath labels "extrinsicism."[46]

In delineating the subsequent shape of the new scholasticism within Protestant orthodoxy and its attendant confessionalism, McGrath focuses on the theology of Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor at Geneva, and the influence his theology had on the five articles of the Synod of Dort (1619) and on such prominent covenant theologians as Franciscus Gomarus, Johannes Wollebius, Zacharius Ursinus, and Johannes Cocceius. Their stance, in turn, was countered by the hypothetical universalism of Moses Amyraut of Saumur.[47] What the Canons of Dort were to Reformed thought in the seventeenth century, the Formula of Concord was to Lutheran theology. McGrath compares the theology of these two confessional traditions under three heads—the nature of justification, the objective grounds of justification, and the subjective appropriation of justification—and concludes that while the Lutheran and Reformed understandings of the first issue are similar, they differ significantly on the second and third.[48]

The emergence of Pietism as a reaction to Lutheran orthodoxy McGrath characterizes as a consequence of insistence upon the active nature of faith. This in turn gave rise to the doctrine of Christian perfection and to Pietism's threefold rejection of vicarious atonement, imputed righteousness, and deathbed conversion, beliefs it considered inimical to piety.

Meanwhile, of course, Roman Catholic theologians were not idle. In examining developments within pre-Tridentine Catholicism, McGrath focuses on the "radically theocentric doctrine of justification" espoused by Juan de Valdés; on Gasparo Contarini's view that the "sacrifice of Christ upon the cross was more than adequate as a satisfaction for human sin"; on Johannes Gropper's "double righteousness" view, which some mistakenly label *duplex iustitiá* and on Italian evangelism, an undogmatic movement characterized early on by strongly Augustinian and individualist beliefs.[49] Tridentine thought itself asserted that "free will is not destroyed, but is weakened by the Fall"; that "man is called through prevenient grace, without reference to his merits"; and that "faith is to be seen as the beginning of human salvation, the root of all justification, without which it is impossible to please God." Trent also carefully identified the causes of justification: the final cause, the glory of God and eternal life; the efficient cause, the mercy of God; the meritorious cause, the passion of Christ; the instrumental cause, the sacrament of baptism; and the formal cause, the righteousness of God.[50] In the wake of Trent, various controversies erupted within the Roman communion, of which McGrath singles out three for special attention: Baianism, Molinism, and Jansenism. Despite the divergent views represented in these controversies, post-Tridentine theology is characterized by two overarching features: the Roman Catholic Church "continued to regard justification as a process," and it permitted the term *justification* itself to be "gradually eliminated from the homiletical and catechetical literature of Catholicism."[51]

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[46] Ibid., 2:36.

[47] Ibid., 2:43.

[48] Ibid., 2:44–51.

[49] Ibid., 2:54–61.

Though drawing inspiration from their continental counterparts, the English Reformers, such as William Tyndale, John Frith, and Thomas Cranmer, propagated their own distinctive views on justification, which McGrath describes as "essentially Augustinian." They omitted "any reference to the concept of the imputation of righteousness," and understood humans "to be *made* righteous *by fayth onely,* with good works being the natural consequence of justifying faith." In time this Augustinianism was tempered by "a Melanchthonian doctrine of justification *per solam fidem."*[52] Later in the sixteenth century, however, Richard Hooker's more Calvinistic views on this particular issue gained prominence. He maintained, for example, that "God bestows upon man justifying and sanctifying righteousness … at one and the same time: the distinction between the two lies in the fact that the former is external to man, and imputed to him, while the latter is worked within him by the Holy Spirit." Further, this justification ought to be "conceived Christologically, in terms of the appropriation of the personal presence of Christ within the believer through the Holy Spirit."[53]

Before turning his attention to John Henry Newman, McGrath examines the Arminianism of the Caroline divines, the experimental predestinarianism of their Puritan counterparts, and the federalism of Heinrich Bullinger and others. Newman's views, McGrath insists, rest upon "an historical analysis of the doctrines of justification associated with Luther (and, to a much lesser extent, with Melanchthon), with Roman Catholic theologians such as Bellarmine and Vasquez, and with the Caroline divines." Unfortunately, "Newman's historico-theological analysis appears to be seriously and irredeemably inaccurate [and to] rest upon a fallacious interpretation" of all three sources, as well as on a concept of "the real presence of the Trinity within the soul of the justified believer," a notion apparently drawn from the Greek Fathers.[54] That Newman's analysis is indeed mistaken McGrath establishes with precision and in detail.[55]

Modern discussion of the issues involved began with "the rise of anthropocentric theologies of justification." Characteristic of the Enlightenment, these theologies tended to emphasize "the autonomy of man as moral agent" and exhibited great "optimism concerning the capacity of natural human faculties," thus calling into question the doctrine of original sin that previously underlay all orthodox speculation on the matter.[56] In England these ideas were advanced first by philosophers like Edward Herbert (Baron Herbert of Cherbury) and John Locke. They were succeeded by rationalists of various stripes and hues as well as by evangelicals and pietists.

