



JUSTICE AND JUSTIFICATION IN MATTHEW AND JAMES: A CHALLENGE FOR LUTHERAN HERMENEUTICS TODAY¹

*Justiça e justificação em Mateus e Tiago: Um desafio para a hermenêutica
luterana da atualidade*

Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr²

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the importance of the biblical testimony on justice and justification for contemporary Lutheran hermeneutics. Based on the fact of Luther's critical statements in his prefaces to the German translation of the Bible on the Epistle of James and from his estimation of the Gospel of Matthew, the essay explores the role and function of these two NT writings in recent ecumenical projects on the doctrine of justification. Thereafter, the meaning of justice in James and Matthew in contemporary exegetical research is described. In the conclusion, the relationship between Paul's doctrine of justification and the testimony on justice in James and Matthew is delineated.

¹ Artigo recebido em 5 de setembro de 2017, e aprovado pelo Conselho Editorial em reunião realizada em 20 de novembro de 2017, com base nas avaliações dos pareceristas *ad hoc*

² Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr (Dr.) é desde 1997 professor titular da área de Novo Testamento na *Universidade Friedrich-Schiller*, em Jena, Alemanha. É membro de diversas entidades de pesquisa, tais como *Akademie der gemeinnützigen Wissenschaften zu Erfurt*, *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, *Society of Biblical Literature*, *Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft für Theologie*, *Theologischer Konvent Augsburgischen Bekenntnisses*. É editor, respectivamente co-editor das seguintes revistas científicas: *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (co-editor para ciências bíblicas, NT e Judaística), *Das Neue Testament Deutsch/Grundrisse zum Neuen Testament* (junto com Samuel Vollenweider), *New Testament Studies* (foi membro do Conselho Editorial de 2000 a 2003), *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* e *Tria Corda. Jenaer Vorlesungen zu Judentum, Antike und Christentum*. E-mail: karl-wilhelm.niebuhr@uni-jena.de.

Keywords:

Justice in the Bible. Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Epistle of James. Matthew. Lutheran Hermeneutics

RESUMO

O artigo discute a importância do testemunho bíblico sobre justiça e justificação para a hermenêutica luterana contemporânea. Baseando-se na declarações críticas de Lutero em seus prefácios para a tradução alemã da Bíblia sobre a Epístola de Tiago e em sua estimativa acerca do Evangelho de Mateus, o ensaio explora o papel e a função desses dois escritos do NT em projetos ecumênicos recentes sobre a doutrina da justificação. Posteriormente, o significado da justiça em Tiago e Mateus em pesquisa exegética contemporânea é descrito. Na conclusão, é delineada a relação entre a doutrina da justificação de Paulo e o testemunho sobre justiça em Tiago e Mateus.

Palavras-chave: *Justiça na Bíblia. Declaração Conjunta sobre a Doutrina da Justificação. Epístola de Tiago. Mateus. Hermenêutica Luterana.*

1 INTRODUCTION³

According to Lutheran understanding, the doctrine of justification is the “*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*”⁴. For Luther, any judgment in theology

³ Paper delivered at the International Conference on Lutheran Hermeneutics and the Gospel of Matthew in Chicago, September 4 to 9, 2014. This consultation belonged to a series of four international conferences inaugurated by the Lutheran World Federation and held between 2011 and 2015. The results have been published by MTATA, K. (Ed.). “**You have the Words of Eternal Life.**” Transformative Readings of the Gospel of John from a Lutheran Perspective (LWF.D 57). Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2012; MTATA, K.; NIEBUHR, K.-W.; ROSE, M. (Eds.). **Singing the Songs of the Lord in Foreign Lands:** Psalms in Contemporary Lutheran Interpretation (LWF.D 59). Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2014; MTATA, K.; KOESTER, C. (Eds.). **To All the Nations:** Lutheran Hermeneutics and the Gospel of Matthew (LWF.S 2015/2). Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015; BECKER, E.-M.; MTATA, K. (Eds.). **Pauline Hermeneutics:** Exploring the “Power of the Gospel” (LWF.S 2016/3). Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017. A longer version of this article appeared in German: NIEBUHR, K.-W. Gerechtigkeit und Rechtfertigung bei Matthäus und Jakobus. Eine Herausforderung für gegenwärtige lutherische Hermeneutik in globalen Kontexten. In: **ThLZ.** Leipzig, v. 140, 2015, p. 1329-1348, and a shorter version I delivered as inaugural lecture on March 7, 2017, for the term opening at the Faculdade Luterana de Teologia in São Bento do Sul, Brazil. – I am grateful to my colleague Dr. Darian R. Lockett from Biola University La Mirada, CA, for correcting my English.

⁴ Cf. **D. Martin Luthers Werke.** Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-2009 (= WA), 40 III, 352, 3; 39 I 205, 20-22; **Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche.** Hrsg. im Gedenkjahr der Augsburgischen Konfession 1930. 11.

and church life has to be rooted and founded by reference to the gospel as it is most clearly revealed in Paul's letters, "for in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'." (Rom 1.17) Therefore, in his apology against the threat of the Papal ban, Luther in 1520 had demanded that in the church "only Scripture shall reign"⁵. Following theological decisions since the time of the Reformation, Paul's doctrine of justification has become the most important and decisive criterion for any Lutheran theology and hermeneutics. Moreover, in the *Joint declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* from 1999, the Roman Catholic Church also agreed on the doctrine of justification as a "measure or touchstone for the Christian faith"⁶ and as an "indispensable criterion which constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ"⁷. This appears to be

ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992 (= **BSLK**), p. 415, 21f. For the origin of this phrase see MAHLMANN, T. Zur Geschichte der Formel 'Articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae'. In: **LuThK**. Oberursel, v. 17, 1993, p. 187-194; MAHLMANN, T. Articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae'. In: **Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart [RGG]**. Vol. 1. 4. ed. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000, p. 799f.

⁵ *Solam scripturam regnare*, cf. Assertio omnium articulorum, **WA** 7, 98f. Yet, for the rather limited evidence for the formula *sola scriptura* in Luther's works cf. WENGERT, T. J. **Reading the Bible with Martin Luther**. An Introductory Guide, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013, p. 16-21.

⁶ **Annex to the Official Common Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church (OCS)**, 1999, 3. Cf. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2017/joint_statement_lwf-pcpcu_-_en.pdf>. Access: 29 Jul. 2017.

⁷ **Joint declaration on the Doctrine of Justification of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (JDDJ)**, 1999, 18. Cf. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2017/joint_statement_lwf-pcpcu_-_en.pdf>. Access: 29 Jul. 2017. See the whole context of quotations:

"Therefore the doctrine of justification, which takes up this message and explicates it, is more than just one part of Christian doctrine. It stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith, which are to be seen as internally related to each other. It is an indispensable criterion which constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ. When Lutherans emphasize the unique significance of this criterion, they do not deny the interrelation and significance of all truths of faith. When Catholics see themselves as bound by several criteria, they do not deny the special function of the message of justification. Lutherans and Catholics share the goal of confessing Christ in all things, who alone is to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (1 Tim 2:5f) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts." (**JDDJ** 18)

"The doctrine of justification is measure or touchstone for the Christian faith. No teaching may contradict this criterion. In this sense, the doctrine of justification is a 'indispensable criterion which constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice

a considerable advancement in ecumenical relationships from the point of view of protestant churches, even though numerous concerns and critical comments remained, most openly expressed by German professors of theology.

Nevertheless, from the point of view of contemporary biblical theology, we have to concede that Luther and Lutheran theology themselves belonged to a particular tradition of biblical interpretation when they took Paul's gospel as the vantage point for their preferred theological orientation. The focus of the reformers on Paul's doctrine of justification was the result of their own deliberate interpretation of Scripture, following a stream of western theological tradition that goes back at least as far as to Augustine. As, for instance, any side glance at Eastern orthodox theology will show, the center of the biblical message in Paul's letters is not at all self-evident⁸. Moreover, I am not sure whether every average member of a Lutheran church today in Europe, Africa or Latin America, when asked about where he or she will find the centre of their faith, point to Paul's statements on justification. Therefore, if we want to adhere to the Lutheran tradition of interpreting Scripture as God's message of justification by faith in Christ, we have to look for good theological reasons and to create convincing arguments. More important, if we want to adhere to Holy Scripture as the basic principle of Lutheran identity, this should remain or be renewed in the church today, as it is communicated in the Lutheran Confessions: proclaiming the gospel in word and sacrament⁹.

of our churches to Christ' (JDDJ 18). As such, it has its truth and specific meaning within the overall context of the Church's fundamental Trinitarian confession of faith. We 'share the goal of confessing Christ in all things, who is to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (1 Tim 2:5-6) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts' (JDDJ 18).“ (Annex 3 to OCS).

