

DIVINE FORGIVENESS AS EXPERIENCED EVENT

An Outline for a Contemporary-Conservative Doctrine of Justification

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Current radical theology to the contrary notwithstanding, God is not ontologically dead; and even the contention that the symbol "God" is linguistically dead has only limited validity. But the metaphorical language historically associated with the doctrine of justification is indeed close to death; it is no longer an adequate vehicle for conveying an understanding of this doctrine. There are two principal reasons for this. In the first place, the traditional vocabulary labors under the intrinsic limitation and one-sidedness of each term, as evident for example in the juridical origin and connotation of the term "justification" itself. In the second place, the terminology has been reinterpreted so often and so radically that it now carries scarcely any theological freight at all. It is our purpose, therefore, briefly to indicate what may be understood as a "Christian doctrine of justification" without employing such terminology as "justification," "sanctification," "regeneration," "reconciliation," "atonement," "redemption," "conversion," and "grace."

At the same time, however, it is hoped that this may be not simply an exercise in translation, but a constructive outline within a context of conservative, but contemporary (and therefore necessarily critical), Protestant thought. That is, the objective is an interpretative restatement of the New Testament witness to the event and experience of divine forgiveness, at the same time making use of what can be learned in dialogue with historical and contemporary Christian

thought.¹ Yet the hope of accomplishment is tempered by Barth's question: "Even when we have done our best, which of us can think that we have even approximately mastered the subject, or spoken even a penultimate word in explanation of it?"²

I

A preliminary clarification of "forgiveness as event" is in order. This "event" is not to be understood in the sense of a *de novo* decision, action, or attitude of God in connection with or response to human attitude or experience; for divine forgiveness is properly understood as eternal, that is, outside the created, temporal order. This is the fundamental meaning of the much-abused doctrine of election: forgiveness and acceptance is not something new and recent even in regard to individual man, but is rather a steady, constant element in the being of God; forgiveness is the way God *is* toward man as

¹ In addition to observing its primary responsibility to the data of the New Testament, any new statement of a Christian doctrine of justification must be attentive to its distinguished predecessors in the history of theology. Some of the most important of these are in Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, qq. 109-14, "Treatise on Grace"; Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, on 3: 1-5 and 4: 1-7, *Lectures on Galatians* (1535), "Argument" and on 2: 15-21; Melancthon, *Apology for the Augsburg Confession*, arts. 4-6; Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. III, chs. 11-18; *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Sixth Session, "Concerning Justification"; J. Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, Sermon V, "Justification by Faith"; F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, secs. 106-112; A. B. Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, chs. 1-3.

The most significant recent formulations are in R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, II, chs. 4-5; K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, sec. 61, and IV/2, sec. 66; E. Brunner, *Dogmatics*, III, chs. 10-22; P. Tillich, *The Courage to Be and Systematic Theology*, III, pt. IV, sec. III-A-3; H. Küng, *Justification*, pt. 2. On the development of Seventh-day Adventist thought about justification, see N. F. Pease, *By Faith Alone* (Mountain View, Calif., 1962), pp. 107-224.

To keep the present outline as concise as possible, references to Biblical and other materials have been severely limited and in general confined to footnotes.

² Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, 1936-), IV/2, 519.

sinner.³ Essentially eternal, the divine forgiveness was enacted in human history in the person of Jesus Christ,⁴ in whom the constant *attitude* of forgiveness expressed itself as the supreme *act* of forgiveness as God Himself participated in the catastrophic consequences of human sin.⁵

"Forgiveness as event" is therefore to be understood in the sense of a new experience of individual man, in which the divine attitude and action becomes effective in recognition, acknowledgment, and response. This is the human action of faith, and "in this action, and this action alone, [God's] pardon actually comes fully into its own."⁶ Yet this event is not merely the joyous discovery of a religious fact (*e.g.*, the fact that God is not really angry after all, so that the experience of existential guilt is an illusion).⁷ The event involves an actually changed relationship, analogous to the changed relationship involved in the event of human forgiveness.⁸

³ Mt 25 : 34; Eph 1 : 4-5; Rom 8 : 28-30.