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[50] Ibid., 2:81–83.
[51] Ibid., 2:97.
[52] Ibid., 2:98–102.
[53] Ibid., 2:104–5.
[54] Ibid., 2:122–23.
[55] Ibid., 2:125–34.

In Germany the sequence was different. There rationalism followed Pietism and was deeply influenced by it. While the Enlightenment proved destructive of the orthodoxy of many, it was itself unable to withstand the withering critique aimed at it by such thinkers as Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Kant's "analysis of the concept of moral autonomy in the light of the principle of radical evil … demonstrated the superficiality of the moralism of the Enlightenment," as did Schleiermacher's "rejection of the equation of religion and morality [and his] demonstration of the heteronomous character of man's soteriological resources."[57] In their wake, Albrecht Ritschl reintroduced a more objective soteriology based upon "the centrality of God's redemptive action in history, with its associated (and subsequent) human response and obligations." Ritschl viewed religions in general and Christianity in particular as fundamentally soteriological. Through the intrusion of Hellenistic metaphysics, however, Christianity had become corrupted into a christologically oriented religion.[58] Thus Ritschl not only was critical of Enlightenment soteriology, but also objected to orthodox formulations, especially their "judicial approach to justification and the concept of original sin."[59]

Liberalism followed Ritschl, and Karl Barth followed liberalism—with a vengeance. Barth's theology, as McGrath describes it, is "an extended reflection upon the fact that God has spoken to man—*Deus dixit*—abrogating the epistemological chasm separating them in so doing."[60] Barth's theological system, as a result, is a progressive unfolding of the inner meaning and manifold implications of the fact that God has spoken. As such, it stands in contrast to the anthropocentricity of liberalism. But, observes McGrath, in Barth's system soteriology becomes a necessarily secondary consideration, one dwarfed by the fact of revelation.[61] Nevertheless, Barth's modest soteriological concerns do bear a "remarkable degree of continuity" with the Enlightenment, Schleiermacher, and Ritschl, as well as "a close affinity with the theological framework of the liberal school, despite substantial differences."[62]

McGrath draws three important conclusions from his study of justification:

1. There is a general consensus of the church that the human situation has been transformed through the action of God in Christ.

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[56] Ibid., 2:136.
[57] Ibid., 2:158.
[58] Ibid., 2:161.
[59] Ibid., 2:165.
[60] Ibid., 2:172.
[61] Ibid., 2:176.
[62] Ibid., 2:179.

2. Although humans are generally understood to be involved in their justification in some manner, the action of God in transforming their situation is based upon the grace of God alone.

3. The development of the doctrine of justification has been neither linear nor continuous, but sporadic and episodic, as well as both relevant and urgent.[63]

(Because space is limited, and because enough has been said already to indicate the nature and scope of McGrath's contribution to the study both of the Reformation and of related ages, issues, and movements, we shall only briefly mention three other significant texts. *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* is a detailed historical account of the theological and philosophical roots of Reformation thought; it points out both the continuity and discontinuity between early Protestant beliefs and their late medieval antecedents. *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* aims to introduce students to Reformation-era theology and its relevance for today. *A Life of John Calvin* traces the origin, development, and influence of Calvin's theology and political thought.)[64]

The Making of Modern German Christology: From the Enlightenment to Pannenberg

McGrath's *Making of Modern German Christology* is "intended to introduce to English-speaking readers the main themes, problems and personalities associated with the development of the Christology of modern German-speaking Protestantism," as well as to "bring up to date the Christological debate within English-speaking circles."[65] Here McGrath specifically mentions his own Church of England—which he believes has largely ignored contemporary questions and concerns and failed in its responsibility to proclaim Christ to the modern world. McGrath selects the Enlightenment as the *terminus a quo* of his study because many scholars now view the Enlightenment as "the most significant development in the intellectual history of the Christian faith—far surpassing the Reformation in this respect."[66] The central christological problem of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment eras, McGrath insists, "is not the ontological problem which dominated the patristic period, but the question of the relationship between revelation and history."[67] By replacing metaphysics with historical understanding, modern Christology has tried to bring the revelation of God in Christ under historical scrutiny. It insists that because this revelation has “taken place within universal history,” it must “be open to historical enquiry.”[68]

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[63] Ibid., 2:189–90.

