

πίστις Χριστοῦ: READING PAUL IN A NEW PARADIGM¹

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The Background of the πίστις Χριστοῦ Question

When Gerhard Kittel in 1906 wrote his article on whether the expression πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is to be understood as a subjective or objective genitive,² his assessment of the evidence made it appear that the question could be easily resolved. Commenting on Paul's use of the expression in Rom 3:21-26, the first of Kittel's seven points in favor of the subjective genitive reading suggested that the texts were so straightforward that the perception of ambiguity, and thus the need for debate, was unwarranted. It was his view that "the first impression that the simpleminded reader must have, speaks against the objective reading. . . . The apostle would frankly have expressed himself in an unintelligible manner if he had intended to speak about faith in Jesus."³

Despite the overwhelming evidence alleged by Kittel in favor of the

¹This paper was initially prepared for a reading course at the Duke University Divinity School under the guidance of professor Richard B. Hays in December 2000.

²Gerhard Kittel, "πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ bei Paulus," *Theologischen Studien und Kritiken* 79 (1906), 419-436.

³*Ibid.*, 424. In addition to the meaning considered to be most likely in the eyes of the casual reader, Kittel's points were (1) that the unambiguous subjective genitive in Rom 3:3, τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ, referring to God's faithfulness; (2) that the subjective genitive ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ in Rom 4:16, speaking of Abraham's faith, not faith in Abraham; (3) that the verb πεφανέρωται in the perfect passive with the constellation δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, referring to a completed and past event that militates against an objective genitive reading, as the act of believing is something in the present; and that this expression talks about the substance of what is revealed, not about the belief; (4) that the expression δικαιοῦμενοι . . . διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ in v. 24 is an explication and elaboration of δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; (5) that the act of believing is spelled out by the phrase εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας in v. 22, thus avoiding the awkward redundancy that goes with the objective genitive reading "so dass kein Wort zu viel oder zu wenig gesagt ist"; (6) that the entire passage in Rom 3:21-26 presents Christ primarily as the mediator of God's salvation of humanity; (7) that where the expression πίστις Ἰησοῦ stands alone, i.e., not πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, this points to the faith of Jesus himself in the days of his flesh. Kittel acknowledged his indebtedness to the earlier article of Johannes Haussleiter, who took great pains to distinguish between the faith of the human Jesus in distinction from the faith of the exalted Christ ("Der Glaube Jesu und der Christliche Glaube," *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 2 [1891]: 109-145, 205-230). There is, however, no evidence that Paul made a distinction between "Jesus" and "Christ."

subjective genitive reading, he was quick to acknowledge that he thought a change in the time-honored practice to be unlikely. "It stands as an established fact that in Romans the justification of sinners by faith in Jesus is the prevailing thought. Given this premise, the subjective reading will be confronted with grave reservations," he wrote.⁴

More people are likely to agree with Kittel in his assessment of the grave reservations against the subjective genitive reading than with his arguments in its favor. Since Kittel's article in the main was a restatement of viewpoints expressed fifteen years earlier by Johannes Haussleiter,⁵ one is left to wonder whether anticipation of such reservations played a role in the long lag time before anyone responded to Haussleiter, and the virtual complete silence on the subject by Kittel or any other NT scholar of note during the next fifty years.⁶

Kittel was of course keenly aware that the texts and terms in question were precisely the ones that lay at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. Expressions like "the righteousness of God" and "faith in Jesus Christ" were the keystones of the gospel as Martin Luther saw it. Any revision of these terms might bring in its wake a different understanding of the notion of "gospel" and perhaps unsettle tenets of Protestant Christianity held as axiomatic. For Luther himself his understanding of these concepts had been personal breakthroughs, decisive turning points in his own experience as well as in the thinking of the segment of the church of which he was the leading reformer. His exposition of Romans was unambiguous. To him, the revelation of $\delta\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu\eta\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in Rom 1:17 did not refer to the righteousness of God

*Kittel, 421, states: "Es gilt als feststehende Tatsache, dass im Römerbrief die Rechtfertigung des Sünders durch den Glauben an Christum Jesum der beherrschende Gedanke sei. Unter dieser Voraussetzung würde die subjektive Deutung einem schweren Bedenken unterliegen."

⁵Haussleiter, see n. 2.

⁶If being ignored is the ultimate slight, at least a few scholars found Haussleiter's proposal to be significant enough not to overlook it entirely. Sanday and Headlam referred to it dismissively in their Romans commentary, cautioning that if Haussleiter's view held good, "a number of other passages would be affected by it." Other than that reservation, their only arguments against Haussleiter were that his view "seems to us forced" and that "it has so far, we believe, met with no acceptance" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992], 83-84). The first edition of this influential commentary was published in 1897, before Kittel's article appeared. In his commentary on Galatians, Ernest De Witt Burton similarly made a note on Haussleiter's work, when he countered that since there is clear evidence that $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ like $\epsilon\lambda\pi\iota\varsigma$ and $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\acute{\alpha}\pi\eta$, may take the objective genitive, as in Ἔχετε πίστιν θεοῦ in Mark 11:22, the expression $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma\ \text{Ἰησοῦ}$ and related terminology in Galatians should be read as objective genitives, denoting the believer's faith in Christ (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921], 121-122).

himself, but to the righteousness by which the condemned sinner might be justified and acquitted before God. "Moreover, with [the expression] the righteousness of God one must not here understand the righteousness through which he himself is righteous, but righteousness through which we are made righteous. This happens through faith in the gospel," wrote Luther.⁷ For the believer the corollary to God's righteousness was faith *in* Christ; Luther consistently read πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive.⁸ πίστις was not an attribute of Christ, whether understood as his faith or his faithfulness; it was the God-given stance of the believer, by which he appropriated the righteousness that would be the basis for his acquittal.

There is little doubt today that Luther reached his conclusion as much on the strength of an overarching theological vision as on the basis of strict exegesis.⁹ Central to that vision was his belief that his own profound sense of condemnation before God was also shared by the apostle Paul, i.e., that his own experience and that of the apostle ran on parallel tracks in their pre-Christian as well as in their postconversion outlook.¹⁰ This is an important point because more recent views of this subject come close to implying that the objective genitive reading of πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ derives from a virgin reading of the Greek text.¹¹ In reality that interpretation was powerfully conditioned and favored by

⁷Luther's words in German are: "Wiederum darf man hier unter der Gerechtigkeit Gottes nicht verstehen, durch die er selbst gerecht ist in sich selbst, sondern die, durch die wir von ihm gerecht machen werden. Das geschieht durch den Glauben an das Evangelium" (*Vorlesung über den Römerbrief 1515/16, Ausgewählte Werke* [Munich: Chr. Raiser Verlag, 1957], 28). My English translation is deliberately literal; later Protestant terminology will favor the expression "declare righteous" instead of "make righteous."