⁴ 2 Ti 1 : 9-10; 1 Pe 1 : 19-20. Rev 13 : 8 is ambiguous; the text may mean either "whose name has not been written in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world" (cf. KJV) or "whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain" (RSV). If the former was intended, the passage may be cited here; if the latter, it belongs with those cited above, n. 3.

⁵ Col 1 : 19-20; Rom 3 : 23-24; 5 : 8-9. Cf. Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (New York, 1964), p. 231: "The decisive element in the sinner's justification is found not in the individual but in the death and resurrection of Christ. It was there that our situation was actually changed; there the essential thing happened." Cf. also G. Schrenk's article on *δικαιος, δικαιοσύνη, δικαίω*, etc., in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1963-), II, 178-225.

⁶ Rom 3 : 26; Barth, IV/1, 615. Cf. Rom 3 : 28, 30; 4 : 5; Gal 2 : 16; 3 : 8, 11, 24.

⁷ Schleiermacher can easily be interpreted as being headed in this wrong direction; cf. *The Christian Faith*, (New York, 1963), pp. 270-314, 476-524.

⁸ Not only does the one offended overcome all hostility and resentment in response to the offense, and offer himself to the offender in personal communion, declaring that no moral barrier exists between them; but also the offender, on his part, forgoes any attempt at self-justification and repudiates any hostility that may have prompted or

Forgiveness is *experienced*, and in the experience of divine forgiveness, the experience of divine-human reunion, God communicates Himself to individual man in a new way—a way so new that the experience is properly said to inaugurate a new mode of human being.⁹

So, although the divine forgiveness may be, and indeed must be, considered as eternal and non-temporal in the being of God, and as historically enacted in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, the focus of the present outline is divine forgiveness as a personal event in the life of individual man.

II

Having just explained that we are concerned with divine forgiveness as an experienced event in the life of individual man, we must immediately insist that it is by no means an independent event, and that it can be adequately understood only in the context of the divine activity in Christ which is continuous in human time and universal in human space. The relationship of the universal, continuous activity of God to the event in the life of individual man may be clarified by considering the divine activity in terms of four constituent elements, all of which are prior to the experience of forgiveness logically and chronologically, but which also continue in one way or another so that they are finally simultaneous with the experienced event. Because all four elements represent the free activity of God (free because man does nothing to earn them and because God is not under any external requirement to perform them), we shall refer to them as prior divine "gifts."

accompanied the offense, offering himself to the one offended in a renewal of the communion broken by the offense, and affirming that no moral barrier exists between them. Thus (to use the familiar Tillichian language) forgiveness is experienced as the overcoming of personal estrangement, the reunion of that which has been separated. This is much more than the discovery of a psychological fact.

⁹ "New creation": 2 Cor 5 : 17; Gal 6 : 15. "New man": Eph 4 : 24; Col 3 : 10. Cf. Tillich's soteriological image, "the New Being."

First is the gift of creation, which as far as man is concerned comprises the gift of existence and the gift of humanness. Individual man, in common with all other existent entities, receives his being as a gift from God; the only answer to the ancient question, "Why is there something and not nothing?" is (in one sense) simple: "Because God wants something and not nothing to be."¹⁰ Man also receives as a gift his humanness—the peculiar being of human being, characterized by a conscious relationship and response to the divine, which is to say, by a moral/religious freedom.¹¹

Second is the gift of continued existence in spite of sin. Sin amounts to a self-determination toward non-being; for it is, negatively, a turning away from God, the only ground of being, and positively, a turning toward the human self, which has no independent being. Having exercised his fundamental freedom to choose non-being, man may appropriately expect the actualization of his decision. The only explanation for the continued existence of sinful man is the divine postponement of the inevitable consequence of sin, in order to make forgiveness possible as a human experience, and because forgiveness is already a fact in the being of God.¹²

Third is the gift of revelation—the presentation of an alternative to the experience of sin, guilt, and non-being. For individual man must know both that there is an alternative and what it is before he can apprehend it and make it his

¹⁰ Jn 1 : 3; Col 1 : 16-17.