[64] Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1987); idem, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1988); idem, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study of the Shaping of Western Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990).

[65] Alister E. McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology: From the Enlightenment to Pannenberg* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1986), 1, 216.

[66] Ibid., 1.

[67] Ibid., 2.

According to McGrath, the Enlightenment reliance upon human reason as the final arbiter of truth represented a “cognitive crisis.” “The world of the *Aufklärung,”* he writes, “was essentially a rational cosmos in which man, as a rational being, works towards his own moral perfection through conforming himself to the rational structure of the cosmos.” Having declared themselves epistemologically and morally autonomous, Enlightenment thinkers fell into conflict with orthodoxy, which declared that “man’s intellect was blinded so that he could not see into the divine mind, and his will perverted so that he could not function as an autonomous moral agent.”[69]

Given its emphasis on reason, the Enlightenment transformed Christ into a mere teacher and exemplar, one who embodied “the fully realized potential of every rational individual.” Christianity, like Christ, became “essentially ethical in character.”[70] In his *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger,* Hermann Reimarus argued that Jesus was merely a disillusioned apocalyptic Jew whose views had “a purely limited temporal reference and relevance.” The resurrection was a fraud perpetrated and perpetuated by the apostles, who also elevated Jesus to supernatural status. Thus, Reimarus wrote, one could—and should—“distinguish between the Jesus of history and the later beliefs of the apostolic church.”[71]

Like Reimarus, Gotthold Lessing attacked the apostolic picture of Christ, insisting that “even if there were reasons for supposing that a supernatural event had taken place in the history of Jesus, … [it is] impossible to deduce a doctrinal or metaphysical truth from a factual or historical event.” This led to Lessing’s now famous declaration that the “accidental truths of history can never become the necessary truths of reason.” The most one can expect from history is a mere corroboration of “the truths which reason itself [has] discovered”; history “[cannot] be permitted to establish them in the first place.”[72]

The *Aufklärung* was set in retreat by two very different movements—the empiricism of British writers like David Hume and the romanticism of German writers like Novalis and Friedrich Scheiermacher, whose fundamental axiom concerned the way individualized human sentiment is oriented toward the infinite. Profoundly christocentric, Schleiermacher’s *Glaubenslehre* is “constructed around the antithesis of sin and grace—that is, around man’s need for redemption, and the actuality of this redemption in Jesus Christ.”[73] To Schleiermacher, human God-consciousness, not reason, was the irreducible foundation of religious belief. This led him to conclude that “Jesus may only be approached through the experience of his benefits as mediated in the historical continuity of the community of faith." Christology, then, was not a function of Enlightenment reason, but a "reflection upon historically and socially mediated experience."[74] While the theologians of the *Aufklärung* conceived of Christianity and human destiny rationally, Schleiermacher preferred to express them religiously, in terms of God-consciousness. By means of his critique of rationalism, Schleiermacher "opened the door for the new Christological developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."[75]

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[68] Ibid., 3.
[69] Ibid., 11.
[70] Ibid., 13.
[71] Ibid., 15.
[72] Ibid., 16.
[73] Ibid., 19–20.

The unique brand of idealism advocated by Georg Hegel, Schleiermacher's contemporary, exercised considerable influence over christological studies in the mid-nineteenth century. Hegel's fundamental contribution hinged upon his distinction between *Vorstellung* ("representation") and *Begriff* ("concept"). This distinction enabled him to critique various forms of religious expression without sacrificing philosophical rigor. For Hegel, "the supreme religious *Vorstellung* from which theological and philosophical speculation may begin … is empirically and objectively grounded in the history of Jesus of Nazareth."[76] Though such *Vorstellungen* occur in all religions implicitly, in Christianity they are explicit, thus rendering Christianity the substance of which all other religions are merely the shadow. As McGrath explains, the *Vorstellung* of the incarnation is transformed into the *Begriff* of theology by means of a process of reflection. This reflection, however, inevitably increases the epistemic distance between history and concept.