⁸Luther, 132, states: "Desgleichen, wenn es 'Glaube an Christus' heisst, so ist darunter der Glaube an Christus und an das Wort eines jeden zu verstehen, in dem selber redet."

⁹Luther's view of the gospel also had implications for his understanding of the canon. It is well known that he thought that the epistle of James and the book of Revelation did not meet the standard of canonicity precisely because these books did not speak of the gospel as he understood it. "I miss more than one thing in this book," he wrote in 1522 in his first introduction to Revelation, "and it makes me consider it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic. . . . For me this is reason enough not to think highly of it: Christ is neither taught nor known in it" (*Word and Sacrament I, Luther's Works* [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960], 35:398-399).

¹⁰See, e.g., Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *Harvard Theological Review* 65 (1963): 199-215. "It is as one of those [anxious contemporaries in the aftermath of the Black Death]—and for them—that Luther carries out his mission as a great pioneer. Is it in response to *their* question, 'How can I find a gracious God?' that Paul's words about justification in Christ by faith, and without the works of the Law, appear as the liberating and saving answer" (203).

¹¹Thus Barry Matlock, "Detheologizing the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective," *NovT* 42 (2000): 1-23.

the experience, presuppositions, and *Sitz im Leben* of Luther and the other Protestant reformers. If it is true that the arguments for a subjective genitive reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ have been biased by a theological agenda, as Barry Matlock seems to suggest in the context of the current scholarly debate of the term, it does not follow that no such agenda was present when the objective genitive translation came into vogue. If anything, the evidence suggests the contrary: whatever theological agenda may be divined as the motive behind the call for a revised reading, there is no doubt that Luther's interpretation came into being as part of a broad theological system.¹² It was not primarily worked out on a lexical, semantic, and exegetical basis, the accepted tools of interpretation today.

After many years of silence on this subject, it was revived in 1955 by Gabriel Hebert.¹³ He made no mention of the previous and all-but-forgotten work of Haussleiter and Kittel, even though his reading of the Pauline passages relevant to the inquiry also favored the subjective genitive reading of the passages in question. In fact, Hebert's translation of Rom 3:21-25 was not very different from better-fated interpretations that have been advanced in more recent times.¹⁴ Thus, he read Rom 3:22 as "God's righteousness, through the Faithfulness of Jesus Christ, to all who believe."¹⁵ He translated Gal 2:16: "We, knowing that a man is not justified by works of the Law, but through the Faithfulness of Christ Jesus (*dia pisteos Christou Iesou*), and not by works of the Law."¹⁶ For Phil 3:9 he proposed the translation: "Not having a righteousness of my own, but that which is through the Faithfulness of Jesus Christ, the Righteousness which is from God *epi te pistei*, for (human) faith."¹⁷

Hebert's translation has deliberately been reproduced here in the main text rather than in the footnotes as telling evidence that later readings of πίστις Χριστοῦ with the subjective genitive meaning actually have improved little on what he proposed. His initiative was followed a

¹²Kittel's argument on behalf of a subjective genitive reading was exegetical only to a limited extent. It is possible that his views also may have reflected a certain cultural conditioning, perhaps of "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man" in vogue in the early part of the twentieth century.

¹³Gabriel Hebert, "'Faithfulness' and 'Faith,'" *The Reformed Theological Review* 14 (1955): 33-40.

¹⁴Such as Douglas A. Campbell, *The Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3:21-26*, JSOTSup 65 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

¹⁵Hebert, 37.

¹⁶Ibid., 37-38. Gal 3:22 was translated: "That the Promise through Faithfulness of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

¹⁷Ibid., 37.

few years later by an article by Thomas Torrance, who concurred with Hebert that the construction πίστις Χριστοῦ in Paul's letters should be understood as "the faithfulness of Christ."¹⁸

If Hebert and Torrance had made the actual translation of these passages the substance of their articles, or if kindly disposed readers had chosen to make their proposed translation of the Greek text the most important aspect of their suggestions, these articles might have had a different reception. As it was, Hebert and Torrance invoked arguments on behalf of their positions that became subject to severe criticism. Both sought to bolster the subjective genitive reading by resorting to the Hebrew faith-language in the OT, claiming a direct link from OT usage to the faith-language in the letters of Paul.¹⁹ The heavy use of etymology,²⁰ on the assumption that the root meaning of a word is a trustworthy guide to current usage and that such root meanings in this instance carried over into another language, drew a sharply worded rebuttal from James Barr.²¹ While not denying that differences between Hebrew and Greek thinking are real, Barr rejected the way entire theologies have been constructed on the assumed meaning of a word. He took Hebert and Torrance as a case in point, arguing that the material had been

¹⁸Thomas Torrance, "One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith," *Expository Times* 68 (1957), 111-114. In a reading that lay close to that of Hebert, Torrance, 113, translated Gal 2:16: "We . . . knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ (*dia pisteos Christou Iesou*), even we believed (*episteusamen*) on Christ Jesus that we might be justified out of Christ's faithfulness (*ek pisteos Christou*), and not by works of the law."

¹⁹Hebert suggested that wherever the word "faith" is used, especially by Paul, the "Hebrew" meaning should be assumed. Faith-terminology in the Bible should be seen as derivatives of the verb *ʿaman* and the corresponding noun *ʿemunah*. These words have the connotation of "firmness" or "steadfastness." For this reason, he proposed, they refer to divine attributes, and this meaning carries over into the Greek *pistis*, i.e., *pistis* should be understood with the broader God-centered meaning in mind. The NT phrase *pistis Christou* should thus read "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ." Torrance, 113, construed *pistis Christou* as a bipolar expression that should not be confined to either a subjective or objective genitive reading: "In most of these passages the *pistis Iesou Christou* does not refer only either to the faithfulness of Christ or to the answering faithfulness of man, but is essentially a polarized expression denoting the faithfulness of Christ as its main ingredient but also involving or at least suggesting the answering faithfulness of man, and so his belief in Christ, but even within itself the faithfulness of Christ involves both the faithfulness of God and the faithfulness of the man Jesus."

²⁰Past usage of a word, let alone its proposed root meaning, is clearly a treacherous ally in terms of present meaning and usage. A nineteenth-century writer might refer to the work of a teacher as "the nicest work." Such an expression would to us mean that teaching is a most enjoyable profession. But what the nineteenth-century writer had in mind was not the teacher's sense of enjoyment, but rather that dealing with the young mind requires a certain touch.

²¹James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

presented selectively with misleading results. Aside from a partial and possibly biased presentation of the evidence on the part of these authors, Barr insisted that the current meaning of a word does not necessarily reflect its etymology.²² Instead, Barr held that the sentence controls the meaning of the word, not *vice versa*, and that linguistic arguments in favor of a certain meaning often misconstrued and misapplied the evidence. In the case of Hebert and Torrance the linguistic argument had backfired, leaving the impression that the otherwise perfectly possible and highly intelligible translation of πίστις Χριστοῦ as “the faithfulness of Christ” was unsustainable.