¹¹ Barth, *op. cit.*, III/1, 231: "What God created when He created the world and man was not just any place, but that which was fore-ordained for the establishment and the history of the covenant, nor just any subject, but that which was to become God's partner in this history, *i.e.*, the nature which God in His grace willed to address and accept and the man predestined for his service. The fact that the covenant is the goal of creation is not something which is added later to the reality of the creature, as though the history of creation might equally have been succeeded by any other history. It already characterises creation itself and as such, and therefore the being and existence of the creature."

¹² Küng, *op. cit.*, p. 179: "If sinful man were in an *absolutely graceless* state, then man would not be left like a piece of wood with no will, but rather would be cut off from the earth."

own. Therefore the gift of revelation includes a revelation of what God has done and what this means for human being.¹³ God forgives: this is the meaning of human life—both because the fact of continued human life testifies to divine forgiveness, and also because the fact of forgiveness gives meaning to human life. And God has acted in a self-involvement with man in his predicament in such a way that God's involvement is man's deliverance; this is the meaning of the Incarnation and the Cross. Moreover, the gift of revelation also includes a revelation of the possibilities open to man because of what God has done—possibilities which are both immediate (*e.g.*, freedom) and ultimate (transtemporal being with God).

Fourth is the gift of continued humanness,¹⁴ which is to say, intentionality. In spite of sin, God maintains man in the way of being that is peculiarly human; God forgives *men*, not meteorites, evergreen trees, or anthropoid apes. Now human intentionality involves comprehension and volition; thus the gift of continued humanness includes, on the one hand, comprehension of the gift of revelation, and comprehension in turn includes the intellectual capacity for cognition and for the existential apprehension of relevance (*i.e.*, that in Christ God forgives *me*). The gift of continued humanness also includes, on the other hand, volition, which is a matter of willing, wanting, weighing, preferring, choosing.

Volition presupposes awareness and motivation adequate to constitute an actually live option.¹⁵ It is in this sense that faith is too a "gift." The "gift of faith" is not a divine and irresistible bending of the will, which would amount to

¹³ Jn 1 : 14; Heb 1 : 1-3; Rom 3 : 21.

¹⁴ Küng, *op. cit.*, p. 160: "The sinner remains man even in and despite his sin. Why? Because God does not will the destruction of the sinner, but spares him for his change of heart. And why can God spare him? Because He has chosen from eternity to take upon Himself the death of the sinner. Redemption is the reason for the sinner's continuing to exist. . . . Thus the sinner, remaining and remaining man, already participates in the grace of his redemption."

¹⁵ This may be part of the meaning of Jn 8 : 36.

God's making the choice for (*i.e.*, really instead of) man. It is, rather, a "drawing" of man to the point where the response of faith becomes a practical possibility.¹⁶ This drawing is ordinarily effected through the medium of some form of human communication of the Gospel (*i.e.*, of the divine revelation of what God has done and what this means for human being), but it may also perhaps be effected through the immediate operation (whatever this may mean) of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ In any case, this "drawing" of individual man overcomes the bias toward autonomous self-affirmation (*i.e.*, sin) prompted internally by the insecurity arising from individual man's awareness of his finitude, his guilt, and the threat of meaninglessness,¹⁸ and externally by an environment that at worst is hostile to the Gospel and faith, and that at best distorts both.

Thus the various "gifts"—the "elements" of divine activity which merge into and complement one another—form the pre-condition for the human experience of divine forgiveness.

III

The experienced event of divine forgiveness resides in a certain volitional function, namely, a decision of faith. This too is analogous to the experienced event of human forgiveness, which also is known only through the self-disclosure of the one who forgives, and which can be received only by volition.

The decision of faith has passive and active sides. The passive side is an *acknowledgment* of reality—a decision to accept the facts of individual man's existential need and God's

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas' idea that God "moves" the mind in free choice (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 111, a. 2; q. 112, a. 2) can perhaps be understood in terms of motivation rather than efficient cause.

¹⁷ What I am saying here is compatible with either an affirmative or a negative answer to the vexed question of the possibility and/or actuality of a genuine response of faith apart from an encounter with the Christian gospel.