⁸ For recent discussion between 'eastern' and 'western' biblical theology cf. J. D. G. et al. (Eds.). **Auslegung der Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Perspektive**. WUNT 130. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000; NIEBUHR, K.-W. Das Alte Testament in der orthodoxen und der „westlichen“ Bibelwissenschaft. Zum Stand und zu den Perspektiven des Gesprächs. In: DIMITROV, I. Z. et al. (Eds.). **Das Alte Testament als christliche Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Sicht**. WUNT 174. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, p. 365-400; DESPOTIS, A. Das paulinische Christentum als Bekehrungsreligion und das ekklesiologische Verständnis der paulinischen Rechtfertigungslehre. In: FREY, J.; SCHLIESSER, B. (Eds.). **Die Theologie des Paulus in der Diskussion**. Reflexionen im Anschluss an Michael Wolters Grundriss. BThSt 140. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2013, p. 213-236; DESPOTIS, A. **Die „New Perspective on Paul“ und die griechisch-orthodoxe Paulusinterpretation**. St. Ottilien: EOS-Verlag, 2014.

⁹ Cf. Confessio Augustana VII.

Even for Luther, the focus on Paul's gospel was not at all self-evident, but rather a conscious decision regarding the possible alternative interpretations of Scripture needed to be reached and defended¹⁰. In the Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude in his German translation of the New Testament, Luther sharply separated Paul's doctrine of justification, which was central to his own understanding of the gospel, from the concept of justification in the Epistle of James. James, according to Luther, "is flatly against St Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works [2.24]. It says that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered his son Isaac [2.21]; though in Romans 4[.2-22] St Paul teaches to the contrary that Abraham was justified apart from works, by his faith alone, before he had offered his son, and proves it by Moses in Genesis 15[.6]"¹¹. Luther, obviously, saw the theological aim and focus of the Epistle of James in Jas 2.14-26 and interpreted its statements as directed "flatly against St Paul". Because of Luther's denigration, the Epistle of James often became marginalized in Lutheran churches and in Lutheran theology until today¹². Only recently, new approaches to the letter developed, stimulated by a focus on the social relations and the ethical concerns in its background¹³.

¹⁰ For the relationship between Scripture and tradition according to Luther cf. OLSON, D. T. *The Role of Tradition in Relation to Scripture: Questions and Reflections*. In: MTATA, 2012, p. 151-168. For Luther's hermeneutics on the whole, cf. WENGERT, 2013, p. 22-68; BEUTEL, A. *Die Formierung neuzeitlicher Schriftauslegung und ihre Bedeutung für die Kirchengeschichte*, In: NÜSSEL, F. (Ed.). **Schriftauslegung**. Themen der Theologie 8. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014, p. 141-177 (p. 154-163); BEUTEL, A. *Theologie als Schriftauslegung*. In: BEUTEL, A (Ed.). **Luther Handbuch**. 2. Aufl. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010, p. 444-449.

¹¹ Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude (1546). In: **Luther's Works**. Ed. J. Pelikan/H.T. Lehmann, 55 vols., Minneapolis: Fortress Press (= **LW** 35, 396); **WA DB** 7, 385, 9-14. For more details regarding differences in wording of Luther's prefaces between the versions of the NT from 1522 ('Septembertestament') and later editions cf. NIEBUHR, 2015, p. 1332-1335.

¹² Yet, see WENGERT, 2013, p. 1-7, who argues that Luther himself had a much more sophisticated judgment about the Epistle of James than later Lutheran theologians did. Thus, Luther's metaphor of the "epistle of straw" in his preface to Jas points back to 1 Cor 3.12. Untrained readers, according to Luther, should better start reading such writings of the Bible that point to Christ and his saving acts more explicitly.

¹³ Cf. NIEBUHR, K.-W. „A New Perspective on James“? Neuere Forschungen zum Jakobusbrief. In: **ThLZ**, Leipzig, v. 129, 2004, p. 1019-1044, and the studies discussed there; see also PENNER, T. C. **The Epistle of James and Eschatology**. Re-reading an Ancient Christian Letter. JSNT, 121. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, p. 33-120; MONGSTAD-KVAMMEN, I. **Toward a Postcolonial Reading of the Epistle**

When dealing with the gospels and their different approaches to the message of justification Luther was less polemical. Even though he ranked St. John first among the gospels, together with St. Paul's epistles to the Romans and St. Peter's first epistle, as "the true kernel and marrow of all the books"¹⁴, he did not denigrate Matthew, Mark and Luke¹⁵. Decisive for this judgment was his conviction that "the gospel, then, is nothing but the preaching about Christ, Son of God and of David, true God and man, who by his death and resurrection has overcome for us the sin, death, and hell of all men who believe in him"¹⁶. Thus, the Christological and soteriological focus governed Luther's high estimation of the gospels and, at the same time, gave reasons to criticize James for his allegedly un-Christological and un-soteriological teaching¹⁷. Only later in Lutheran theological tradition the gospel of Matthew appeared less convincing than Paul

of James. James 2:1-13 in its Roman Imperial Context. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013; TAMEZ, E. **The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works is Dead.** New York: Crossroad, 2002; AHRENS, M. **Der Realitäten Widerschein oder Arm und Reich im Jakobusbrief.** Eine sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung. Berlin: Alektor-Verlag, 1995.

¹⁴ Preface to the New Testament 1546 (1522). In: **LW 35, 357-362 (WA DB 6, 2-11)**. For reasons to prefer John over against the other gospels see Luther's concluding argument about "Which are the true and noblest books of the New Testament": "Now John writes very little about the works of Christ, but very much about his preaching, while the other evangelists write much about his works and little about his preaching. Therefore John's Gospel is the one, fine, true, and chief gospel, and is far, far to be preferred over the other three and placed high above them." (op. cit.). For Luther's prefaces to the German Bible, see BLANKE, H. *Bibelübersetzung*. In: BEUTEL, 2010, p. 258-265 (p. 263f.).

¹⁵ Cf. for Luther's rather high estimation of Matthew, even in its teaching of "good works" DEINES, R. **Die Gerechtigkeit der Tora im Reich des Messias.** Mt 5.13-20 als Schlüsseltext der matthäischen Theologie. WUNT 177. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, p. 5-11. For Luther's interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount cf. STRECKER, G. **Die Bergpredigt.** Ein exegetischer Kommentar. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984, p. 13-15.

¹⁶ Preface to the New Testament 1546 (1522). In: **LW 35, 357-362** – The quote continues: "Thus the gospel can be either a brief or a lengthy message; one person can write of it briefly, another at length. He writes of it at length, who writes about many words and works of Christ, as do the four evangelists. He writes of it briefly, however, who does not tell of Christ's works, but indicates briefly how by his death and resurrection he has overcome sin, death, and hell for those who believe in him, as do St. Peter and St. Paul."

¹⁷ Cf. Preface to the Epistle of St. James and St. Jude. In: **LW 35,395-398**: "its purpose is to teach Christians, but in all this long teaching it does not once mention the Passion, the resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ. He names Christ several times; however he teaches nothing about him, but only speaks of general faith in God."

or John in theological terms¹⁸. This, obviously, was the result of theological and hermeneutical prejudices informed by Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann¹⁹.