Barr’s withering critique may have had the effect of restraining any rash revival of the subjective genitive reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ, at least on linguistic grounds, but it hardly made the topic go away. A study by D.W.B. Robinson in 1970 suggested a three-pronged approach to resolving whether πίστις Χριστοῦ should be understood as a subjective or objective genitive: determining the force of the genitive after πίστις on grammatical and syntactical grounds, resolving the semantic problem as to the meaning of πίστις, and coming to grips with the meaning of πίστις Χριστοῦ in Paul’s thinking, i.e., the theological issue.²³ On all these scores Robinson concluded that the evidence favored the subjective genitive reading. As to the semantic aspect, and perhaps in what could be seen as a partial vindication of Hebert and Torrance, he held that in ordinary Greek the meaning πίστις is not “faith” or “trust,” but “reliability” or “fidelity.” He also pointed out that in the LXX πίστος rarely, if ever, means “faith” or “trust.” Taking his point of departure in Robinson’s systematic approach, George Howard found the same trend as to the meaning of πίστος in Hellenistic Jewish literature.²⁴ He also called into question a crucial and explicit assumption in Barr’s earlier rebuttal of the subjective genitive reading. Barr believed that the aspect of “trust” or “believing,” though present in the OT,

received a great increase of importance and centrality in the New Testament, a fact which I think no one will deny. This fact explains the great rise in the representation of the sense, “trust, faith” for *pistis* in the New Testament and its preponderance over the sense “faithfulness” which is the normal LXX sense.²⁵

²²Barr, 198, states: “Extant forms are not derived directly from the ultimate etymology or from the ‘root meaning.’”

²³D.W.B. Robinson, “Faith of Jesus Christ”—A New Testament Debate,” *Reformed Theological Review* 29 (1970): 71-81.

²⁴George Howard, “The ‘Faith of Christ,’” *Expository Times* 85 (1974): 213-214.

²⁵Barr, 202-203.

Was this conclusion favored by the evidence? Or was it merely an assumption, an example of proving what is assumed precisely by what at best can only be assumed? Barr himself seemed aware of that possibility, writing somewhat self-consciously: "If such a judgment will be permitted,"²⁶ to which Howard answered that such a judgment ought not to be permitted simply because the evidence for it is not there. "Since there is no real proof that 'trust/faith' is the normal meaning for New Testament *pistis* there is little confidence that can be given to Barr's treatment of the issue. Indeed if we follow the example of *pistis* in Hellenistic Jewish literature in general we should look for the meaning of 'faithfulness' to appear most often in the New Testament," concluded Howard.²⁷

It is probably a fair assessment of the evolution of the πίστις Χριστοῦ question to say that the study of Richard Hays, examining Paul's letter to the Galatians, has played a pivotal role—enhancing the plausibility of the subjective genitive reading, serving as a catalyst for continued interest in the question, and clarifying the issues to be resolved.²⁸ In his analysis, Hays argues that Paul's strain of thought becomes much clearer if one recognizes the underlying narrative assumption and highly allusive character of the text. As to the former, Paul is not spelling out a complete and systematic presentation of his message in his letters. Instead, he repeatedly falls back on the narrative into which the Galatians were initiated through Paul's preaching when he was with them in person during his initial visit. When Paul reminded the Galatians that "it was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified" (Gal 3:1), he was referring to the narrative he had related concerning the suffering and death of Jesus. With recourse to the terminology of Northrop Frye, Hays has suggested that "the *dianoia* of the gospel story is embodied in the phrase 'Jesus Christ crucified.' This summary phrase recalls the "scene of exceptional intensity" which stands at the center of Paul's recollection of the story of Jesus Christ. The allusion, therefore, which would be meaningless outside the frame of reference provided by the gospel story, stands for the whole story and distills its meaning."²⁹

As to the second aspect of Hays's interpretation of Galatians—the allusive character of the text—a postulate that the author admits to be crucial, one should read Paul's letter with the understanding that "its foundation and framework are for the most part hidden from view,

²⁶Ibid., 203.

²⁷Howard, 214.

²⁸Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4, 11*, 2d ed., SBLDS 56 (Chico: Scholars Press, 2002).

²⁹Ibid., 197.

implicit rather than explicit.³⁰ On the interpretive platform of the text's narrative and allusive character³¹ Hays proceeds with careful exegesis of the text itself.³² This leads to several elements of distinction and importance in his interpretation, one of which is that Paul's quotation of Hab 2:4 is given greater playing room to Hays's understanding than what is commonly allowed. ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται, as Paul uses the quotation in Gal 3:11, and as Hays interprets it, should not be seen merely as the apostle's frantic search for prooftexts for a doctrine completely unrelated to Habakkuk's original concern. Granting this, the text gets messianic overtones: ὁ δίκαιος in Habakkuk is the Messiah, and the one who shall live by faith is the Messiah himself, not just those who believe in him.³³ Not only this, but the recurring phrase οἱ ἐκ πίστεως in Galatians (3:7, 9) is never entirely loosened from its original moorings in the OT; it retains an allusive element and "is best understood in the context of Galatians 3 as an ad hoc formulation based upon the prophetic text."³⁴ According to this reading of Paul, "Christ is the ground of faith because he is the one who, in fulfillment of the prophecy, lives ἐκ πίστεως."³⁵

Since the publication of Hays's dissertation, the number of participants and viewpoints in the debate has multiplied to the extent that a review of their respective positions is impossible within the limited framework of this inquiry. Thus, it seems more fruitful to take stock of issues that have been clarified and what this means for the current state of the subject.

³⁰Ibid., 234.

³¹This is not to suggest that the notion of narrative and allusions are arbitrary presuppositions imported into the reading of the text. Instead, they emerge naturally from the text itself, and their explicit mention serve as facilitators or sensitizers, allowing for a more dynamic perception of the situation and a more nuanced reading of the text.

³²As to grammatical evidence, Hays, 164, concludes that it favors the view that πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ means "faith of Jesus Christ," however that might be interpreted. The case on grammatical grounds for the translation "faith in Jesus Christ" is really very weak.

³³Ibid., 150-151. "On this point, I have not persuaded many scholars," Hays has confided to me in a personal note.

³⁴Ibid., 201. "In view of all these considerations," as Hays sees it, "we may suggest that οἱ ἐκ πίστεως carries not primarily the connotation of 'those who have faith' but rather the connotation of 'those who are given life on the basis of (Christ's) faith.'" The latter part of this statement is a quotation from Franz Muessner, *Der Galaterbrief*, HTKNT 9 (Freiburg: Herder, 1974), 207.

³⁵Hays, 231.