Later, David Strauss, Ferdinand Baur, and Ludwig Feuerbach transformed Hegel's mental distance into a chasm. Strauss did so by subjecting the Gospels to historical examination based upon naturalistic assumptions. His historical criteria served to identify and to set aside the supposedly mythical elements in the Gospel accounts. According to Strauss, "because the idea of 'resurrection' includes the obviously supernatural idea of the return to life of a dead man, a rational observer is forced to conclude 'either Jesus was not really dead or he did not really rise again.' "[77] Strauss simply replaced the *Vorstellung* of incarnational history with the *Begriff* of his own speculations, which he believed to be as existentially satisfying as and considerably more precise than myth.[78]

Although greatly influenced by Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* as a young man, Baur later grew to reject its Christology as insufficiently historical. It was his contention that "unless theology begins with the historical Jesus, in terms of a critical analysis of the gospel accounts, he will never be found." For Baur, "the key to a correct understanding of the significance of Jesus of Nazareth lay in a critical study of Christian origins."[79] The Gospel of John was the text that polarized Baur and Schleiermacher. For the latter, John's Gospel "was the most nearly continuous, complete and historically reliable portrait of Jesus," while for the former the fourth Gospel was "a source for the theology of the early church, rather than a source for the history of Jesus of Nazareth."[80] Baur differed not only from Scheiermacher, but also from Hegel. "For Hegel," McGrath explains, "Christianity was primarily about a concept (*Begriff*); … for Baur, Christianity was primarily about a *person,"* a person of history.[81]

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[74] Ibid., 20–21.
[75] Ibid., 26.
[76] Ibid., 33.
[77] Ibid., 37.
[78] Ibid., 38.
[79] Ibid., 39–40.

After a brief survey of Feuerbach's reductionistic anthropotheism, McGrath focuses on liberal theologians from Albrecht Ritschl to Adolf von Harnack and on the pictures of Christ that they developed. Ritschl's point of departure was his insistence that "Christ's *person* must be determined from his *work,"* a notion based upon Ritschl's conviction that Christianity is concerned primarily with the action of God and the action of humans in relation to one another.[82] According to Ritschl, Christ's uniqueness consists largely in his status as the historical founder of the Christian community. His primacy is historical rather than ontological. But "although Jesus may be viewed as a man objectively, faith recognizes him as having the religious value of God."[83] Thus Christ has a unique status within the community of faith. But this unique status does not imply that we have direct or immediate contact with God. The presence of God is always a mediated presence, mediated in the community of faith. As McGrath explains, "the presence of Christ is to be understood as the spatio-temporal extension of the ideas and principles represented in his person within the community of faith."[84]

The quintessential liberal portrait of Christ was not Ritschl's, but Harnack's. Harnack distinguished carefully between the religion of Jesus and the religion about him that arose later. McGrath identifies in Harnack's version of the religion of Jesus "three circles of thought, each of which contains the whole proclamation of the gospel: the coming of the Kingdom of God; the fatherhood of God and the infinite value of the human soul; the higher righteousness and the commandment of love."[85] The religion about Jesus, as it developed over time, was a "gradual adulteration of the original Palestinian gospel through the infiltration of Greek philosophy."[86] The historian of theology's task, declared Harnack, is to identify the irreducible element in the gospel by eliminating from it the unnecessary accretions added over the centuries. The principal example of this Hellenization in the realm of Christology is the Chalcedonian definition of the two natures in Christ. To reverse the process of theological accretion, the historian of theology has to employ proper historiographic principles. "Harnack thus replaced the traditional dogmatic criterion of the *doctrines* of Christianity with the historical criterion of the *nature* of Christianity, by which the fundamental principles (*Grundzüge*) of the gospel might be established and verified through a critical historical analysis which isolated the distinctive essence (*das Wesen*) of Christianity from the temporary historical forms in which it manifested itself."[87]

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[80] Ibid., 40.
[81] Ibid., 41.
[82] Ibid., 57.
[83] Ibid., 58.
[84] Ibid., 56.
[85] Ibid., 68 n. 43.
[86] Ibid., 60.

Harnack's liberalism was short-lived, being superseded by the work of Johannes Weiss, Martin Kähler, and Ernst Troeltsch. In his brief *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* Weiss rediscovered, as it were, the eschatological nature of Jesus' message. As Weiss understood it, Jesus preached an apocalyptic kingdom which God himself would bring about in the near future. Jesus did not initiate the kingdom, Weiss argued; he merely preached repentance. His penitential ethic was the way by which his followers would prepare themselves for the coming of the kingdom. The kingdom of God was "thus the motive for ethics, rather than its embodiment."[88] The kingdom of God was not the result of human insight and development over time, insight gained from liberal reflections on the teachings of Jesus; rather, the kingdom "comes as a catastrophe from heaven."[89]

Kähler's *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* was designed "to establish an invulnerable area of faith in the midst of the crisis which he correctly perceived to be developing."[90] By exposing the hitherto unacknowledged dogmatic presuppositions of both the *Aufklärung* and the liberal school, Kähler effectively challenged their Christology. Their efforts, Kähler insisted, were "a blind alley."[91] To be properly understood, Christ must be viewed as a suprahistorical being rather than as a merely historical figure. To view him as the latter leads only to Arianism or Ebionism. This reduces Christian piety from "worship of God to worship of a hero."[92] Kähler, by contrast, avoided all such consequences because he was far more interested in what Christ did than in what Christ was. That is, Kähler's focus was soteriological, not ontological. He believed the "pseudo-scientific Christ" of the life-of-Jesus movement to be "devoid of existential significance."[93]

