Rightwiseness and Justice, a Tale of Translation

Ronald Damholt*

In most English-language Bibles—particularly those arising out of Protestantism—the Greek word dikaiosyne, *which occurs most often in Romans, is overwhelmingly translated "righteousness." Scholars have long voiced concerns with this rendering, and in this article I both review their objections and ask why this tradition of translation has been so tenacious. The answer proposed is twofold: first, the ancient Anglo-Saxon pedigree of the word* rightwiseness *(whose meaning originally included notions of justice about which Paul seems to have been writing) and its consequent preference by the first English Bible translators, the Wycliffites; and second, the penetrating brilliance and lasting influence of William Tyndale, along with his inclination to follow the Wycliffite choice in this matter. I also consider alternative traditions of New Testament translation relative to this important Greek word and sketch the historical context out of which these divergent traditions have developed.*

> *"It is no surprise, then, that most English-speaking people think that the New Testament does not say much about justice; the Bibles they read do not say much about justice."*[1]

This is a remarkable statement, not because it is false (it is not), but because the questions it raises are so astonishing. Jesus, rooted in the Hebrew prophetic tradition, spending his life teaching and caring largely for those disenfranchised by Roman oligarchy and Jewish Second Temple hierarchy, failed to talk with them about the justice of God's kingdom? And Paul, serving Christians who lived in an empire

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* Ronald Damholt graduated from Chicago Theological Seminary in 2010 with a Master of Arts in Religious Studies and a focus on the writings of St. Paul. He currently serves on the middle school teaching staff at Good Shepherd Episcopal School in Dallas, Texas, and is a member of the Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration. His master's thesis served as the basis for this article.

1 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 110.

which often believed itself the very fount of justice—but in practice was often the source of partiality toward the wealthy and powerful, and of injustice toward the poor and enslaved—did not think to write them of God's loving justice, both incarnated in and promised through Messiah Jesus?

In fact God's justice was a central theme for both Jesus and Paul, a theme absolutely inescapable in the texts of both the Gospels and Paul's letters. That is to say, it is at once inescapable and greatly obscured, largely because of a translation issue long recognized in scholarly literature: the rendering in most English-language New Testaments of the Greek word *dikaiosyne* as "righteousness" rather than what would often be a more appropriate translation, "justice."

The case for the problematic nature of this tradition of translation has been made by others, and I will briefly review it. I will then address the question: If this tradition *is* an error with serious implications, where and why did it arise, and how is it that we (English-speaking readers and translators) have continued for centuries to repeat it? This will entail a historical review focused on the followers of John Wyclif in the late 1300s, and on the remarkable scholar William Tyndale over a century later. Finally, I will summarize my argument, and briefly suggest directions which other investigations might take.

Dikaiosyne: *Personal Righteousness, or Interpersonal Justice?*

When, in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of Matthew 6:33, we read that if we "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness" God will provide our needs, we are likely to conclude that Jesus is encouraging in us a state of moral and religious purity which responds to God's own purity—qualities which may or may not focus on our behavior toward others. As Nicolas Wolterstorff asserts, "It goes almost without saying that the meaning and connotations of 'righteousness' are very different in present-day idiomatic English from those of 'justice.' 'Righteousness' names primarily if not exclusively a certain trait of personal character. . . . 'Justice,' by contrast, refers to an interpersonal situation; justice is present when persons are related to each other in a certain way."[2] This interiorized understanding of "righteousness" recalls the Great Awakening preaching of George Whitefield: "'The kingdom of God is righteousness': that is,

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[2] Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 111.

the righteousness of Christ applied and brought home to the heart."[3]
By contrast, if we read Jesus urging us to seek "the kingdom of God
and his *justice*," our attention is drawn to the way God acts toward
human beings—that is, with loving, restorative justice—and our con-
sequent responsibility to behave similarly.

Another significant way in which the New Testament's *dikaiosyne*
is often misunderstood by readers of English Bibles arises when we
read that among human beings "there is no one who is righteous,"
but that in the gospel of Christ Jesus "the righteousness of God is
revealed" and that "to one who without works trusts him who justi-
fies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Rom. 3:10,
1:17, 4:5). Drawing on these and similar texts, many prominent Prot-
estant scholars have long asserted that, for Paul, *dikaiosyne* has pri-
marily to do with the faithfulness of God and with God's free act of
declaring sinners righteous. Thus Robert Jewett writes: "In the face
of the impartial righteousness of God, no human system of compet-
ing for glory and honour can stand. . . . To be 'made righteous' in the
context of the Christ (3:21) means that humans who have fallen short
of the 'glory of God' (3:23) have such glory and honour restored, not
as an achievement but as a gift."[4] Similarly, John Zeisler notes that it is
"usually agreed that the 'righteousness of God,' . . . means God's sav-
ing activity (Rom. 1.18), characteristically seen in justification by his
grace through faith (Rom. 3.21–6)."[5] If when reading Romans one re-
peatedly encounters the theme of "righteousness," and if (with regard
to human beings) one understands "righteousness" primarily as God's
faithfulness in justifying all who believe and the consequent forgiven,
honorable state of those who are justified, it becomes difficult to read
what Paul is saying in any larger way.