πίστις Χριστοῦ: *The State of the Question Today*

In its simplest form, the issue is still whether the expression πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ should be understood as a subjective or an objective genitive, in much the same way as the question was formulated by Kittel almost a century ago. Although there is no agreement as to the answer, much has been done to clarify aspects that must be taken into consideration, and lessons have been learned on all sides of the issue to help avoid the pitfalls of simplistic and one-sided solutions. The following is a selection of some of the most crucial concerns:

1. It must be admitted that the force of the genitive construction πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ may be either objective or subjective. Instances of unambiguous subjective genitives have been identified in Rom 3:3, where τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ clearly means “the faithfulness of God,” or Rom 4:16, where ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ also carries the subjective genitive force, referring to “the faith of Abraham.” For the objective genitive, Mark 11:22 has already been noted, Ἐχετε πίστιν θεοῦ, quite likely meaning “have faith in God.”³⁶ Another example is Phil 3:8, τῆς γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου, “knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” and not the knowledge that Christ himself had.³⁷ Nevertheless, the meaning of these clear-cut formulations does not dictate whether πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ should be understood as one or the other. This means that the question cannot be resolved on grammatical grounds. And while the two options are equally possible, it does not necessarily follow that they are also equally likely. If Kittel’s view is correct on how the straightforward and simpleminded reader would read the construction, the first choice should be the subjective genitive, and the burden of proof for abandoning it lies on the objective genitive reading.

2. Other nuances of grammar and syntax are at best inconclusive in terms of deciding the question in favor of one reading or the other. Several attractive hypotheses have been slain by “ugly” facts, depending on one’s preference. Burton’s observation that “the article is . . . almost invariably present” when πίστις is accompanied with a subjective genitive,³⁸ is, as Dunn points out, weakened by the fact that “faith” in most of his examples is accompanied by the personal pronoun, “your

³⁶This reading is contestable as indicated by Robinson, 71, who early in life encountered the translation: “Reckon on God’s fidelity.”

³⁷Hays, 164; Arland Hultgren, “The *Pistis Christou* Formulation in Paul, *NovT* 22 (1980), 254; James Dunn, “Once More, ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ,” *SBL 1991 Seminar Papers*, 731-732 (reprinted in Hays, 249-271)..

³⁸Burton, 482.

faith.³⁹ But the usefulness of the article as a distinguishing feature becomes even less tenable by the example of Abraham's faith in Rom 4:16, where the genitive is subjective, but the article is absent. Reluctant to relinquish this element, Hultgren makes the presence or absence of the article the leading argument in his analysis of Pauline syntax in favor of the objective genitive reading.⁴⁰ But the instances of the articular use of *πίστις* as a subjective genitive in connection with genitive pronouns such as *hymōn*, *hemon*, *autou* are, as Sam Williams has demonstrated, not convincing since such constructions are not normally anarthrous.⁴¹ According to Williams, only two possible examples remain, Rom 3:3 and 4:12, for the hypothesis that "Paul always has the article before *pistis* when an accompanying genitive is subjective," but even these two constructions fail to come down in favor of the hypothesis.⁴² All of this means that the presence or absence of the article cannot be used as the distinguishing feature it has been taken to be.

3. No one contests that Paul speaks about faith *in* Christ in his letters. Galatians 2:16, *καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν*, means by virtually unanimous agreement "we also (or even we) believed in Christ Jesus." The issue to be safeguarded most by the objective genitive of *πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* is thus not in jeopardy even if the expression is interpreted as a subjective genitive.⁴³ Hultgren thinks that prepositional phrases like *πίστις ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ* in letters considered by some to be non-Pauline (as Eph 1:15) could have been expressed as *πίστις Χριστοῦ* by Paul, and that the increasing use of prepositional phrases with *πίστις* is evidence for the objective genitive reading.⁴⁴ This is at best a conjecture of dubious value, especially since prepositional phrases denoting "faith in Christ" also are found in letters that all agree are Pauline. What is certain is that the subjective genitive reading leads to a different interpretation of these texts, and there is

³⁹Dunn, 732.

⁴⁰Hultgren, 253.

⁴¹Sam K. Williams, "Again *Pistis Christou*," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 432.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 432. In Rom 3:3, *τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ* is a subjective genitive and arthrous, but its equivalent, *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* in Rom 3:21, is anarthrous, though also subjective. In Rom 4:12, the complete expression is *τῆς ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ πίστεως τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ*, thus not "the . . . faith of Abraham," but "the . . . faith of our father Abraham." It is the designation "our father" that controls the article in this instance, not *πίστις*.

⁴³See Phil 1:29, Rom 10:14, and many equivalent examples using prepositional phrases such as *εἰς*, *ἐν*, or *ἐν* for faith in Christ.

⁴⁴Hultgren, 254. Dunn, 734, also considers the prepositional expressions "equivalent phrases." Another possibility is to read the prepositional phrase as locative, indicating that *πίστις* exists within the sphere of being-in-Christ.

nothing to compensate for that loss, if indeed it may be seen as a loss.

4. There is also agreement that pre-NT lexical evidence as to the use of πίστις in the LXX and in Hellenistic Jewish literature favors the notion of “faithfulness” rather than “faith.”⁴⁵ This does not mean that the valence of NT faith language follows the same trajectory, but it indicates that if external evidence is admitted, such evidence tilts in the direction of the subjective genitive interpretation.

5. There is even agreement that the subjective genitive reading makes excellent sense theologically. Dunn writes that “I should make it clear that the *theology* of the subjective genitive reading is powerful, important, and attractive. For anyone who wishes to take the humanness of Jesus with full seriousness “the faith of Jesus” strikes a strong and resonant chord. Moreover, as a theological motif, it seems to me wholly compatible with Paul’s theology.”⁴⁶

On balance, if the above points are representative of recent scholarly work, the trend tends toward the subjective genitive reading. But even if one must conclude that these pieces of the puzzle in themselves do not hold the key to the solution, it should not come as a surprise. Once the possibility of different views on each of the points listed above is admitted, it is clear that any or even all of the points cannot yield the consensus one might like to achieve in such matters. Kittel’s prediction that the objective genitive reading of πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ would prove impervious to change may nevertheless have been overly pessimistic. There has already been such a major shift in scholarly opinion, at least in the English-speaking world, that it is no longer unthinkable that a revised reading may one day appear in standard translations of the Bible.

Before considering that possibility, it is well to remind ourselves that the objective genitive reading rose to its present status on the strength of a *theological* understanding. That path is not as readily open to anyone contemplating change in the established theological order in our time. In today’s scholarly climate the singular achievement of Luther and the early Protestant reformers is not likely to be emulated. Anyone eager to see a different interpretation, believing that change is merited by concern for the nature of the evidence, will have to travel the thorny road of exegesis.

Whither πίστις Χριστοῦ?

In the revised edition of the Anchor Bible Commentary on Galatians, a shift in emphasis is evident in J. Louis Martyn’s new translation that could

⁴⁵Howard, 213-214; Ian G. Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions*, SNTST Monograph Series 84 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-23.