On the other hand, recent exegesis and theology tended to higher estimate Matthew's evaluation of justice and its relationship to Paul and James. The focus on peace and justice in Matthew's gospel, particularly seen in the Sermon on the Mount, suggested a political focus of the faith especially accentuated in Christian social-political movements²⁰. The emphasis on ethics shared by Matthew and James (the so-called "Christentum der Tat") formed a challenge and backup for several Christian groups who wanted to take part more actively in attempts to improve the society. Yet, more recently, the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistle of James have gained approval in theological and ecumenical circles²¹. The focus on justice as the core message of Jesus's own teaching and as a yardstick for any Christian community became a resource for ecumenical understanding between churches. Matthew's theology and ethics as based in early Jewish Torah traditions, very similar to James' paraenesis, appeared as evidence for the rootedness of early Christianity as a whole in a Jewish matrix²². Such placement of Matthew and James in their early Jewish context correlates to a new understanding of Paul and

¹⁸ Cf. for a radically negative view, SCHULZ, S. **Die Stunde der Botschaft**. Einführung in die Theologie der vier Evangelisten, Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1967; SCHULZ, S. **Die Mitte der Schrift**. Der Frühkatholizismus im Neuen Testament als Herausforderung an den Protestantismus. Stuttgart; Berlin: Kreuz-Verlag, 1976. Yet, see also the more careful judgment by KÜMMEL, W. G. Lukas in der Anklage der heutigen Theologie. In: KÜMMEL, W. G. **Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte**. Bd. 2. Gesammelte Aufsätze 1965-1977. MThSt 16. Marburg: Elwert, 1978, p. 87-100.

¹⁹ Cf. for this the debate about the so-called „Frühkatholizismus“, ROGGE, J; SCHILLE, G. (Eds.). Frühkatholizismus im ökumenischen Gespräch. Aus der Arbeit des Ökumenisch-Theologischen Arbeitskreises in der DDR, Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983.

²⁰ See for example DEINES, 2004, p. 12-18; STRECKER, 1984, p. 22f.; WENGST, K. **Das Regierungsprogramm des Himmelreichs**. Eine Auslegung der Bergpredigt in ihrem jüdischen Kontext, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010.

²¹ The so-called "Ecumenical Gathering for Justice, Peace and Preservation of the Creation" evolved into a certain climax in the eightieth of last century; cf. KUNTER, K. **Erfüllte Hoffnungen und Zerbrochene Träume**. Evangelische Kirchen in Deutschland im Spannungsfeld von Demokratie und Sozialismus (1980-1993). AKZG 46. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006.

²² Cf. for Matthew, NIEBUHR, K.-W. Die Antithesen des Matthäus. Jesus als Toralehrer und die frühjüdische weisheitlich geprägte Torarezeption. In: KÄHLER, C. et al. (Eds.). **Gedenkt an das Wort** (FS W. Vogler). Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1999, p. 175-200; OVERMAN, M. **Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism**. The Social World of the Matthean Community. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

his own theological roots from a “new perspective”²³.

Therefore, when we ask about a Lutheran hermeneutic for today, the relationship between Paul, Matthew and James seems to be an adequate and a challenging topic to evaluate. In particular when dealing with categories of justice and justification, we have to consider what Scripture as a whole will have to say to us Lutherans in our different global and regional contexts, rather than only one or two selected passages from the Bible.

In what follows, I will enter my subject by reporting on a recent project on “The Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Justification” jointly run by the Lutheran World Federation, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the World Methodist Council (II). Then I briefly sketch the use and meaning of terminology of justice and justification in Matthew (III) and James (IV). In my conclusion (V), I will come back to the question of hermeneutics from a Lutheran perspective.

2 Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Justification

In 2006, the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity implemented a task force, consisting of six theologians (four NT scholars and two specialists in ecumenical theology), to

²³ For this term, cf. NIEBUHR, K.-W. Die paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre in der gegenwärtigen exegetischen Diskussion. In: SÖDING, T. (Ed.). **Worum geht es in der Rechtfertigungslehre?** Das biblische Fundament der „Gemeinsamen Erklärung“ von katholischer Kirche und Lutherischem Weltbund. QD 180. Freiburg u.a.: Herder Verlag, 1999, p. 106-130; MASCHMEIER, J.-C. **Rechtfertigung bei Paulus.** Eine Kritik alter und neuer Paulusperspektiven. BWANT 189. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010; WILK, F. Gottesgerechtigkeit – Gesetzeswerke – eigene Gerechtigkeit. Überlegungen zur geschichtlichen Verwurzelung und theologischen Bedeutung paulinischer Rechtfertigungsaussagen im Anschluss an die »New Perspective«. In: **ThLZ.** Leipzig, v. 135, 2010, p. 267-282. For the continuing debate, see BACHMANN, M. (Ed.). **Lutherische und neue Paulusperspektive.** Beiträge zu einem Schlüsselproblem der gegenwärtigen exegetischen Diskussion. WUNT 182. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005; WATSON, F. **Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles.** Beyond the New Perspective. Revised and Expanded Edition, Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007; DUNN, J. D. G. **The New Perspective on Paul. Collected Essays.** WUNT 185. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005; WESTERHOLM, S. **Perspectives Old and New on Paul.** The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics, Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004.

search for ways in which to continue the process of ecumenical accommodation of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ) with special regard to its biblical foundations. In the discussions on this document after its publication, one of the points of criticism had been its weakness in exegetical argument and a rather marginal interaction with more recent developments in biblical research. From the point of view of biblical studies, in particular a one-sided, dogmatically blurred use of the Old Testament, the neglect of the Jewish context of the New Testament and its exclusively Pauline concept of justification had been fiercely criticized.²⁴ Therefore, the task force received a mandate to take on the commitment explicitly mentioned already in the Official Common Statement (OCS) to the *Joint Declaration* “to continued and deepened study of the biblical foundations of the doctrine of justification”²⁵. To execute this task the study group included OT scholars as well as theologians from Reformed and Methodist churches and several colleagues (men and women) from the “global south”. In the end, altogether fifteen theologians from seven different countries took part in the project. During three workshops in Rome 2008, Louisville 2012, and Wittenberg 2011, the team went its way from Rome to Wittenberg. Meanwhile the results appeared in print in English and German²⁶.

One of the main objectives of the project was to reflect on the hermeneutical presuppositions from the perspective of different confessional traditions respectively. Therefore, after a brief introduction, two chapters of the study document deal with hermeneutical aspects²⁷ and traditions of biblical interpretation in different confessional backgrounds²⁸, before the study examines core matters of the biblical understanding of justice and justification in the Old and in the New Testament. I will come back to this part of the document later in

²⁴ For such critical voices, see SÖDING, T. Kriterium der Wahrheit? Zum theologischen Stellenwert der paulinischen Rechtfertigungslehre. In: SÖDING, 1999, p. 193-246; HOSSFELD, F.-L. Gedanken zum alttestamentlichen Vorfeld paulinischer Rechtfertigungslehre. In: SÖDING, 1999, p. 13-26.

²⁵ OCS (see note 6), p. 3.

²⁶ **The Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Justification.** An Ecumenical Follow-Up to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, Geneva, July 2011 (= New York/Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2012; quoted as **BFDJ**); **Biblische Grundlagen der Rechtfertigungslehre.** Eine ökumenische Studie zur Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre, ed. W. Klaiber, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012.

²⁷ **BFDJ** (see note 26), p. 7-13.

²⁸ **BFDJ** (see note 26), p. 15-26.

my conclusions.

For the biblical part of the study document the conviction concluded that the foundations of the message of God's salvific dealing with humankind in Jesus Christ cannot be identified simply with Paul's doctrine of justification as expressed in (only some of) his letters. The one Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed in Holy Scripture and read from the perspective of Christian belief in the triune God, on the one hand, differs categorically from variable expressions of the faith in the Gospel formulated by different people living in different contexts and shaped by different traditions which all have found their way into the Christian Bible canon, on the other. For this reason, we first have to ask carefully how the Bible in its different parts speaks about God's justice and about his salvific work as well as about human justice (and injustice as well!) and how human conduct has to be transformed and reshaped according to the will of God. Yet, after this process of carefully distinguishing different texts and expressions in the Bible, we also have to look for the message of the Bible as a whole. We also have to ask what the Bible has to say to human beings in our own time who (mostly) are not Bible scholars but "ordinary" persons well qualified in their own fields and confronted with their own urgent questions and challenges of their lives. We do not believe in Paul or his doctrine – Paul himself would have fiercely refused such a claim – but in Jesus Christ who saved our lives, and the Bible as a whole testifies to this faith in Christ when read and understood as the Gospel of the triune God.