But it was Troeltsch who was the undoing of the liberal Christ. Troeltsch noted that the Ritschlians based their ideas on a "discredited supernaturalism," whereas his own work was based upon a "consistent historicism … which … alters everything until it finally explodes the entire structure of theological methods employed until the present."[94] In his view, the radical application of the historical method leads to the dissolution of dogmatics because it exposes as spurious the connection between sober history and dogmatic speculation. In light of what he believed to be his withering critique, Troeltsch thought liberalism had to die. In large part it did.

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[87] Ibid., 59.
[88] Ibid., 72.
[89] Ibid., 73.
[90] Ibid., 76.
[91] Ibid., 78.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 79.
[94] Ibid., 83.

The vacuum was filled by the dialectical theology of Karl Barth and the dialogical theology of Emil Brunner. In Barth's view, one had to choose between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Unlike Harnack, he chose the latter. He did so as a reaction to the nineteenth-century *Zeitgeist.* His *Römerbrief* (1919) stressed both the otherness of God and the hopelessness and irrelevance of historicism, especially regarding God in Christ. Barth believed that "God's revelation can no more be pinned down in human history than a bird in flight. … In Jesus, God becomes a secret, making himself known as the unknown, speaking in eternal silence."[95]

In contrast Brunner held that "God reveals himself within the historical process, and supremely in the work of Christ."[96] God's revelation of himself is both personal and historical. Furthermore, it is "necessarily Christocentric."[97] This christocentric revelation, Brunner warns, must be understood biblically rather than philosophically.[98] We must eschew the false objectivism of the early church, which relied too heavily on Greek philosophy. For Brunner, religious truth is personal, not propositional; and it is an act of God, not something from the world of ideas.[99] In his later years, Barth rejected his Kierkegaardian dialecticism and adopted a view closer to Brunner's, differing primarily on anthropological grounds, grounds that rendered Brunner's God-human dialogue a divine monologue only and Barth's Christology far less history-bound than Brunner's.[100] The differences, McGrath contends, are considerable—they "mark the end of a road" and necessitate regarding Barth's theology as premodern.[101]

By the early 1940s the influence of the dialectical/dialogical theology of Barth and Brunner began to wane, being eclipsed by Rudolf Bultmann's kerygmatic/existentialist theology, which declared that a modern individual cannot accept the mythological framework of the New Testament proclamation of Christ. One needs "to reinterpret the mythology of the New Testament anthropologically, or *existentially.*"[102] Bultmann had in mind the existentialism of Martin Heidegger. McGrath explains:

> Bultmann's theology may be regarded as an ellipse constructed around two foci: first, the programme of demythologization, or existential interpretation, of the New Testament; second, the idea of *kerygma*, the proclamation of a divine word addressed to man, occasioning a crisis and demanding an existential decision on his part. … For Bultmann, the *kerygma* is the word of proclamation through which the Christ-event confronts the individual here and now. The word of God becomes a *personal* word of God, addressed to the individual, striking his conscience and demanding a decision. … The *existentially*

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[95] Ibid., 96.
[96] Ibid., 102.
[97] Ibid., 103.
[98] Ibid., 101.
[99] Ibid., 103.
[100] Ibid., 105–6.
[101] Ibid., 110–15.
[102] Ibid., 129.

> *significant* Christ is not "Christ according to the flesh," but the "preached Christ," the Christ who is present in the *kerygma.*[103]

The Christology of Paul Tillich was also influenced by Heidegger, his onetime colleague at Marburg. Tillich held that "the event upon which Christianity is based has two aspects: the fact which is called 'Jesus of Nazareth,' and the reception of this fact by those who received him as Christ."[104] Because Tillich posited such a radical disjunction between faith and history, his Christology was more idealist than biblical or historical. At best, McGrath concludes, we are "presented with a philosophy of existence which attaches itself to the existence of Jesus of Nazareth in the most tenuous of manners."[105]

According to later Bultmannians like Gerhard Ebeling, faith cannot and should not be seen as *fides historica,* for "faith is an existential attitude, and most emphatically does not have an object. … Faith concerns what gives existence stability."[106] In Ebeling's construction "the only historical fact on which Christology is based is the cross"; nothing else in the Gospels is to be regarded as objective history.[107] Thus "Jesus is not the *content* of faith," but "its evoker, or cause, … he is the *ground* of faith."[108] Ebeling's theology, then, is existentialist. It is also kerygmatic in that he believes that "the crucial aspect of Christology is that the *event* of the cross has become the *word* of the cross."[109]