⁴⁶Dunn, 744.

be a harbinger of things to come even for standard translations of the Bible.⁴⁷ Galatians 2:16 now reads: "Even we ourselves know, however, that a person is not rectified by observance of Law, but rather by the faith of Christ Jesus. Thus, even we have placed our trust in Christ Jesus, in order that the source of our rectification might be the faith of Christ and not by observance of the Law."

The sensitized reader will notice that Martyn has incorporated the subjective genitive reading in his translation. Where the NRSV and virtually all other translations speak of "faith *in* Jesus Christ," Martyn has chosen "the faith *of* Jesus Christ." This small change in prepositions, from *in* to *of*, leads to enormous change in meaning. The former refers to the faith of the believer, the latter to the faith of Christ himself. What is a little step for grammar turns out to be a giant leap for interpretation. According to Martyn,

Paul writes *pistis Christou Iesou*, an expression which can mean either the faith that Christ had and enacted or the faith that human beings have in Christ, both readings being grammatically possible. Recent decades have seen extensive discussion of the matter, sometimes even heated debate; and the debate has demonstrated that the two readings do in fact lead to two very different pictures of the theology of the entire letter. Is the faith that God has chosen as the means of setting things right that of Christ himself or that of human beings? Attention to a number of factors, especially to the nature of Paul's antinomies and to the similarities between 2:16 and 2:21, leads to the conclusion that Paul speaks of the faith of Christ, meaning his faithful death in our behalf.⁴⁸

Another notable difference is that the traditional word "justified" has been replaced by the word "rectified" as a better rendition of the scope and intention of the Greek verb δικαιόω. Even though the words δικαιόω and δικαιοσύνη in Greek are closely related as the verb and the noun of the same idea, this relationship has been obscured in many English translations. Martyn explains the rationale for his solution by pointing to the weakness of the traditional position: "To render the verb with the English expression 'to justify' while translating the noun as 'righteousness'—the most common way of proceeding—is to lose the linguistic connection that was both obvious and important to Paul."⁴⁹

⁴⁷J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1997). The Greek expression is διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. It can also be translated "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ." One scholar who has chosen this translation consistently in a work on Galatians is Bruce Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998).

⁴⁸Martyn, 251.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 249. E. P. Sanders has made a similar observation as to the way the Greek terms

All of the translation options . . . have one weighty liability: they are either at home in the language of the law—where “to justify” implies the existence of a definable legal norm—or in the language of religion and morality—where “righteousness” implies a definable religious or moral norm. As we will see, Paul intends his term to be taken into neither of these linguistic realms. Hence, we will find some advantage in using the verb “to rectify” and the noun “rectification.” For these are words that belong to a single linguistic family (*rectus facio*), and they are words that are not commonly employed either in our courtrooms or in our religious and moral institutions. The subject Paul addresses is that of God’s *making right what has gone wrong*.⁵⁰

Thus, the legal aspect of coming into a right relationship with God is toned down in favor of the relational or covenantal. The antinomy Paul presents is not between works and faith, or between doing and believing, as the traditional view has it. It is between law and “the faith of Christ” as the basis for righting what has gone wrong. Besides, the subjective genitive reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ spills over into the characterization of the two opposing communities, οἱ ἐκ πίστεως and ὅσοι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου. On that basis, Martyn introduces the interesting contrast between “those whose identity is derived from faith” (3:7, 9) and “those whose identity is derived from observance of the Law” (3:11).

An exegetical approach that favors the subjective genitive reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ in Galatians has already been noted in Hays’s *The Faith of Jesus Christ*. Since it is undisputed that Galatians is thematically related to Romans, and since the use of the πίστις Χριστοῦ formulation is as widespread in Romans as in Galatians, that epistle naturally stands apart as fertile soil for renewed exegetical effort.⁵¹ In addition, a crucial link between the two letters is found in the fact that Paul calls upon the same quotation from Habakkuk in support for his message in Gal 3:11 and Rom 1:17.

Before considering the relevant texts in Romans, two further observations are in order. While the case for a theocentric reading of Galatians may be questioned, the evidence for such a reading of Romans is ample. Williams believes that the expression δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ should be accepted as a central theme in Romans, and that the unfolding of this theme is nothing if not theocentric (e.g., Rom 1:17; 3:21-26; 15:8). Williams claims that in Romans Paul “wants to show that his gospel agrees with who God *is*—Lord of all people and forever true to his own nature

have been handled in English (*Paul* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991], 44-47).

⁵⁰Martyn, 250.

⁵¹As noted, Kittel argued the case for the subjective genitive in Romans on exegetical grounds only to a limited extent.

and purpose.⁵² In Rom 3:21-26, Paul refers to δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ three times, making the death of Jesus the focal point of its meaning. According to Williams, "Rom 3:26 indicates that when Paul employs the term *dikaioσune theou* in 3:21-26 he is thinking about *how* God is righteous."⁵³ He finds strong confirmation that this is a consistent and overarching theme in Romans since Paul clearly returns to it in chapter 15. In his conclusion, Williams states that "if 'righteousness of God' is a key to Romans and if the preceding pages correctly point in the direction of the apostle's intent when he uses this phrase, the argument of *this* letter, at least, is thoroughly theocentric."⁵⁴

In contrast to other epistles, no real or imminent crisis may be identified that triggered Paul to write to the Romans. If Paul in Galatians is arguing his case in heated dialogue with the "Galatian teachers," no such adversary seems to be present among the Roman believers. If anything may be said to distinguish this epistle, it is found in Paul's painstaking effort to enlist the OT in support of his gospel. In this letter, at least, Richard Hays is probably right when he states that "once the conversation begins, the addressees recede curiously into the background, and Paul finds himself engaged with an older and more compelling partner."⁵⁵ That partner is not a contemporary person or event, but the OT itself.

In Romans, Paul uses the Habakkuk text to introduce the theme of his letter: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel. . . . For in it the righteousness of God (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'" (Rom 1:1, 17, NRSV). Later he expounds on the meaning of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (1:17; 3:3, 21, 22, 25, 26), placing this expression in such intimate relationship to πίστις Ἰησοῦ (3:22, 25, 26) as to make the two phrases very closely related. Also in Romans, Paul proceeds on a line of reasoning that clearly

⁵²Sam K. Williams, "The 'Righteousness of God' in Romans," *JBL* 99 (1980): 254. James Dunn dissents from Williams's view in certain particulars, but not as to whether the expression δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (Rom 1:17; 3:21-26) is saying something about God (*Romans* 1-8, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1988], 40-42). In the closing part of the letter, Paul refers to himself as a servant ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας θεοῦ (Rom 15:8), indicating once again that God is more than a peripheral concern in his ministry. This applies whether these expressions are read as subjective or objective genitives.

⁵³William, "Righteousness of God," 278.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 289. Perhaps the most emphatically theocentric reading of Paul has been that of J. Christiaan Beker, who writes that "Paul is an apocalyptic theologian with a theocentric outlook" (*Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of god in Life and Thought* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980], 362).