Therefore, if we search for biblical foundations of the doctrine of justification we cannot limit our perspective to Paul and his letters, but rather have to take into account all parts of Scripture to find expressions of the gospel, even those parts where the terminology of justice or justification may be missing. Nevertheless, this particular terminology as well as the message of God acting to justify and save people from sin and suffering *is* present also in the Old Testament at many places²⁹. The OT part of the study, therefore, assembles several terms and phrases from OT writings by which God's righteousness is expressed explicitly or implicitly, as well as the righteousness of the people of God and the message of justification or even the cry for justice in social and political contexts³⁰.

²⁹ Cf. for this WITTE, M. Von der Gerechtigkeit Gottes und des Menschen im Alten Testament. In: WITTE, M. (Ed.). **Gerechtigkeit**. Themen der Theologie 8. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012, p. 37-68.

³⁰ **BFDJ** (see note 26), p. 27-49.

Such teaching and preaching on God's righteousness in the Old Testament was well received and developed further not only in the New Testament but already in Early Jewish writings which, in a way, form the "missing link" between both Testaments of the Christian Bible. Therefore, if we want to understand Paul's expressions about God's righteousness in Christ in their original context, we have to take into account also how pious Jews of his time (as he himself was one of them) would have understood from their own religious traditions what Paul had written. There is plenty of evidence in Jewish texts of similar views on God's righteousness and his grace, in particular in the Qumran scrolls, but in other contemporaneous sources as well³¹. Key passages from the Old Testament³² quoted in the New as referring to God's justice and to the faith in Christ, therefore, are part of a broader tradition of reading and understanding Scripture as God's word for today already in Judaism contemporaneous to the New Testament. If Paul, for instance, quotes Gen 15.6 as a testimony for his own view of justification by faith without works of the law he only proves himself being a Jew qualified in Scripture to find suitable sections in the Bible to express his belief in Christ.

It is Paul among the New Testament authors, of course, who uses more than anybody else does the terminology of righteousness and justification to point to God's work in Jesus Christ, predominantly in his letters to the Galatians, to the Romans and to the Philippians. Yet, it would be a failure to limit our search for the biblical foundations of the doctrine of justification to Paul's letters alone. According to the common study document, the apostolic witness for the message of God's saving acts in Jesus Christ in the New Testament is much broader. Therefore, the text reads "From a biblical or 'canonical' perspective" it is "Jesus' ministry and the saving act of his death and resurrection" which form "the basis for the whole of the church's message. The Gospels and sometimes even the letters of the New Testament collected and transmitted what people remembered and retold of Jesus' sayings and stories. We refer to these traditions of Jesus' proclamation as 'the gospel of Jesus Christ' and will ask whether or not we can find in it the roots of a theology of justification"³³.

³¹ See for this **BFDJ** (see note 26), p. 49-52. For prayers of repentance in ancient Jewish texts see Dan 9.16-18; 1QS 11.11-15; 1QH 4 [12].29-37; 4QMMT 398, fr. 14 II; IV Esr 7.46, 68; 8.35.

³² Cf. Gen 15.6; Hab 2.4; Jes 28.16. See for this **BFDJ** (see note 26), p. 52-56.

³³ **BFDJ** (see note 26), p. 57.

Out of this reason, the document firstly tries to sketch the profile of Paul's theology of justification³⁴, but then turns to "The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Theology of Justification." In this brief section³⁵, the study deals with the ministry of Jesus and his proclamation of the kingdom of God. However, this chapter does not consist of a reconstruction of the teaching and preaching of the so-called "historical Jesus." When speaking of "the gospel of Jesus Christ," the study has in mind the Jesus-event as a whole as expressed in the gospels, consisting of "the good news he preached to the people in Galilee and Judea, the good news he brought through his healing and liberating ministry to the sick and to those who were possessed by demons, and the good news he lived in his death at the cross, which by his resurrection was revealed as the deepest expression of the service of his whole life, giving it as 'a ransom for many'"³⁶. Only after this chapter, the study deals with other writings in the New Testament, as the Gospel of Matthew, St. John's gospel and the Epistle of James, which according to the study all include alternative expressions of the "apostolic witness to Jesus Christ and to all that God has done through him"³⁷.

By this order of chapters, the study text develops a particular hermeneutical approach to the testimony of Scripture as a whole, even where the doctrine of justification is in view. The gospel of God's righteousness, obviously, comes to the fore most clearly and explicitly in Paul's letters, but it is rooted in and shaped by the event in which God was dealing beneficially with humankind in Jesus Christ, which not only Paul, but also all other writings of the New Testament testify in their own way respectively.

3 JUSTICE IN MATTHEW

To go a little bit further in the direction taken by the ecumenical study document, in the following two sections I will turn to Matthew and James in order to sketch their ways of proclaiming "the gospel of Jesus Christ." As we will see, there is no way to assimilate their theological conceptions to Paul's original view

³⁴ BFDJ (see note 26), p. 58-87.

³⁵ BFDJ (see note 26), p. 87-92.

³⁶ BFDJ (see note 26), p. 87f.

³⁷ BFDJ (see note 26), p. 57.

on justification by faith in Christ without works of the law or even to identify both of them. Yet, following the hermeneutical approach of the ecumenical study document, I consider it fruitful to search carefully for a common basis of their very different views on justice and justification by “the gospel of Jesus Christ,” even if this basis is developed in a completely different way from Paul in these writings.

In Matthew, the use of the words “justice/righteousness,” “just,” “being justified” is shaped in a particular way in comparison to the other synoptic gospels³⁸. The noun occurs seven times in Matthew (Luke: 1, Mark: 0), exclusively in passages with no synoptic parallels³⁹. The adjective occurs 17 times in Matthew (Luke: 11, Mark 2). Yet, the use of the verb already makes it clear that there is a big gap between Matthew’s understanding and Paul’s use of the word group: Matthew uses the verb only twice (Luke: 5, Mark: 0), in comparison to its very frequent occurrence in Paul’s letters. Therefore, to understand what Matthew wants to express by speaking of God’s righteousness, we must not start with a Pauline concept of justification in mind, but we have to focus on the literary and theological context of the word group in Matthew’s gospel story.

If we look to the semantic field of the word group in Matthew, we observe a certain overlap with Paul as well as characteristic discrepancies. On the one hand, Matthew, like Paul, uses the term with regard to the Jewish law and its commandments⁴⁰. Justice is no abstract ethical category, as in ordinary Greek usage, but something that people have to do or to fulfil⁴¹. On the other hand, in Matthew we never find an opposition between faith in Christ and “works of the law” which is so characteristic for Paul’s comprehension of God’s righteousness and the justification of sinners. Instead, for Matthew justice is an attribute of the kingdom of God, the βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν⁴², which in his gospel functions

³⁸ I leave out of consideration here John, see for him **BFDJ** (see note 26), p. 98-101. For Matthew’s concept of justice see also **BFDJ** (see note 26), p. 92-98.

³⁹ Matt 3.15; 5.6, 10, 20; 6.1, 33; 21.32. Cf. for an overview DEINES, 2004, p. 124-127.

⁴⁰ Cf. Matt 5.17-20, cf. 1.19; 5.45; 23.28; 25.37. Cf. for a comparison of Matthew and Paul with regard to their understanding of the law most recently KONRADT, M. *Salvation and Christian Identity in Paul and Matthew*. In: M. Welker; G. Etzelmüller (Eds.). **Concepts of Law in the Sciences, Legal Studies, and Theology**. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013, p. 81-204.

⁴¹ Compare for this term Matt 3.15; 5.17; Rom 1.29; 8.4; 13.8; Gal 5.14.

⁴² Cf. Mt 5.10, 20; 6.33. For a most recent debate on understanding justice in Matthew, see DEINES, R. *Gerechtigkeit, die zum Leben führt. Die christologische Bestimmtheit der Glaubenden bei Matthäus*. In: **ZNT**. Tübingen, v. 36, 2015, p. 46-56; VOGEL, M.

as the leading metaphor for Jesus's own preaching and for that of his disciples⁴³. However, this term is almost completely missing in Paul⁴⁴.