But Bultmann's unhistorical Christ soon began to elicit objections, first from Ernst Käsemann and Joachim Jeremias, but most significantly from Wolfhart Pannenberg.[110] Rather than grounding his Christology in a philosophical analysis of existence or in an ancient kerygma, Pannenberg chose to ground it in universal history, which is itself an indirect revelation of God. McGrath explains, "For Pannenberg, revelation is essentially an historical event interpreted as an act of God."[111] Because the significance of a revelatory event can be fully understood only from the standpoint of the end of history, it must be interpreted proleptically. Accordingly, ancient apocalypticism looms large in Pannenberg's theological agenda both because it informs the historical background of Jesus' life and teaching, and because it provides the eschatological perspective from which to view events before the end of time. "In that the end of history is disclosed in the resurrection of Jesus, and in that history discloses the acts of God which can only be fully interpreted as revelation from the standpoint of the *end* of history, Pannenberg is able to argue that the resurrection establishes Jesus as the final revelation of God."[112] Thus, for Pannenberg, "Christianity ultimately rests upon an *event,* rather than an *idea."*[113]

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[103] Ibid., 133, 138, 140.
[104] Ibid., 145.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., 146.
[107] Ibid., 147.
[108] Ibid., 148.
[109] Ibid., 149.
[110] Ibid., 162.
[111] Ibid., 165.

McGrath completes his survey of modern German Christology by examining the work of Jürgen Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel. Moltmann's approach is based on the idea that "Christology is *totally* eschatological."[114] Ours is a religion of expectation based upon the death and resurrection of Christ. Moltmann sees the death of Jesus as a statement about God, for in the cross of Christ "the Father suffers the grief of the loss of his Son, and the Son suffers the agony of God-forsakenness. The Father delivers up his Son on the cross in order that he may be the Father of all those who are delivered up; the Son is delivered up to this death in order to become the Lord of both the dead and the living."[115] So then, "the *historical* event of the crucifixion gives solace and strength to those presently suffering, and the *eschatological* event of the resurrection of the one who was crucified points to the final eschatological resolution of human suffering."[116] Echoing Moltmann's distaste for metaphysical theology, Jüngel also focuses upon the cross of Christ. He "locates the origin of all heresy in the refusal or reluctance to recognize God in Jesus Christ. Theology is therefore concerned with the unfolding of the knowledge of God which is to be had from the crucified Christ."[117] However, "it is not clear, at points, whether Jüngel is suggesting that God is *identical* with, or that God *identifies himself* with, the crucified Jesus."[118]

In summing up, McGrath notes that modern German Christology has had three dominant concerns: "(1) history; (2) the nature of the New Testament sources for Christology; and (3) the apocalyptic nature of the New Testament sources."[119] Under the influence of these three overriding concerns, "Christology has undergone a radical change in the last two centuries, perhaps even greater than at any previous period."[120] The most important modern theologians do not focus on the issues that occupied their ancient and medieval predecessors. McGrath says that those (predominantly English-speaking) theologians who do not address the modern questions have failed to proclaim Christ to today's world. The chief purpose of his writing *The Making of Modern German Christology* has been to bring them into the discussion.[121]

The Genesis of Doctrine

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[112] Ibid., 173.
[113] Ibid., 176.
[114] Ibid., 186.
[115] Ibid., 190–91.
[116] Ibid., 191.
[117] Ibid., 196.
[118] Ibid., 195.
[119] Ibid., 212.
[120] Ibid., 215–16.
[121] Ibid., 216.

The Genesis of Doctrine is in part a historical analysis of "how the phenomenon of doctrine arose, how it has been understood, and how the past has been restructured and reappropriated by Christian theologians, especially in the modern period."[122] But the book is not purely historical in character; it also employs a creative dialectic which is, on one hand, historical and descriptive and, on the other, theological and prescriptive.[123]

"Reappropriation of the doctrinal heritage of the Christian tradition," McGrath observes, "is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks confronting contemporary theology." Too often theologians approach this task uncritically. The result is either "an uncritical *affirmation* of the Christian tradition" or "an uncritical *rejection*" of it. To evaluate this heritage properly, McGrath contends, one must turn to the discipline of doctrinal criticism, which "seeks to evaluate the reliability and adequacy of doctrinal formulations of the Christian tradition by identifying what they purport to represent, clarifying the pressures and influences which led to their genesis, and suggest- ing criteria—historical and theological—by which they may be evaluated, and, if necessary, restated."[124]