⁵⁵Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 35.

takes the form of an answer to the problem raised by Habakkuk in the OT. Reluctant to admit this, some of the most influential writers on Romans have strained to show that Paul was not quoting Habakkuk because he was talking about the same thing, and thus was invoking the OT source in support of his own thesis. Instead, it has been held that Paul was merely using Habakkuk as a matter of convenience, even though his subject matter was different. In the influential commentary of Sanday and Headlam, the authors wrote that "the Apostle does not intend to base any argument on the quotation from the O.T., but only selects the language as far as being familiar, suitable, and proverbial, in order to express what he wishes to say."⁵⁶ Hays asserts that "parties on all sides of the debate have been surprisingly content to assume that Paul employs the passage as a proof text for his doctrine of justification by faith with complete disregard for its original setting in Habakkuk's prophecy."⁵⁷

Despite the near unanimity with which it has long been held, this inference is best settled by letting the evidence speak for itself. The perplexing issue was clearly stated by Habakkuk: "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?" (1:2, 3, 13).

Habakkuk received the answer that the revelation of God's righteousness would not be infinitely delayed: It "awaits an appointed time. . . . [I]t will certainly come and will not delay . . . , but the righteous will live by his faith" (2:3, 4). This statement is quoted by Paul, and it will become evident that he was not applying it to a completely different question than that of Habakkuk.⁵⁸

Thus, when Paul quotes Hab. 2:4, we cannot help hearing the echoes—unless we are tone-deaf—of Habakkuk's theodicy question. By showcasing this text—virtually as an epigraph—at the beginning of

⁵⁶Sanday and Headlam, 289. These authors believed that "there is no stress on the fact that the O.T. is being quoted," that "the Apostle carefully and pointedly avoids appealing to Scripture," and that "no argument is based on the usage of the O.T."

⁵⁷Hays, *Echoes*, 39.

⁵⁸Hays notes that this text was deemed to be the *locus classicus* for the question of God's justice both in Judaism and early Christianity. He also emphasizes the difference between the Hebrew text and the LXX, where it says in Hebrew that "the righteous one shall live by his faithfulness," meaning that of the loyal person, whereas in the LXX the wording is that "the righteous shall live by my faithfulness," meaning the faithfulness of God himself (*Echoes*, 40).

the letter to the Romans, Paul links his gospel to the Old Testament prophetic affirmation of God's justice and righteousness.⁵⁹

When this relationship is accepted, it points toward a different translation of Paul's introductory theme than the one found in most translations and holds the key to a number of puzzling concerns in Romans.⁶⁰ The wording of Paul's message might then be that "the righteousness of God is revealed from faithfulness to faith,"⁶¹ as it is written, "The righteous one shall live by faith."⁶²

The validity of this conclusion is strengthened by Paul's question in Rom 3:3, a text concerning which most translators have agreed. Paul's use of the word πίστις allows no ambiguity; only the subjective genitive reading of τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ has any meaning. "What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?" (Rom 3:3, NRS). In this passage Paul rephrases his introductory theme, asking whether the unfaithfulness of Israel may be used as evidence that God himself cannot be trusted. He answers his own question with an emphatic negative (3:4). But his answer remains unsubstantiated until the fuller explanation in Rom 3:21-26.

Several NT scholars have singled out this passage as the key to the letter. Cranfield says that "it is the centre and heart of the whole of Rom 1.16b-15.13,"⁶³ Käsemann that it holds "the thesis proper,"⁶⁴ Ridderbos that this is "the great programmatic summary of his gospel."⁶⁵ John A. T. Robinson, while admitting that the passage may be difficult, calls it "the most concentrated and heavily theological summary of the Pauline gospel, and every word has to be wrestled with. But if we take the trouble it demands and really enter into the background of his

⁵⁹Ibid., 40.

⁶⁰For Paul this theme did not hinge on the single reference to Habakkuk. As Hays demonstrates, Paul was mingling echoes from the Psalms, Isaiah, and Habakkuk, locating his proclamation of the gospel "within the sounding chamber of prophetic reflection for faithfulness" (ibid., 41).

⁶¹Hays has "out of faithfulness for faithfulness" (ibid., 41).

⁶²As already noted, a strong case for understanding Habakkuk's original statement as a messianic prophecy has been made, in which case "the righteous one" (with the definite article in Rom 1:17) must refer to Christ. This answers the question as to whose faithfulness it talks about, whether God's, who sent Christ (as in the LXX), or Christ's, who was faithful to death (as in Hebrew). The answer is both. See Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 151ff.

⁶³C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 199.

⁶⁴Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 91.

⁶⁵Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 144.

words it is not, I believe, obscure, however profound.”⁶⁶

The element to be explained, then, is “the righteousness of God,” couched in the echo of the anguished query of Habakkuk adopted here by the apostle Paul. This passage, with the subjective genitive reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ, has recently been worked out exegetically by Douglas A. Campbell.⁶⁷ While no one will deny its complexity, I suggest that the subjective genitive interpretation yields the lucid message that Robinson thought was possible, and a clarity that has not been achieved as long as πίστις Χριστοῦ has been read as an objective genitive.⁶⁸ For the present purpose the Greek text of Rom 3:21-26 is reproduced along with a translation that reads πίστις Ἰησοῦ as a subjective genitive, contending that the case for such a translation has been made, that it is preferred by the context and makes plain the meaning of an otherwise tortuous passage.⁶⁹

Νυνὶ δὲ χωρὶς νόμου

But now apart from law

δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ

the righteousness of God⁷⁰

⁶⁶J.A.T. Robinson, *Wrestling with Romans* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 43.

⁶⁷The most thorough discussion of this passage in Romans is found in Campbell. A few concerns emerge from Campbell's dissertation. One has to do with the significance of the passage itself. While beginning his study by highlighting the broad scholarly consensus as to the significance of Rom 3:21-26 in the overall theme of Romans—giving the references reproduced here—he seems to back off from that view himself (203). If this impression is correct, the reason for it is far from clear. If anything, it seems that his interpretation of the passage substantiates and amplifies the consensus already existing as to its importance. Also puzzling, in a more recent article, is Campbell's straining to downplay a theocentric reading, or to posit a christocentric reading in opposition to a theocentric (idem, “Romans 1:17—A *Crux Interpretum* for the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate,” *JBL* 113/2 [1994]: 265-285).

⁶⁸I have seen the look of amazement when presenting this passage to lay audiences, comparing the subjective and objective genitive readings. As to lucidity, the verdict clearly has gone in favor of the subjective genitive alternative.

⁶⁹I am indebted to Campbell's detailed analysis of Rom 3:21-26. The tenor of his interpretation will easily be recognizable in my translation, but Campbell's wording has not been followed in every respect. See also Hays, “ΠΙΣΤΙΣ and Pauline Christology: What Is at Stake?” *SBL Seminar Papers* 1991, 714-729 (reprinted in Hays, 272-297).