More important is the literary function of the term δικαιοσύνη in Matthew's story. In the very first word pronounced by Jesus in the gospel (the first verbal quotation of Jesus in the Bible at all!), Matthew speaks of justice as to be fulfilled by John the Baptist and by Jesus himself. When Jesus comes to the Jordan to be baptized by John, and when John would be preventing him by saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" then Jesus replies "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way *to fulfil all righteousness.*" (Matt 3.15)⁴⁵. If we follow Matthew's story to its end, again the last word about justice in the gospel is a word raised by Jesus about John the Baptist. Concluding the Parable of the Two Sons, Jesus proclaims that the tax collectors and the prostitutes on their way to the kingdom of heavens will go ahead of the leaders of his opponents in Jerusalem because they did not believe in John who came to them "*in the way of righteousness*" (Matt 21.32).

Therefore, the ministry of Jesus as a whole as told by Matthew from its beginnings in Galilee up to his fatal end in Jerusalem is bracketed by two statements on righteousness pronounced by Jesus himself. This observation points to the result that justice in Matthew implies much more than only an ethical category for human conduct. In Matthew, δικαιοσύνη is a theological term used to point to the whole way of Jesus and John the Baptist as an expression of God's salvific work for his people. Righteousness in this sense in Matthew also has to do with faith in Jesus who comes to Israel as the eschatological messenger from God, announced by John the Baptist, to save his people of Israel, even though this concept of righteousness differs completely from Paul's doctrine of justification.

If we consider briefly the remaining occurrences for δικαιοσύνη in Matthew, this result proves true. The word occurs otherwise only in the Sermon on the Mount, in the first speech of the Son of God. It appears twice in the

Die Ethik der „besseren Gerechtigkeit“ im Matthäusevangelium, **ZNT**. Tübingen, v. 36, 2015, p. 57-63.

⁴³ Cf. Matt 4.17, 23; 9.35; 10.7. On the term βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν as a Matthean guideline, cf. DEINES, 2004, p. 103-120.

⁴⁴ It occurs only in Rom 14.17; Gal 5.21 and occasionally in 1 Cor.

⁴⁵ Cf. for this DEINES, 2004, p. 127-136. See also KLAIBER, W. **Das Matthäusevangelium. Teilband 1: Mt 1,1 – 16,20**. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2015, p. 56-58.

Beatitudes, then as conclusion of Jesus's words about the fulfilment of the law and the prophets and then again twice in chapter 6⁴⁶. In all these occurrences, the meaning of justice in Matthew has to do with the way of life that human beings have to lead according to God's will, but cannot be limited to an ethical category only. Righteousness, as Matthew understands it, always relates to the kingdom of God as demonstrated and taught by Jesus⁴⁷. When Jesus blesses "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (5.6), he not only describes the conduct of a righteous life, but a broader attitude of longing for salvation offered by God through Jesus's ministry. When Matthew speaks of "those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (5.10) he has in mind Jesus's followers who suffer for the sake of their adherence to Jesus, and he promises that they will inherit the kingdom of heaven. Their pious life shall not be self-confident and hypocritical like a show to impress people, but humble and shaped by gratitude to God who like a father rewards those who trust in him (6.1-4). As for the needs of everyday life, Jesus admonishes his followers not to trust in material goods but to "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (6.33). According to Jesus, therefore, the kingdom of God includes all matters of everyday life, but cannot be restricted to earthly, practical matters only, like food or clothing.

This is what Jesus has in mind also when he speaks of a justice "higher" or "better" than that of the scribes and the Pharisees (5.20). One has to be careful not to infer here any traditionally anti-Jewish prejudices over against the Pharisees as a group drafted negatively in ancient Judaism⁴⁸. What Jesus wants to point out here according to Matthew is a way of life shaped by the will of God as expressed

⁴⁶ Cf. Matt 5.6, 10, 20; 6.1, 33.

⁴⁷ Cf. also KONRADT, M. *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*. NTD 1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015, 77: „Die von den Jüngern erwartete ‚bessere Gerechtigkeit‘ basiert hingegen darauf, dass die großen Gebote adäquat, d.h. gemäß ihrem vollen und tieferen Sinn befolgt werden. Voraussetzung dafür ist das neue Erschlossenensein von Gesetz und Propheten durch Leben und Lehre Jesu.“

⁴⁸ Cf. BFDJ (see note 26), p. 93: "Even if this righteousness can be called 'new' or 'better' or 'higher' justice ..., it does not negate the Jewish tradition. It is a new interpretation and takes the law beyond the way it was practiced according to the Jewish tradition. The context of the emergence of this *dikaiosynē* in the narration of Matthew will enable us better to understand the tension between an erroneous understanding of Jesus' mission, the justice of the scribes and Pharisees, and the new or higher justice. 'Scribes and Pharisees' appear as literary figures of the Matthean story, not as historically reconstructed Jewish groups."

in the Torah, but enabled and encouraged by the encounter with Jesus, the Son of God⁴⁹. This shows up clearly in the following “Antitheses”⁵⁰. “Higher justice” then is not an ethical but an eschatological category founded in Jesus’s proclamation of the kingdom of God as well as in his own way of life as the Son of God and in his fate as God’s servant. Only as a significant contribution to the Jesus-story told by Matthew, such justice appears in its full theological and ethical meaning.

Justice in a Matthean sense, therefore, points to God dealing with humankind in Jesus Christ. Yet, it also has consequences for the way of life of those who want to adhere to Jesus as his followers. Such justice refers to every single disciple in his or her ethical or religious decisions and convictions. Yet, at the same time, it also refers to the people of God, the community of the followers of Jesus, as well as to the “world,” the society in which they live and which carries the promise to being converted by God into the kingdom of heavens.

4 JUSTICE IN JAMES

If we would try to use the Pauline doctrine of justification as a key to the Epistle of James, it would stick in the lock or even break off. In any case, it is impossible to unlock the theological content and the paraenetical value of James by means of a Pauline perspective, furthermore there is nothing in the letter that suggests James intended to argue from the point of view of Paul in his discussion on faith and works⁵¹. Moreover, nobody ever tried this before Martin Luther. The Church Fathers considered the two authors as being complementary from a canonical perspective, as did also John Calvin⁵².

The Epistle of James only rarely mentions God’s righteousness and the justification of human beings. Jas 1.20 reads “your anger *does not produce God’s righteousness*.” From its context, the sentence conclusively inverts a statement

⁴⁹ Cf. **BFDJ** (see note 26), p. 96: “In other words, Jesus is the true master of justice, and it is only through him that one can aspire to the ‘higher justice’ that leads to the kingdom of heaven.”

⁵⁰ See for this my Antithesen des Matthäus (see note 22), p. 175-200.

⁵¹ Cf. Jas 2.14-26. For the following part I draw on passages on James in **BFDJ** (see note 26), p. 101-103, which I drafted for the study document.

⁵² For the history of interpretation of Jas see ALLISON, JR., D. C. **A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James**. New York et al.: Bloomsbury, 2013.

about God's appreciation of humans' righteous deeds. Human beings cannot achieve recognition by God; they only receive the saving word. Abraham and the harlot Rehab occur as biblical examples for the conviction that God recognizes human activities that express and perfect their faith.⁵³

According to his self-understanding – which can be discerned most clearly in the prescript – the letter is the authoritative word of “James, servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ to the twelve tribes (of Israel) in the dispersion” (1.1). On the other hand, the author lays great stress on the fact that the Christ event is God's gift to humankind. The section Jas 1.12-25 lays the theological foundation for the whole epistle⁵⁴. Two beatitudes in verses 12 and 25 frame this section⁵⁵. The first determines, like a key signature, the tone of the epistle. Blessed is the believer who does exactly what the opening admonition of the letter demands. He shows steadfastness in temptation that arises from faith⁵⁶, in contrast to those who doubt. Their soul is torn and they are driven back and forth wherever they go⁵⁷. While the latter will receive nothing from the Lord, those who persevere in faith will receive the “crown of life”⁵⁸. A series of imperatives follows this pledge of salvation flowing into the second blessing: blessed is the one who immerses himself in the perfect law of freedom and thus becomes a doer and not merely a hearer of the word. This argument designates the principal aim of the letter: the unity of hearing and doing in faith.