McGrath begins by taking a look at George Lindbeck's *Nature of Doctrine* and its threefold classification of existing theories of doctrine: cognitive-propositionalist theories emphasize "the manner in which doctrines function as truth claims or informative propositions"; experiential-expressive theories view "doctrines as noncognitive symbols of inner human feelings or attitudes"; and cultural-linguistic theories focus upon the rule or regulative aspects of doctrine.[125] In response McGrath develops his own view of the nature and history of Christian doctrine, positing a fourfold delineation of doctrine as social demarcation, interpretation of scriptural narrative, interpretation of experience, and truth claims, a schematization he believes more fully captures "the polymorphic and polyvalent character of doctrine."[126] Without "prejudging the question of what doctrine *ought* to be," McGrath sets out under these four headings a historical description of what doctrine actually was and is.[127]

First, because "there is an obvious need for a religious group to define itself in relation to other religious groups and to the world in general," Christian doctrine serves as a social demarcation. It helps a given religious group to satisfy their "need for social definition" and ideological legitimation.[128] In other words, doctrine "assists in defining both the limits of, and the conditions for entering, a religious community." It also helps to define "communities of discourse."[129]

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[122] Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990), viii.

[123] Ibid., ix.

[124] Ibid., vii.

[125] Ibid., 14.

[126] Ibid., 33.

[127] Ibid., 37.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Ibid., 38.

Second, doctrine functions as a communal interpretation of Christianity's foundational narrative, the Gospel accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. As such, Christian doctrine helps to preserve the church's identity, self-consciousness, and values.[130] In so doing, doctrine serves as the bearer and interpreter of tradition, thus illuminating the present and opening up options for the future.[131] "Doctrine provides the conceptual framework by which the scriptural narrative is interpreted. It is not an arbitrary framework, however, but one which is suggested by [the Gospel] narrative, and intimated by scripture itself."[132]

Third, despite the fact that words cannot fully express or define religious experience (indeed experience of any kind), Christian doctrine is concerned to communicate the communal experiences of the church. Though "human words, and the categories they express, are stretched to their limits as they attempt to encapsulate, to communicate, something which tantalizingly refuses to be reduced to words," and though "Christian doctrine … is obligated to express in historical forms, in words, those things which by their nature defy reduction to these forms, there is a fundamental resonance between words and experience."[133] This resonance arises from "the communicability of emotion and feelings *through* words, despite their innate ineducability *to* words. The communal Christian experience may be communicated verbally to those who have yet to discover it, in such a manner that an individual may, in the first place, experience it, and in the second, recognize this experience for what it is."[134]

Fourth, "there is an ineradicable cognitive element to Christian doctrine. … It purports to be a representation, however provisional, of the way things really are, in response to the questions arising from the history of Jesus of Nazareth." Thus, while "it is impossible to represent God exhaustively at the cognitive level, [it is] possible to represent him adequately for the purposes of Christian proclamation and existence."[135] Christian doctrine constitutes "a communal claim to possession of significant true insights concerning God and humanity. It is the intellectual self-expression of a living and thinking community."[136] "To speak of doctrine as 'truth,' " McGrath explains, "is rightly to draw attention to the fundamental Christian conviction that doctrine has to do with veridicality, rationality, and comprehensive elucidation."[137] Following Brunner, McGrath also affirms that Christian "truth is something which *happens,"* and that it involves an encounter with Jesus Christ, the source of Christian truth.[138]

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130 Ibid., 52.
131 Ibid., 53.
132 Ibid., 58–59.
133 Ibid., 67–69.
134 Ibid., 70.
135 Ibid., 75.
136 Ibid., 72–73.
137 Ibid., 78–79.
138 Ibid., 74, 79.

To set the stage for his own theoretical model for properly understanding and employing the history of doctrine, McGrath traces how the authority of the past was both understood and appropriated in the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment, and by modern historians of dogma (from Baur to Harnack). McGrath's model resembles, but does not imitate, Harnack's:

> While the suggestion, implicit within much *Dogmengeschichte,* that doctrine is an outmoded form articulating Christian insights must be regarded as implausible, the assertion that history must be permitted to criticize doctrine remains valid, to the point of being of crucial importance in the contemporary task of evaluating and reappropriating the doctrinal heritage of the Christian tradition. The intellectual and historical credentials of this heritage must be investigated, with a view to ascertaining how and why a given doctrine gained its plausibility within the community of faith, with a view to eliminating those found to be deficient.[139]