⁷⁰“The righteousness of God” should not only be thought of as though the righteousness that has been revealed is sufficient to meet our standard, i.e., righteousness relative to a known quantity. It is probably better to understand it as *God's way of being righteous*, admitting that it has so far been an unknown quantity.

πεφανερωται μαρτυρουμένη ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν, δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας.

has been disclosed, witnessed by the law and (by) the prophets, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to all who believe.⁷¹

οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή πάντες γὰρ ἡμαρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ

For there is no difference,⁷² for all have sinned and lack the glory of God.⁷³

δικαιούμενοι δωρεὰν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ·

They have been set right freely by his grace through the deliverance (which is) in Christ Jesus.

ὃν πρόθετο ὁ θεὸς ἰλαστήριον διὰ [τῆς] πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι

God set him forth publicly⁷⁴ as a means of reconciliation⁷⁵ through the faithfulness of his bloody death.

εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ θεοῦ,

(He did this) in order to show his righteousness (in view of the fact that) he had passed over the sins previously committed⁷⁶ in the forbearance of God;

⁷¹The redundancy of the objective genitive reading is here avoided, i.e., "the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."

⁷²"[N]o difference," that is, between Jews and Gentiles with respect to coming up short.

⁷³Campbell has, "Everyone sinned and lacks the glorious image of God" (*Rhetoric of Righteousness*, 203). Lacking "the glory of God" here is usually thought of in purely ethical terms: knowing what is right, but failing to do it. It seems possible to read this as an amplification of what he has already said, making "the righteousness of God" and "the glory of God" sound the same theme.

⁷⁴This reading is preferred by the context, but also because it resonates with the narrative background that is assumed in Galatians: "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was *publicly exhibited* as crucified!" (3:1). The "public display," προεγράφη, referred to Paul's previous *preaching* of the crucified Jesus and stands as the programmatic point of reference for the entire letter; the public display in Rom 3:25, πρόθετο, to that event itself. This rendering is also preferred by Christian Maurer in *TDNT*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 166.

⁷⁵ἰλαστήριον lacks the article and should not be seen as a definite entity, such as "the mercy seat." Adolf Deissmann has worked out the case for the present translation (*Bible Studies* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901], 124-135).

⁷⁶Campbell has chosen another solution for this part, but the translation chosen here resonates better with the question it is thought to address.

πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης (that is,) in order to demonstrate his
 αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι righteous at the present time, that
 αὐτὸν δίκαιον καὶ δικαιούντα τὸν ἕκ he (God) may be right in the very act
 πίστεως Ἰησοῦ. of setting right⁷⁷ the one who lives on
 the basis of the faithfulness of Jesus.⁷⁸

The disturbing question raised by Habakkuk and echoed by Paul as to God's righteousness was answered in the faithful life and death of Jesus Christ. It was not answered, it must be added, in Habakkuk's time by a turnaround in the immediate moral order, or in Paul's time by a sudden improvement in the national fortune of Israel. But the question was answered; it is as an answer to that question that the passage must be read, not primarily as a message about individual salvation. To this effect Hays writes that

the Reformation theme of justification by faith has so obsessed generations of readers (Protestant readers, at least) that they have set Law and gospel in simplistic antithesis, ignoring the internal signs of coherence in Rom 3:1-26; consequently, they have failed to see that Paul's argument is primarily an argument about theodicy, not about soteriology. The driving question in Romans is not "How can I find a gracious God?" but "How can I trust in this allegedly gracious God if he abandons his promises to Israel?"⁷⁹

The salient point in this exegetical approach is that it looks not only at the grammar or semantics of the text itself. Paul alludes to the OT when he develops his theme and lays out the basis for its resolution. He uses quotations from, and allusions to, Scripture in a manner that is consonant with the original text. The full scope of his message cannot be understood except by hearing the echoes of the OT, just as many pregnant statements in the OT would remain unintelligible except in the light brought to bear on them by the NT. Hays's contention that Paul has salted his letter with OT allusions, that he "hints and whispers all around Isaiah,"⁸⁰ and that the very incompleteness of Paul's allusions was

⁷⁷The usual translation, as in the RSV, is "that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus." But the notion of "both-and" is not satisfactory, nor is it mandated by the Greek. The *καὶ* serves an explanatory and amplifying role. It is "in the very act" of setting right the one who lays claim to the faithfulness of Jesus that God has revealed his way of being right.

⁷⁸Here Campbell has "the one who lives out the faithfulness of Jesus." Other options are possible and may be even better, especially if one allows that the passage speaks about God's way of being righteous.

⁷⁹Hays, *Echoes*, 53.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 63.

intentional in order to call on the reader to complete the figures of speech, assumes a way of reading Scripture that is more dynamic, poetic, and dramatic than what has hitherto been the norm.

The notion that "the righteousness of God" has come to light in "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ" cuts a wide swath in the theological landscape and rearranges the perspective around a new center. When Campbell says that the point of Rom 3:21-26 is that "Christ, and above all his death, is the definitive eschatological revelation of the saving righteousness of God,"⁸¹ he is stating a conclusion that in itself can hardly be contested, but the anguished tenor brought to the question by Habakkuk has been preempted. The prophet's voice was not that of the terrified sinner seeking justification before the bar of divine justice, but that of the distraught believer perplexed by moral disarray, unfulfilled promises and God's apparent absence. In his question lay the troubling possibility that God may not be righteous at all, let alone that his righteousness would have a saving quality. The NT answer is that God indeed turned out to be righteous, but his righteousness is molded according to an unexpected norm. Above all, it was not punitive according to the notions of many who had placed their hope in him. Instead, in what may have been anticipated only by the prophet who is heard whispering all over in Romans,⁸² his righteousness was redemptive.

The suggestion that δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in the broadest sense refers to God's character and way of doing things may more easily win acceptance on the basis of Romans than in Galatians. But in both letters God's treatment of Jew and Gentile occupies center stage. E. P. Sanders, who in one context says of Paul that "from him we learn nothing new or remarkable about God,"⁸³ has not been oblivious to the problem posed by God's apparent neglect of the Gentiles or by the implications of the proposed terms for their inclusion.

The election of Israel, however, called God's consistency of purpose even more into question: why choose Israel, give them the law, and then require them to be saved as were the Gentiles—by faith in Christ? Doubts about God's constancy led to the theological problem called "theodicy," the "righteousness of God." God, we have seen, should not be capricious. And so the lead question is whether or not the word of God, when he called Israel, had failed (Rom 9:6). Has God been fair, honest, just, reliable, and constant? The two dispensations seem to

⁸¹Campbell, *Rhetoric of Righteousness*, 203.

⁸²The prophet Isaiah, that is, and not only chaps. 40-55, as the footnotes and references in *Nestle-Aland* will show. Irrespective of the many incarnations he is given in modern scholarship, Isaiah sounds a consistent theme.