Of particular weight in the letter are propositions about God⁵⁹. God is the giver of good gifts. Humans receive them⁶⁰. Works do not “make” the person.

⁵³ Cf. Jas 1.21b; 2.21, 23, 24, 25.

⁵⁴ Cf. the seminal monograph on James by KONRADT, M. **Christliche Existenz nach dem Jakobusbrief**. Eine Studie zu seiner soteriologischen und ethischen Konzeption. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998.

⁵⁵ Cf. for this NIEBUHR, K.-W. Die Seligpreisungen in der Bergpredigt nach Matthäus und im Brief des Jakobus. Zugänge zum Menschenbild Jesu? In: LAMPE, P. et al. (Eds.). **Neutestamentliche Exegese im Dialog**. Hermeneutik – Wirkungsgeschichte – Matthäusevangelium (FS U. Luz). Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2008, p. 275-296.

⁵⁶ Jas 1.2-4.

⁵⁷ Jas 1.6, 8.

⁵⁸ Jas 1.7, 12.

⁵⁹ See for this WENGER, S. **Der wesenhaft gute Kyrios**. Eine exegetische Studie über das Gottesbild im Jakobusbrief. ATHANT 100. Zürich: TVZ Theologischer Verlag, 2011.

⁶⁰ Jas 1.5, 7, 12, 17; 3.15, 17.

Rather, what a person is willing to receive from God this makes a person what he or she is. Accordingly, formulations in the passive voice define the image of the human being: the blessed man will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised⁶¹. In contrast, God is active as creator and “father” who is immediately afterwards described by the specifically maternal trait of giving birth⁶². God comes to help those who turn to him and hears the cries of the suffering⁶³. As judge, God can preserve and save life, or not.⁶⁴ God strengthens the lowly and brings down the proud⁶⁵.

As far as human salvation is concerned, the Epistle of James holds receiving and listening as more important than faith or works⁶⁶. Understood in these contexts, faith would never denote a justifying work⁶⁷. If faith and works occur together in James, the topic at hand is the unity of hearing and acting, believing and living. The origin of faith is no longer at stake there⁶⁸. Nonetheless, the emphasis James places on the interrelationship between faith and works provides a hint to his main intentions by writing the letter. The intention to being a doer, not only a hearer of God’s salvific word, governs his exhortation⁶⁹. The context shows that faith shall appear in action. Faith and works come together only in the Epistle of James where the development and shaping of the new life is at hand, which believers received as a gift from God. Therefore, faith is apparent in works, but it is not a product of works. It is visible in his acts, whether or not one has received the good gift of faith⁷⁰.

⁶¹ Jas 1.12. Cf. NIEBUHR, K.-W. Ethik und Anthropologie nach dem Jakobusbrief. Eine Skizze. In: HORN, F.W.; ZIMMERMANN, R. (Eds.). **Jenseits von Indikativ und Imperativ**. WUNT 238. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009, p. 329-346.

⁶² Jas 1.17f.; 3.9.

⁶³ Jas 4.8; 5.14-15; 5.4.

⁶⁴ Jas 2.13; 4.9, 12, 15; 5.9, 19f.

⁶⁵ Cf. Jas 2.5; 4.6, 10.

⁶⁶ Jas 1.12, 21-23.

⁶⁷ For the meaning of faith in Jas, see my article NIEBUHR, K.-W. Glaube im Stresstest. Πίστις im Jakobusbrief. In: FREY, J.; SCHLIESSER, B; UEBERSCHER, N. (Eds.), **Glaube. Das Verständnis des Glaubens im frühen Christentum und in seiner jüdischen und hellenistisch-römischen Umwelt**. WUNT 373. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017, p. 473-501.

⁶⁸ Cf. Jas 2.14-26.

⁶⁹ Jas 1.22.

⁷⁰ Jas 3.13-18. Cf. for this HEILIGENTHAL, R. **Werke als Zeichen**. Untersuchungen

The particular emphasis in the statements about God's righteousness and the justification of humans in the Epistle of James is that the action of the believer certainly is considered important, yet not as a prerequisite or condition for receiving salvation, but rather as the consequence of faith. In James, works are the expressions of faith. They bear witness to the fact that a person has received faith that is living within him or her. Christians are those who received a gift from God. They base their life on this gift, but they also are to make something out of the life they received by their faith in Christ.

Compared to Paul, the differences are remarkable. Whereas in Paul the vocabulary of righteousness/justification and faith refers to the inclusion of all humankind ("Jews and Gentiles") by the salvific activity of God, characterized by the Christ event, in James the same vocabulary occurs to present the life and activity of human beings in consequence of their faith previously received as a gift. The most important difference between James and Paul is the relevance of the Torah with regard to faith. This difference is obvious in the fact that the expression "works of the law" occurs only in Paul, but never in James. Whereas, according to Paul, the Torah has no role at all in the process of accessing the salvific power of Christ, in James, the Torah is part of God's saving activity on behalf of his people. Compared to Paul, James is closer to the understanding of the law and the usage of language in early Judaism⁷¹. His understanding of righteousness is more related to Matthew's concept of justice than it is to the Pauline theology of justification. Nevertheless, both New Testament authors use the vocabulary of righteousness/justification in a way that should neither be merged nor understood as mutually exclusive. Rather, we should read them from their respective contexts and not set them in opposition to one another.

zur Bedeutung der menschlichen Taten im Frühjudentum, Neuen Testament und Frühchristentum. WUNT II/9. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983 (p. 26-52 on Jas 2.14-26).

⁷¹ Cf. for this NIEBUHR, K.-W. *Nomos. B. Jüdisch, C. Neues Testament*. In: **Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum**: Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt. Bd. 25. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2013, p. 1006-1061; NIEBUHR, K.-W. **Gesetz und Paränese**. Katechismusartige Weisungsreihen in der frühjüdischen Literatur. WUNT II/28. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987.

V CONCLUSIONS

If we search for the biblical foundations of the doctrine of justification from the perspective of Lutheran hermeneutics, we have to take into account that the Bible includes a diversity of expressions converging in their testimony to God's salvific action toward human beings. At the same time, biblical texts choose different means in order to correspond to diverse situations. The Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew are two such different testimonies we have to put in relation to the Pauline argumentation on God's righteousness and God's justification of human beings by faith alone. Even a Lutheran perspective cannot presuppose that it has at hand the "pure gospel." Lutheran hermeneutics is not without its own traditions of biblical interpretation and they originated in specific constellations of historical developments and theological convictions. Therefore, we have to reflect carefully upon the relationship between the revelation of the gospel in Jesus Christ on the one hand and the Holy Scripture as the multifaceted testimony of this revelatory event on the other hand, along with the traditions of interpretation which guide our understanding of the Bible today⁷².

The Christ event, as the core matter of the apostolic testimony precedes the New Testament writings and the biblical canon. It possesses revelatory quality governing Christian faith and the church. The one and only Christ event, as subject and prerequisite for both faith and the church, also precedes all multiform apostolic proclamations of the gospel, which found their expression in the writings of the New Testament. The apostles received the revelation of the Christ event in exclusive encounters with the risen Christ, who entrusted them with the message of salvation (cf. 1 Cor 15.8-9). The apostolic writings of the New Testament testify to their encounter with Christ. To this extent, there exists a categorical disparity between the first apostolic proclamation as witnessed in the New Testament and its various transmissions to the church, in the church, and by the church.

The diverse expressions of the apostolic proclamation of the gospel by the apostles' witness form the basis of the New Testament canon⁷³. The apostles'

⁷² Cf. for this **BFDJ** (see note 26), p. 7-13.

⁷³ In this sense, KÄSEMANN, E. was right in seeing in the NT canon the reason not for the unity of the church, but for the diversity of confessions, cf. his often quoted article: *Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?* In: KÄSEMANN, E. (Hg.). **Das Neue Testament als Kanon**. Dokumentation und kritische Analyse zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970, p. 124-133.

fellowship in their proclamation of the gospel, as shown in the New Testament (cf. 1 Cor 15.1-11; Acts 15; Gal 2.1-10), appears as a canonical template for reading the Bible from an ecumenical perspective⁷⁴. From the point of view of the Christ event, the canon is genuinely valid only when its unity as well as the tension between its parts is preserved. Such unity and tension exists in the relationship between the single act of salvation, to which the church owes its existence, and the different proclamations of this act in the texts of the New Testament.

