

When I say that "the assertion, in some concepts and terms or other, that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone is just as 'constitutive' (or 'constituting') as either the properly christological or the strictly theological assertion," I am unintentionally misled and misleading. For I have evidently forgotten that both "the properly christological assertion" and "the strictly theological assertion" are *existential*, not merely intellectual, assertions, whether empirical, empirical-historical, or metaphysical. As such, they have to do with their respective subjects—Jesus and the ultimate reality of self, others, and God—not in their being or structure in themselves, but in their meaning or significance for us. Thus even "the *strictly* theological assertion" *qua theological*, rather than metaphysical, has as much to do with how we can and should understand ourselves and others in relation to God as with how we are to understand God in relation to us—as the all-gracious God whom we can and should obey through faith, which is to say, unreserved trust and unqualified loyalty.

One and the same constitutive christological assertion, which, as such, is an existential-historical assertion, answers two questions: (1) Who is Jesus? and (2) What does God, and thus ultimate reality, mean for us? Accordingly, it is, in effect, two assertions: (1) the existential-historical assertion that Jesus is the decisive re-presentation of the meaning of God, and thus of ultimate reality, for us (this being "the properly christological assertion"); and (2) the existential assertion that the meaning of God, and thus of ultimate reality, for us is the meaning decisively re-presented through Jesus (this being "the strictly theological assertion").

Of course, both of these assertions, being existential, i.e., existential-historical and existential respectively, necessarily *imply* both properly metaphysical and properly moral assertions. But all such necessary implications are rightly considered "conservative" (or "conserving"), as distinct from "constitutive" (or "constituting") theological assertions.

The main point, in any case, is that the properly soteriological assertion that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone is not really a third assertion in addition to the properly christological and the strictly theological assertions, even though, like them, it *is* additional to the properly

metaphysical and the properly moral assertions that all existential assertions necessarily imply. It is not really an addition to these other existential assertions, because it but asserts what they themselves already assert, provided only that they are understood, as they should be, precisely as *existential* assertions about the meaning of Jesus and of ultimate reality for us. At the same time, the properly soteriological assertion makes clear that Eberhard Jüngel is exactly right in saying that the Christian faith that is christocentric as well as theocentric is soteriocentric as well as christocentric—indeed, that "the center of the center of Christian faith" is the good news that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone.

16 February 2001