¹⁸ Cf. Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, 1952), pp. 40-57.

gracious activity. In regard to ontological reality, the decision of faith involves an acknowledgment of dependence on something beyond oneself. For existence, man is entirely dependent on God's activity as Creator; for meaning, which is essential to existence insofar as it is human existence,¹⁹ man is entirely dependent on God's function as Lord. In regard to moral reality, the decision of faith involves individual man's acknowledgment of the wrongness and culpability of his own existence—an acknowledgment, in other words, that there is a standard of value outside himself, and that he has not lived appropriately in relation to it, at best ignoring it and pretending that it did not exist, and at worst consciously rebelling against it.²⁰

The active side of the decision of faith is individual man's *response* to the reality of his need and God's activity. This is first of all a response of trust—that is, a reliance on the integrity of God. It is a reliance on (which means a certainty of, confidence in, and dependence upon) the divine forgiveness both as eternal in the being of God and as historical in the Cross of Christ. It is also a corresponding non-reliance on oneself as deserving forgiveness, either because of the worth of past existence or because of the value of present or future response. But the active side of the decision of faith is more than a response of trust; it is also a response of self-commitment—that is, a reliance on the practical relevance of God in the life of individual man. (As the response of trust, which is one aspect of the active side of the decision of faith, corresponds to the acknowledgment of guilt as one aspect of the passive side, so also self-commitment, which is the other aspect of the active side, corresponds to the acknowledgment of ontological dependence as the other aspect of the passive side.)

Self-commitment is a willingness to obey, and thus presup-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51: "The threat to [man's] spiritual being is a threat to his whole being."

²⁰ A particularly strong emphasis on the acknowledgment of guilt marks Luther's early *Lectures on Romans*.

poses the moral/ethical relevance of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The covenant relationship, expressed in the reiterated formula "I am your God and you are my people,"²¹ involves a divine sovereignty over and claim to the lives of those people who would, on their part, experience the covenant relationship.²² On the other hand, however, the response of self-commitment is not an anticipation of perfect obedience,

²¹ Gen 17 : 8; Ex 6 : 7; 19 : 5; Lev 26 : 12; Dt 26 : 17-19; Jer 7 : 23; 11 : 4; 31 : 33; Eze 11 : 20; 14 : 11; Rev 21 : 3. Cf. the idea of "peculiar people" (KJV) in Tit 2 : 14; 1 Pe 2 : 9.

²² This aspect of faith as self-commitment has received insufficient attention in theological formulations. Certainly the Reformation's neglect of it is understandable (albeit unfortunate) in view of the acute fear of every form of legalism. The modern period on the other hand has in general been skeptical of anything that has seemed remotely "heteronomous." To be sure, R. Bultmann has made a great deal of the idea of "radical obedience"; cf. *Jesus and the Word* (New York, 1958), pp. 72-86, and *Theology of the New Testament* (New York, 1951), I, 314-24. But this existentialist ethic is quite different from what I have in mind here as "obedience." Somewhat closer is the early Bonhöffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, 1963), pp. 45-94, exposing the comfortable and complacent "cheap grace" that is not at the same time a call to self-giving obedience. But even here the effective emphasis is on the horizontal, ethical claim upon a Christian obediently to *serve*, without a corresponding emphasis on the vertical, purely religious claim upon him obediently to *worship*. In other, rather Calvinistic terms: there is a tendency for the first table of the Law to be obscured, or even swallowed up, by the second. The same tendency appears in Brunner, *Dogmatics* (London, 1949-62), III, 290-313: although he notes that "in the bestowal of the gift of faith there is always directly implicit the summons to obedience" (p. 297), he dissociates this obedience from any "general rules of obligation," which he sees as a "reintroduction of the law by the back door of the so-called third use of the law" (p. 300). Finally, Küng's omission of the idea of self-commitment from his explanation of justification may be significant here, although it is perhaps to be explained by his specific methodology, namely, a development of parallels between Barth and authentic Tridentine theology.