The Pauline doctrine of justification appears as one, but not the only kerygmatic and didactic formulation of the Christ event. It is not identical to the apostolic witness to Christ, but it partakes in it. It has the same status over against the apostolic witness as the other apostles' formulations of the Christ event. It is equal in terms of origin, content, authority, and normativity: "Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe" (1 Cor 15.11).

The testimony of Matthew is important for comprehending the full meaning of God's righteousness and of justice as a yardstick for a Christian way of life. Matthew does not oppose Paul's conviction that only by faith in Christ God will save all humankind. The same refers to the Epistle of James which is deeply rooted in the experience of faith in Christ as the turning point of life for those who have already received the "word of truth," "the implanted word which has the power to save souls" (cf. Jas 1.18, 21)⁷⁵. Both Matthew and James, perhaps more than Paul, but not in opposition to him, explicitly point to the ethical consequences of faith in doing what is right and just in everyday life, and by doing this they, in

⁷⁴ Cf. for this NIEBUHR, K.-W. Gemeinschaft der Apostel. Das „Apostelkonzil“ als Bezugspunkt und Modell konziliarer Gemeinschaft in der Kirche. In: HELLER, D.; SCHNEIDER, J. (Eds.). **Die Ökumenischen Konzilien und die Katholizität der Kirche**. Das elfte Gespräch im bilateralen theologischen Dialog zwischen der Rumänischen Orthodoxen Kirche und der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland. ÖR.Beih 83. Frankfurt: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2009, p. 46-69; NIEBUHR, K.-W. Sola Scriptura und Communio Sanctorum. Zum Verhältnis von Schriftgemäßheit und Kirchengemeinschaft. In: **ZNT**. Tübingen, v. 20, 2017, p. 127-141.

⁷⁵ Cf. for this my recent articles NIEBUHR, K.-W. Der erinnerte Jesus bei Jakobus. Ein Beitrag zur Einleitung in einen umstrittenen Brief. In: LABAHN, M. (Ed.). **Spurensuche zur Einleitung in das Neue Testament** (FS Udo Schnelle). FRLANT 271. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017, p. 307-329; NIEBUHR, K.-W. Der Jakobusbrief in ökumenischer Perspektive. Ein Vorgriff auf meine Kommentierung im EKK. In: Ulrich LUZ u.a. (Eds.). **Exegese – ökumenisch engagiert**. Der „Evangelisch-Katholische Kommentar“ in der Diskussion über 500 Jahre Reformation. Ein Rückblick und ein Ausblick. Ostfildern; Göttingen: Patmos; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht [2016], p. 137-145.

a way, turn back their understanding of righteousness to the biblical foundations in the Old Testament and early Jewish thinking. Therefore, they have an important word to say, not against Paul, but in addition to him, when we search for a biblical understanding of justice and justification.

In order to broaden the biblical basis of the message of justification for a contemporaneous understanding, we are to look for different formulations of the proclamation of Christ in the New Testament. These are essentially homogenous in the sense of the apostolic witness to Christ although their doctrinal reflections and interpretations may differ with regard to what they emphasize. The letters of Paul (esp. Romans, Galatians, Philippians) fundamentally develop and reflect the doctrine of justification in the face of opponents in Pauline churches who compromised the proclamation of the gospel. The Gospel of Matthew is a witness to the righteousness of God embodied in Jesus Christ by his proclamation and realization of the lordship of God, and by his call to the disciples to do justice. The Epistle of James by reference to the “harvest of righteousness” (cf. Jas 3.18) points to necessary consequences of the revelation of the “word of truth” (cf. Jas 1.18) as constituent component of living faith. The criterion to evaluate different biblical witnesses for justification is how they correspond to the Christ event, to the gospel of Christ, and to the action, way, and destiny of Jesus of Nazareth in whom God accomplished God’s justification for salvation of all humankind.

REFERENCES

- AHRENS, M. **Der Realitäten Widerschein oder Arm und Reich im Jakobusbrief**. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung. Berlin: Alektor-Verlag, 1995.
- ALLISON, JR., D. C. **A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James**. New York et al.: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Annex to the Official Common Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church (OCS)**, 1999. Disponível em: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2017/joint_statement_lwf-pcpcu_-_en.pdf>. Acesso em: 29 jul. 2017.
- BACHMANN, M. (Ed.). **Lutherische und neue Paulusperspektive**. Beiträge zu einem Schlüsselproblem der gegenwärtigen exegetischen Diskussion. WUNT 182. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.
- BECKER, E.-M.; MTATA, K. (Eds.). **Pauline Hermeneutics: Exploring the “Power of the Gospel”** (LWFS 2016/3). Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017.
- BEUTEL, Albrecht. *Die Formierung neuzeitlicher Schriftauslegung und ihre Bedeutung für*

- die Kirchengeschichte, In: F. NÜSSEL (Ed.), **Schriftauslegung**. Themen der Theologie 8. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014, p. 141-177.
- BLANKE, H. Bibelübersetzung. In: BEUTEL, Albrecht. Theologie als Schriftauslegung. In: A. BEUTEL (Ed.). **Luther Handbuch**. 2. Aufl. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010, p. 258-265.
- BEUTEL, Albrecht. Theologie als Schriftauslegung. In: A. BEUTEL (Ed.). **Luther Handbuch**. 2. Aufl. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010, p. 444-449.
- Biblische Grundlagen der Rechtfertigungslehre**. Eine ökumenische Studie zur Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre, ed. W. Klaiber, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012.
- D. Martin Luthers Werke**. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-2009 (= WA).
- DEINES, R. **Die Gerechtigkeit der Tora im Reich des Messias**. Mt 5.13–20 als Schlüsseltext der matthäischen Theologie. WUNT 177. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004.
- DEINES, R. Gerechtigkeit, die zum Leben führt. Die christologische Bestimmtheit der Glaubenden bei Matthäus. In: ZNT. Tübingen, v. 36, 2015, p. 46-56.
- DESPOTIS, A. **Die „New Perspective on Paul“ und die griechisch-orthodoxe Paulusinterpretation**. St. Ottilien: EOS-Verlag, 2014.
- Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche**. Hrsg. im Gedenkjahr der Augsburgerischen Konfession 1930. 11. ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992 (= BSLK).
- DUNN, J. D. G. **The New Perspective on Paul**. Collected Essays. WUNT 185. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.
- FREY, Jörg; SCHLIESSER, B. (Eds.). **Die Theologie des Paulus in der Diskussion**. Reflexionen im Anschluss an Michael Wolters Grundriss. BThSt 140. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2013, p. 213-236.
- HEILIGENTHAL, R. **Werke als Zeichen**. Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung der menschlichen Taten im Frühjudentum, Neuen Testament und Frühchristentum. WUNT II/9. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983.
- J. D. G. et al. (Ed.). **Auslegung der Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Perspektive**. WUNT 130. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.
- Joint declaration on the Doctrine of Justification of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (JDDJ)**, 1999, 18. Cf. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2017/joint_statement_lwf-pcpcu_-_en.pdf>. Access: 29. Jul. 2017.
- KÄSEMANN, Ernst. Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche? In: Ernst KÄSEMANN (Hg.). **Das Neue Testament als Kanon**. Dokumentation und kritische Analyse zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion. Göttingen, 1970, p. 124-133.
- KLAIBER, W. **Das Matthäusevangelium**. Teilband 1: Mt 1,1 – 16,20. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2015.
- KONRADT, M. **Christliche Existenz nach dem Jakobusbrief**. Eine Studie zu seiner soteriologischen und ethischen Konzeption. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998.
- _____. **Das Evangelium nach Matthäus**. NTD 1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015.