In recent decades, however, many scholars' understandings of
the New Testament's *dikaiosyne* have been moving in a direction
indicated by José Porfirio Miranda in 1974, who asserted: "Paul's
gospel has nothing to do with the interpretation which for centuries
has been given to it in terms of individual salvation. It deals with the

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[3] George Whitefield, "The Kingdom of God: A Sermon Preached on Sabbath
Evening, September 13th, 1741 in the High-Church-Yard of Glasgow, Upon Romans
xiv.17."

[4] Robert Jewett, "Romans," in *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, ed. James
D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 94.

[5] Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the
Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), s.v. "Righteousness."

justice which the world and peoples and society, implicitly but anxiously, have been awaiting."[6] Theodore Jennings, a careful reader of Miranda, writes:

> With respect to a reading of Romans, it has regularly been supposed that Paul is concerned with issues of grace and law insofar as these bear on the question of the justice of God and the act of justifying human beings. This set of issues, which has an undoubted significance in this text (as well as Galatians), have, however, been sealed off from critical appreciation by the tactic of supposing them to deal with something that in English has been called "righteousness," a term that has been given a restricted religious meaning—a meaning, moreover, reduced to the interiority of the individual.[7]

Jennings calls this a "depoliticizing translation," asserting that Miranda was "the first to make clear the falsity and ideological functioning of this operation." Jennings's view is more nuanced than Miranda's: while insisting that God's actions in "justifying human beings" are indeed *part* of what Paul is addressing, he believes Paul's vision of God's *dikaiosyne* is not restricted either to the forgiveness of individuals or to interior purity. He also notes that, whereas by the first century Roman Stoicism had tended to supplant earlier discussions of public justice (grounded in Plato) with "a concentration on the justice of the individual," by contrast "Paul may be read as seeking to reinstate the question of justice at something like the level of civilization (or the empire) as a whole."[8]

Similarly for Elsa Tamez, *justified* people have experienced "the amnesty of grace" with regard to guilt before God, and are empowered to live in communities guided by the Holy Spirit which *enact justice* in the world and take part in God's work of transforming all of creation in *loving justice*.[9] And N. T. Wright points out that Hebrew terms for "righteousness" and "justice" are both included within the scope of *dikaiosyne*: "The sense of covenant faithfulness and the

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[6] José Porfirio Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1974), 179, emphasis added.

[7] Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Reading Derrida / Thinking Paul: On Justice* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 5.

[8] Jennings, *Reading Derrida / Thinking Paul*, 6.

[9] See Elsa Tamez, *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1993).

sense of things being put to rights belong together in the mind of a Jew like Paul. . . . When, therefore, God's righteousness was unveiled, the effect would be precisely that the world would receive justice, that rich, restorative, much-to-be-longed-for justice of which the Psalmists had spoken with such feeling."[10]

This focus on *dikaiosyne* as "justice" is consistent with the translation of other ancient Greek texts. In the *Republic* Plato wrestles regularly with justice in the public sphere: can one even imagine a situation in which Socrates and his interlocutors are deeply engaged with issues of "righteousness"? And when Josephus writes that John the Baptist "was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous [*arete*] lives, to practise justice [*dikaiosyne*] towards their fellows and piety [*eusebia*] towards God," he is using *dikaiosyne* to refer to "interpersonal justice."[11] Yet when *dikaiosyne* appears in most English-language New Testaments, "justice" is generally hidden from view.

This "depoliticization" of *dikaiosyne* likely has many roots, perhaps including a desire for spiritual ease. Living a life of interior "righteousness," demanding as that may be, remains a lighter task than embracing (and being embraced by) a gospel which requires participation in the Spirit's work of transforming in loving justice *all* of creation, including the wider social and political spheres. While examining whether a temptation to soften God's call may lie behind such translation decisions is compelling, however, it lies beyond the scope of this paper. My primary goal is to explore the historical roots of this tradition of translation, a tradition which seems to have originated with a group of scholars gathered around the noted fourteenth-century English theologian and philosopher, John Wyclif.