In short, whether understood religiously or ethically, prescriptively or contextually, obedience has been regularly viewed as a concomitant or consequence of faith, whereas I am here suggesting that a "commitment to obey" or at least a "willingness to obey" is constitutive of faith itself. Barth, indeed, suggests this idea; cf. *op. cit.*, IV/1, 620: "Faith is the humility of obedience." But he does not develop it.

for it is aware that life remains ambiguous, that individual man's pride is not annihilated, and that his ability to control his own reactions is limited.²³ Furthermore, even to the extent that it is actualized, obedience is never intended to become a claim on God's forgiveness. It is always a consequence of the divine activity; the very willingness to obey is, like the response of trust, grounded in God's prior attitude and act of forgiveness. Finally, obedience is not intended to be a "proof" of righteousness;²⁴ it may be an evidence of the response of faith, but the whole point of faith is its total disavowal of one's own righteousness.

So the decision of faith, always an act of human volition grounded in God's prior activity, is both an acknowledgment of individual man's ontological dependence and moral guilt, and a response of trust and self-commitment.

IV

What happens *to* individual man in the experienced event of divine forgiveness? Certainly such an existentially crucial event makes a difference, but how is that difference best understood and described? Just as certainly, a forgiven sinner is still a *sinner*; yet it seems clear that when he is forgiven something is basically changed in the way in which he *is* as a

²³ Barth, *op. cit.*, IV/1, 596: "There is no moment in his life in which [the justified man] does not have to look for and await and with outstretched hands request both forgiveness and therefore freedom from his sins." The whole sub-section, "The Pardon of Man," pp. 568-698 is an exposition of the tension of *simul justus et peccator*. Brunner, *op. cit.*, III, 293: a man "filled by God's Holy Spirit" is "precisely the person who perceives with an exceptional clarity the infinite distance that still separates him from his goal." Cf. also R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York, 1941-43), II, 127-56.

²⁴ Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, tr. W. Pauck (Philadelphia, 1961), p. 123: "'Without works' must be understood . . . to refer to works by the performance of which one thinks he has obtained righteousness, as if one were righteous by virtue of such works or as if God regarded and accepted him as righteous because he did them. . . . It is not so much works, as such, as the interpretation and foolish estimation one applies to them that are disapproved."

sinner.²⁵ This change may be understood under three aspects.

Forgiven man has a changed status: still a sinner, he is nevertheless now *forgiven* as sinner. This is the "forensic" aspect of the change wrought in the experience of forgiveness. It does not, however, ignore the real facts of sinful man's existence. It does not pretend that sin has not happened and will not continue to happen. It does not amount to a declaring righteous (by God) of someone whom everybody (God, the man himself, and the world) knows is *not* righteous. Hence forgiveness cannot be simply "acquittal" in the sense of declaring "not guilty," (*i.e.*, declaring that the man had not sinned).²⁶ This would be a denial of reality, a deception unthinkable on the part of God. Forgiveness is therefore a deliberate "in spite of" or "notwithstanding"—a "taking into account" of sin, but not letting it be determinative of the relationship between God and man. Forgiveness has no meaning apart from a mutual recognition of the fact of sin, past and present.

Yet it must be emphasized that forgiveness in its forensic aspect is not "merely verbal." In many areas of life, words do more than "say"; they commit, they purchase, they betray. In short, they "perform."²⁷ As an event, a wedding is essentially a verbal event; yet the minister's formula, "I pronounce you husband and wife" is not simply a description. These words (together with the expressed vows) in a profound sense

²⁵ With this different mode of being evidently in mind, Küng, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 85, 260-61, and 268, characterizes the change as "ontological."

²⁶ Because "acquit" may mean "discharge from a debt or obligation," the RSV reading of Rom 5:18 is technically correct: "As one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men." But because the more common understanding of "acquit" is "declare not guilty," this reading tends to be misleading.

²⁷ On the "performative" function of language, cf. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (New York, 1965); also D. Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement* (London, 1963), pp. 27-78. Another example of the theological use of this idea is James W. McClendon, "Baptism as a Performative Sign," *ThT*, XXIII (1966-67), 403-16.

change the being of a man and a woman, who now *are* in a new way, *i.e.*, as husband and as wife. Likewise the words "I forgive" are not a description of what one is now doing (cf. "I am listening to the radio"); they are the means of changing the way in which the one who forgives and the one forgiven *are* toward each other. Thus the experienced event of divine forgiveness is a creative event, the inauguration of a new way of being.²⁸ And this brings us to the second aspect of the "change by forgiveness."