- _____. Salvation and Christian Identity in Paul and Matthew. In: M. Welker; G. Etzelmüller (Eds.). **Concepts of Law in the Sciences, Legal Studies, and Theology**. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013, p. 81-204.
- KÜMMEL, Werner Georg. Lukas in der Anklage der heutigen Theologi. In: W. G. KÜMMEL. **Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte**. Bd. 2. Gesammelte Aufsätze 1965-1977. MThSt 16. Marburg: Elwert, 1978, p. 87-100.
- KUNTER, K.. **Erfüllte Hoffnungen und Zerbrochene Träume**. Evangelische Kirchen in Deutschland im Spannungsfeld von Demokratie und Sozialismus (1980-1993). AKZG 46. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006.
- MAHLMANN, T. Articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae'. In: **Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart** [RGG]. Vol. 1. 4. ed. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000, p. 799f.
- MAHLMANN, T. Zur Geschichte der Formel 'Articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae'. In: **LuThK**. Oberursel, v. 17, 1993, p. 187-194.
- MASCHMEIER, J.-C. **Rechtfertigung bei Paulus**. Eine Kritik alter und neuer Paulusperspektiven. BWANT 189. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010.
- MONGSTAD-KVAMMEN, I. **Toward a Postcolonial Reading of the Epistle of James**. James 2.1-13 in its Roman Imperial Context. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013.
- MTATA, K. (Ed.). **"You have the Words of Eternal Life."** Transformative Readings of the Gospel of John from a Lutheran Perspective. (LWF.D 57). Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2012.
- _____; NIEBUHR, K.-W.; ROSE, M. (Eds.). **Singing the Songs of the Lord in Foreign Lands: Psalms in Contemporary Lutheran Interpretation**. (LWF.D 59). Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2014.
- _____; KOESTER, C. (Eds.). **To All the Nations: Lutheran Hermeneutics and the Gospel of Matthew**. (LWF.S 2015/2). Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015.
- NIEBUHR, K.-W. „A New Perspective on James“? Neuere Forschungen zum Jakobusbrief. In: **ThLZ**. Leipzig, v. 129, 2004b, p. 1019-1044.
- _____. Das Alte Testament in der orthodoxen und der „westlichen“ Bibelwissenschaft. Zum Stand und zu den Perspektiven des Gesprächs. In: I. Z. DIMITROV et al. (Eds.). **Das Alte Testament als christliche Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Sicht**. WUNT 174. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004a, p. 365-400.
- _____. Die Antithesen des Matthäus. Jesus als Toralehrer und die frühjüdische weisheitlich geprägte Torarezeption. In: C. KÄHLER et al. (Eds.). **Gedenkt an das Wort** (FS W. Vogler). Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1999, p. 175-200.
- _____. Die paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre in der gegenwärtigen exegetischen Diskussion. In: T. SÖDING (Ed.). **Worum geht es in der Rechtfertigungslehre?** Das biblische Fundament der „Gemeinsamen Erklärung“ von katholischer Kirche und Lutherischem Weltbund. QD 180. Freiburg u.a.: Herder Verlag, 1999, p. 106-130.
- _____. Die Seligpreisungen in der Bergpredigt nach Matthäus und im Brief des Jakobus. Zugänge zum Menschenbild Jesu? In: P. LAMPE et al. (Eds.). **Neutestamentliche Exegese im Dialog**. Hermeneutik – Wirkungsgeschichte – Matthäusevangelium (FS U. Luz). Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2008, p. 275-296.
- _____. Der erinnerte Jesus bei Jakobus. Ein Beitrag zur Einleitung in einen umstrittenen Brief. In: M. LABAHN (Ed.). **Spurensuche zur Einleitung in das Neue Testament**

- (FS Udo Schnelle). FRLANT 271. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017, p. 307-329.
- _____. Der Jakobusbrief in ökumenischer Perspektive. Ein Vorgriff auf meine Kommentierung im EKK. In: Ulrich LUZ u.a. (Eds.). **Exegese – ökumenisch engagiert**. Der „Evangelisch-Katholische Kommentar“ in der Diskussion über 500 Jahre Reformation. Ein Rückblick und ein Ausblick. Ostfildern/Göttingen: Patmos/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht [2016], p. 137-145.
- _____. Ethik und Anthropologie nach dem Jakobusbrief. Eine Skizze. In: F.W. HORN; R. ZIMMERMANN (Eds.). **Jenseits von Indikativ und Imperativ**. WUNT 238. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009, p. 329-346.
- _____. Gemeinschaft der Apostel. Das „Apostelkonzil“ als Bezugspunkt und Modell konziliarer Gemeinschaft in der Kirche. In: D. HELLER; J. SCHNEIDER (Eds.). **Die Ökumenischen Konzilien und die Katholizität der Kirche**. Das elfte Gespräch im bilateralen theologischen Dialog zwischen der Rumänischen Orthodoxen Kirche und der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland. ÖR.Beih 83. Frankfurt: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2009, p. 46-69.
- _____. Gerechtigkeit und Rechtfertigung bei Matthäus und Jakobus. Eine Herausforderung für gegenwärtige lutherische Hermeneutik in globalen Kontexten. In: **ThLZ**. Leipzig, v. 140, 2015, p. 1329-1348.
- _____. **Gesetz und Paränese**. Katechismusartige Weisungsreihen in der frühjüdischen Literatur. WUNT II/28. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987.
- _____. Glaube im Stresstest. Πίστις im Jakobusbrief. In: J. FREY; B. SCHLIESSER; N. UEBERSCHER (Eds.), **Glaube**. Das Verständnis des Glaubens im frühen Christentum und in seiner jüdischen und hellenistisch-römischen Umwelt. WUNT 373. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017, p. 473-501.
- _____. Sola Scriptura und Communio Sanctorum. Zum Verhältnis von Schriftgemäßheit und Kirchengemeinschaft. In: **ZNT**. Tübingen, n. 20, 2017, p. 127-141.
- OLSON, D. T. The Role of Tradition in Relation to Scripture: Questions and Reflections, in: MTATA, K. (Ed.). **“You have the Words of Eternal Life.”** Transformative Readings of the Gospel of John from a Lutheran Perspective. (LWF.D 57). Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2012, p. 151-168.
- OVERMAN, M. **Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism**. The Social World of the Matthean Community. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
- PENNER, T. C. **The Epistle of James and Eschatology**. Re-reading an Ancient Christian Letter. JSNT, 121. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, p. 33-120.
- ROGGE, J.; SCHILLE, G. (Eds.). Frühkatholizismus im ökumenischen Gespräch. Aus der Arbeit des Ökumenisch-Theologischen Arbeitskreises in der DDR, Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983.
- SCHULZ, S. **Die Mitte der Schrift**. Der Frühkatholizismus im Neuen Testament als Herausforderung an den Protestantismus. Stuttgart; Berlin: Kreuz-Verlag, 1976.
- _____. **Die Stunde der Botschaft**. Einführung in die Theologie der vier Evangelisten, Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1967.
- STRECKER, G. **Die Bergpredigt**. Ein exegetischer Kommentar. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984.

- TAMEZ, E. **The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works is Dead**. New York: Crossroad, 2002.
- VOGEL, M. Die Ethik der „besseren Gerechtigkeit“ im Matthäusevangelium. In: **ZNT**. Tübingen, v. 36, 2015, p. 57-63
- WATSON, F. **Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles**. Beyond the New Perspective. Revised and Expanded Edition, Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007.
- WENGER, S. **Der wesenhaft gute Kyrios**. Eine exegetische Studie über das Gottesbild im Jakobusbrief. AThANT 100. Zürich: TVZ Theologischer Verlag, 2011.
- WENGERT, T. J. **Reading the Bible with Martin Luther**. An Introductory Guide, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2013.
- WENGST, K. **Das Regierungsprogramm des Himmelreichs**. Eine Auslegung der Bergpredigt in ihrem jüdischen Kontext, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010.
- WESTERHOLM, S. **Perspectives Old and New on Paul**. The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics, Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004.
- WILK, F. Gottesgerechtigkeit – Gesetzeswerke – eigene Gerechtigkeit. Überlegungen zur geschichtlichen Verwurzelung und theologischen Bedeutung paulinischer Rechtfertigungsaussagen im Anschluss an die »New Perspective«. In: **ThLZ**. Leipzig, v. 135, 2010, p. 267-282.
- WITTE, M. Von der Gerechtigkeit Gottes und des Menschen im Alten Testament. In: M. WITTE (Ed.). **Gerechtigkeit**. Themen der Theologie 8. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012, p. 37-68.