McGrath's view relies heavily upon the Marxist framework of Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Concept of History"; indeed, McGrath lauds Benjamin as "possibly the most important cultural theorist within the Marxist tradition."[140] Benjamin's basic principle "is that the present moment involves the intermingling of the past and present. … The past injects an impulse into the historical continuum, which is appropriated at specific subsequent periods, if ignored by others. … [Though] the past is dead, in the sense that it is chronologically discharged—yet the present moment is able to salvage at least part of its heritage, and assimilate it. There is a sense of solidarity with the past."[141] McGrath is drawn to Benjamin's Marxist model because it "incorporates the notion of historical development … with the pervasive and observable tendency of the present to 'recollect'—in the dual sense of 'remember' and 'pick up again'—the past. … The past is not regarded as dead; rather, it is viewed as a source of creative impulses, running parallel to the continuum of history, which may impose themselves upon that continuum."[142]

A chief benefit of adopting Benjamin's model is its implication "that the phenomenon of reappropriation of the *doctrinal* heritage of the past involves no special claims for Christian theology; rather, it illustrates a general tendency of human historical and cultural reflection."[143] Moreover, Benjamin's model is capable of being reworked christologically. "The memory of Jesus of Nazareth," McGrath explains, "embodied in specific historical forms and traditions, pervades the historical continuum, and is capable of being 'recollected' or 'remembered' throughout history. It is the generative event of the history of the communities of faith. … The history of doctrine may therefore be approached as a process of recollection, of recalling the fundamental impulse of Christian faith and communal reflection."[144]

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[139] Ibid., 151.

[140] Ibid., 166. For the text of the theses see Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften,* 3 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972–80), 2:691–704.

[141] McGrath, *Genesis,* 168.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Ibid., 169.

Because truth, as the Christian community of faith understands it, centers on an event—the Christ event— Christian doctrine arises in response to the history of Christ. Thus "Christianity is characterized by its tendency to insist that 'God' is Christologically specified." We Christians "are constrained in our thinking about 'God' by the transmitted history of Jesus of Nazareth."[145] Individual Christians "do not begin their quest for knowledge [about God] *de novo,* as if they were isolated from society and history. … The Christian faith does not come into existence in a conceptual vacuum, but is both generated and informed by a corporate tradition—the proclamation of the community of faith. … Indeed, underlying the affirmation 'I believe in Christ' may be detected a latent 'I believe in the church.' "[146]

McGrath by no means advocates an uncritical acceptance of tradition; in fact, he insists that it is "open to verification or falsification."[147] But he does reject the cavalier dismissal of the past by the Enlightenment, a dismissal he characterizes as sociologically naive, phenomenologically inaccurate, and ideologically conditioned. The Enlightenment rejection of history and tradition is self-stultifying: "There are no tradition-independent standards of argument or reason available by which the Christian tradition may be evaluated. All inquiry begins from some specific social and intellectual past. … All criteria have a history."[148]

McGrath concludes by insisting that theological reconstructionism proceed by means of "critical evaluation and reappropriation of the doctrinal heritage of the Christian tradition."[149] This tradition is handed both *down* and *over* to us. Thus the doctrinal heritage of the Christian faith is "both a gift and a task, an inheritance and responsibility. What our forebears in the Christian faith passed down to us must be appropriated, in order that we may wrestle with it within our own situation, before passing it on to those whose day has yet to dawn."[150]

McGrath is currently at work on a projected three-volume systematic theology that will explore the ways in which the cross functions as the centerpiece of Christian thinking. Volume 1, *The Cross of Christ and the Glory of God,* deals with the foundations of Christian theology, namely Scripture, Christ, and the cross. Volume 2, *The Cross of Christ and the Redemption of the World,* will focus on the relation between the person and the work of Christ, as well as on the nature of redemption. Volume 3, *The Cross of Christ and the Community of Faith,* will be a detailed discussion of the way the cross shapes the Christian church, especially its worship, its ministry, and its hope. In addition, McGrath has been commissioned to write a biography of J. I. Packer.

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[144] Ibid., 170.
[145] Ibid., 175.
[146] Ibid., 177–78.
[147] Ibid., 185.
[148] Ibid., 192–93.
[149] Ibid., 198.
[150] Ibid., 200.

McGrath's considerable reputation as a popularizer of theology rests upon the success of his *Understanding Jesus, Understanding the Trinity,* and *Understanding Doctrine,* which are vivid, entertaining, and enlightening.[151] Energetic scholar, effective teacher, committed churchman, McGrath has already made his mark on modern evangelical theology. Because he is still young and so prolific, our summary of his work can be only an interim report. We eagerly anticipate those contributions yet to come.

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[151] Alister E. McGrath, *Understanding Jesus: Who Jesus Christ Is and Why He Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987); idem, *Understanding the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988); and idem, *Understanding Doctrine: Its Purpose and Relevance for Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).