Forgiven man is reoriented man; this is the "religious" aspect of the change. There is now a new center of meaning—what God has done and is doing in creation and forgiveness. No longer does human existence derive its meaning from individual man's own self and its accomplishments—or from those apparently-noble but actually-limited extensions of the self: the family, the church, the nation. No longer is life characterized by sequential polytheism.²⁹ For there is (to change the metaphor) a new direction—new goals, aims, and values by which life is guided. This does not necessarily mean a vocational change; what is involved is not so much the content of individual existence and responsibility-in-life as its intention and context,³⁰ not so much *what* is done professionally, but *how* and *why*. (Of course, the reorientation effected by forgiveness may involve a change in vocation; it

²⁸ Barth, *op. cit.*, IV/1, 570: "This pardon does not mean only that something is said concerning us, or, as it were, pasted on us, but that a fact is created, a human situation which is basically altered." Brunner, *op. cit.*, III, 197: as justified, the sinner "receives a new personal being, a new person as his own."

²⁹ H. R. Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York, 1960), p. 77: "As a rule men are polytheists, referring now to this and now to that valued being as the source of life's meaning. Sometimes they live for Jesus' God, sometimes for country and sometimes for Yale. For the most part they make gods out of themselves or out of the work of their own hands, living for their own glory as persons and as communities."

³⁰ Luther's doctrine of the "two realms" says something important about the being of forgiven man even if the dichotomy cannot finally be maintained in the terms Luther uses.

is probably impossible for forgiven man to function with integrity in some vocations.)

Finally, forgiven man is a newly free man; this is the "psychological" aspect of forgiveness. Here the dialectic of existence-as-forgiven is particularly apparent. Man is free in respect to God; yet this does not mean that he has forgotten his sin and guilt. On the contrary, he is more aware of it than ever; yet he is not crushed or dominated by it. He can now act even *coram Deo* with a certain boldness; for although he is aware that he is still a creature and a sinner, he is also aware that he is a creature and sinner whose nature and sin God has taken into himself and overcome.³¹ Forgiven man is also newly free in regard to his fellow men. While he is more aware than ever of human interrelationships and of the impossibility of independent existence, he is not threatened by the possibility of hostility, disregard, or contempt (at least he *need* not be so threatened), for the center of meaning cannot be affected crucially by any man outside himself. On the positive side, forgiven man can accept his unacceptable fellow man without pretending that he is really acceptable, because he is profoundly aware that he himself has been so accepted by God. He can now relate to fellow men without using them. And forgiven man is newly free in respect to himself. More aware than ever of his own ambiguities, he has no longer a need defensively to deny their reality; for his inner security as individual man does not depend on his achievements professionally, socially, or personally. He can now even *begin* to be truly righteous without having to use his righteousness as ego-support.³²

³¹ As Barth emphasizes, the divine Yes underlies, interpenetrates, and finally overcomes the divine No.

³² Brunner, *op. cit.*, III, 200: "Self-justification is no longer *possible* for the man for whom Christ was nailed on the Cross. It is not *necessary* for the man to whom God says 'You are my son.'" It is to the potentialities of this freedom that Jesus pointed in the sayings of Mt 5-7; cf. J. Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount*, N. Perrin, tr. (London, 1961), pp. 32-33: "These sayings of Jesus delineate the lived faith. They say: You are forgiven; you are the child of God; you belong to His kingdom.

Thus what happens in the experience of forgiveness is a fundamental change in the way of being of individual man.

V

The content of this paper may be summarized very briefly: (1) Forgiveness is eternal in the being of God, historically enacted in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth and experienced in the existence of individual man. (2) Forgiveness is predicated on the prior divine gifts of creation, continued existence and humanness in spite of sin, and revelation. (3) Forgiveness is experienced in a decision of faith which comprises an acknowledgment of dependence and guilt and a response of trust and commitment. (4) Forgiveness effects a fundamental change in the way of human being, seen as change of status, reorientation of existence, and new freedom toward God, fellow man, and oneself. And all of this is involved in the meaning of "justification."

... You no longer belong to yourself; rather you belong to the city of God, the light of which shines in the darkness. Now you may also experience it: out of the thankfulness of a redeemed child of God a new life is growing."