⁸³E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), 509.

indicate not. Only if Paul can hold them together can he save God's reputation.⁸⁴

Against the background of such questions, "saving God's reputation," as Sanders puts it, may not be the peripheral concern in Paul's theology that it has often been taken to be. In Galatians, we read that it was God who at the right time sent forth his Son in order to ensure the adoption of all his alienated sons and daughters, offering equal terms and the right of inheritance to all without any distinction as to gender, race, or status (Gal 4:4-7). In Romans, Paul repeatedly has the need to reaffirm God's impartiality and fairness. "For God shows no partiality," he writes in Rom 2:11, later asking rhetorically whether God is "the God of Jews only" (Rom 3:29), emphatically dismissing the suggestion, then returning to the subject again in Rom 10:12: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him." Such affirmations indicate that God's reputation did not lie outside Paul's field of vision, and that the person by whom and the event by which God's righteousness had been disclosed had answered the concern. Radical as it may seem, our reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ, which on the surface may seem like a minor revision, lays the groundwork for an entirely different paradigm in the theology of the NT.

If Habakkuk's question in the OT belongs to the realm of theodicy, and if the same concern is echoed and amplified by Paul in the NT, its coherence and depth of perspective is retained only by reading πίστις Χριστοῦ as a subjective genitive. With the objective genitive reading the subject has been changed; we are in a different landscape in which the question raised by the OT prophet is not addressed.

The last of the πίστις Χριστοῦ formulations in the NT lies outside the Pauline corpus, but it is not irrelevant to the subject of God's redemptive righteousness as we have seen it play out in the letters of Paul. It is set in the book of Revelation, with a frame of reference that is pervasively and explicitly dualistic. The story is told in starkly symbolic language of the cosmic war between God and Satan, culminating with Satan's defeat and self-inflicted demise (Rev 20:1-10). The entire text is, from beginning to end, suffused with OT echoes and allusions in a pattern that is neither haphazard nor immaterial to the reader's prospects of deciphering the message.⁸⁵ Among the myriad of allusions there is also one recalling the biblical story of the Fall. Implicating Satan in the fateful event, Revelation refers to him as "the great dragon . . . *that ancient serpent*, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the

⁸⁴Ibid., 118.

⁸⁵The most rewarding recent book on the literary structure and pattern of Revelation is Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993).

whole world" (Rev 12:9; 20:2). The imagery, intentionally fragmentary, expects the receiver of the message to fill in the blanks, hearing the distant echo of suggestions that portrayed God as arbitrary, severe, and unreasonable (Gen 3:1). In the original story, the point was not only that human beings did something that was explicitly prohibited (Gen 2:16, 17; 3:3). According to the serpent, it was rather that the prohibition ought not to have existed in the first place (Gen 3:1, 6). In the context of Revelation, misrepresentation of God lies at the heart of the satanic agenda (Rev 12:9; 20:7, 8). Setting right the deceptive portrait through the life and death of the Lamb (Rev 5:6; 12:11)—a perspective not unlike Paul's tribute to the mind of God in Christ in Phil 2:5-11—may be seen as the paramount concern of the book.

In what purports to be the climax of this cosmic drama, we find the text, Ὡδε ἡ ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἀγίων ἐστίν, οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (Rev 14:12). This text—terminated by the phrase πίστις Ἰησοῦ—is the final expression of its kind in the NT. If the consequence of reading such constructions as subjective or objective genitives leads to different results as we have seen in the letters of Paul, so also here. The traditional reading says of the remnant that is admonished to persevere that "they keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (RSV).⁸⁶ The indebtedness of the standard interpretation to Lutheran categories of law and gospel need hardly be pointed out: at issue is their individual salvation, and the answer applies the formula of law and grace. But the context of the cosmic battle belies the notion that the main concern is individual salvation. Instead, in the eschatological drama of conflicting loyalties and perceptions of the Unseen, the question is rather to overcome the satanic misrepresentations, no matter how specious and persuasive, and hold to the truth about God. With the subjective genitive reading πίστις Ἰησοῦ, the call is for them to "hold firm to the way of God as it was revealed by the faithfulness of Jesus."⁸⁷

In the course of the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate, Hays has written that the relationship between Christology and soteriology still appears elusive: "*How* the death of Jesus can be understood to be the source of salvation."⁸⁸ He

⁸⁶Interestingly, translators have often settled for the subjective genitive reading in this case, "the faith of Jesus," but the theology derived from the text has nevertheless retained the flavor of similar phrases in Paul, i.e., "faith in Jesus." The KJV has, "The faith of Jesus." With more recent translations the emphasis has changed in the direction of human steadfastness in times of distress. The NIV has "the saints who obey the commandments of God and remain faithful to Jesus"; the GNB has "those who obey God's commandments and are faithful to Jesus."

⁸⁷The faithfulness of Jesus was manifested most clearly in his self-sacrificing death in Revelation as much as in the letters of Paul.

⁸⁸Hays, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ," 727.

confides that "I still cannot, I am sorry to say, offer a satisfactory elucidation of this mystery."⁸⁹ Perhaps part of the answer is that theodicy is more important to soteriology than it is taken to be. Put more bluntly, even if God could not save anybody, he could clear himself of the charges that had been brought against him. In view of the struggle between good and evil, the incarnation, suffering, and death of Jesus—"the faithfulness of Jesus Christ"—served as the ultimate rebuttal of the satanic misrepresentation that made God out to be an arbitrary and severe sovereign not worthy of the loyalty and obedience of human beings. Even within an outlook more attuned to the modern consciousness, viewing the existence of personal evil as implausible and unpalatable, the question of God's ways remains a matter of as grave concern as it was to Habbakuk. Rectifying the sinner's legal status has hardly ever been the only question to be resolved in setting right what has gone wrong in the relationship between human beings and the Creator.

Whither πίστις Χριστοῦ? In what may be marked as a centennial of sorts for the initial suggestion that this phrase calls for a different translation,⁹⁰ the goal of seeing the proposed revision reflected in standard translations for the Bible still seems distant. But if the subjective genitive reading of the construction has emerged as the preferred option, that should nevertheless be the goal; indeed, nothing less could be the goal. Such a change will accommodate the need of the simpleminded reader, who, as Kittel suggested, would not read the Greek expression as anything but a subjective genitive, and also reflect the practice in the early church, who read it that way.⁹¹

But the earliest and more important witness to how the expression πίστις Χριστοῦ should be understood may be found in the OT. Let Habakkuk, in this review at least, have the last word because the exegetical ladder that leads to the subjective genitive reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ begins with him. Let him stand as a post-Holocaust voice heard in pre-Holocaust times, scanning the horizon for evidence that God has not abandoned the world and that the agents of chaos have not been left free to run riot. "If it seem slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay," Habakkuk was admonished (Hab 2:3).

According to the NT, it did come. Paul says that God's way of being righteous is revealed in the gospel, apart from law, "although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:17; 3:21-22).

⁸⁹Ibid., 727-728.

⁹⁰Hausleiter, as noted, was published in 1891.

⁹¹Wallis, 175-212.