Wyclif and the Wycliffites: a Tale of Translation

John Wyclif (c. 1330–1384) was an English priest and academic, widely considered "the most eminent Oxford theologian of his day."[12] Wyclif lived during a time of widespread social unrest caused

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[10] N. T. Wright, "St. Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 170–171.

[11] *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities, Books XVIII–XX,* trans. Louis H. Feldman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 81–82.

[12] F. F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English,* third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 12.

largely by repeated outbreaks of bubonic plague, by wars of succession between England and France, and by widespread criticism of the church's hierarchy. The English were further embittered by the decades-long residency of the papacy in Avignon and by increasing annates demanded of English ecclesiastical properties.

Wyclif's considerable writings were often contrary to the entrenched power of the clergy (for example, his teachings on civil dominion) or theologically troubling (such as his assertion that transubstantiation is absurd). Ten of his conclusions were declared heretical in 1382, and while fearing the possibility of execution, he died "unmolested in person."[13] He is best remembered, however, for having inspired the first complete translation of the Bible into English. Doubtful that Wyclif personally translated the biblical text, scholars generally agree that he "instigated" the project, that work began at Oxford in the 1370s, and that Wyclif's associates Nicholas Hereford and John Trevisa clearly participated.[14]

John Wyclif and the English Language

These Wycliffite translators were not working in a vacuum. The Venerable Bede writes of Caedmon, an unlettered seventh-century cowherd of the monastery at Whitby, who was visited by an angel who commanded and miraculously gifted him to sing a song of Creation. Instructed thereafter in biblical materials, Caedmon would retell them in "the highly complicated verbal and metrical forms of traditional [Anglo-Saxon] verse."[15] Late in the ninth century King Alfred translated many Psalms, and in the tenth century the Benedictine monk Ælfric was writing English sermons which included excerpts from scripture. In Geoffrey Shepherd's words, "the vernacular was reaching out to grasp the sacred text."[16]

While the culture initiated by the Norman Conquest (1066) proved unfriendly toward translation into English, vernacular preaching revived in the late twelfth century. An Augustinian canon, Orm,

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[13] John Stacey, *John Wyclif and Reform* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1964), 12.

[14] Mary Dove, *The First English Bible: The Text and Context of the Wycliffite Versions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.

[15] Geoffrey Shepherd, "English Versions of the Scriptures Before Wyclif," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Volume 2: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 367.

[16] Shepherd, "English Versions of the Scriptures," 377.

worked on an English harmony of the Gospels around 1200. Richard Rolle created an interlinear Latin–English Psalter for devotional use in the early 1300s, and Julian of Norwich and Geoffrey Chaucer were writing soon thereafter. The language developing in all these works is Anglo-Norman (commonly called "Middle English"), in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon dialects common before 1066.

Yet prior to the Wycliffites, no one seems to have attempted to translate the entire Bible into English. Jaroslav Pelikan points out that late medieval translators needed to be both accomplished exegetes and "philologist[s] of the vernacular, probing the strengths and weaknesses of the common people as a medium for articulating biblical truths that for centuries had been most familiar in their Latin formulations."[17] Indeed, over a thousand English words of Latin origin are first recorded in the "Early Version" of the Wycliffite Bible.[18]

Rightwiseness *and Justice: The Precedents*

In late medieval Europe, Latin was widely considered "the tongue of the angels" and the realities that Jesus spoke Aramaic, that the Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek, and that Jerome himself was translating into a "vulgar" tongue had been largely forgotten. The Wycliffites worked exclusively from the Vulgate, where Jerome had regularly translated *dikaiosyne* with the Latin *iustitia*. Today the standard translation for *iustitia* is its English cognate "justice," yet for the Wycliffites this choice was not at all clear. Why was this so?

The answer seems to lie in a word with a long English pedigree which encompassed many of the meanings we now ascribe to "justice": *rightwiseness* (though several spellings were in use). The first two appearances of *rehtwisness* cited in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) are translations of the Septuagint's *dikaiosyne* in a liturgical text penned around 825. The next is by King Alfred, and the fourth from a translation of Matthew 21:32 written around 1000: "*Iohannes com on rihtwisnesse wethe.*"[19] By way of contrast, the first OED-cited use of the Middle English word *iustise* is from a legal chronicle of

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[17]   Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Reformation of the Bible / The Bible of the Reformation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 41.

[18]   Melvyn Bragg, *The Adventure of English: The Biography of a Language* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2003), 83.

[19]   J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition*, vol. XIII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), s.v. "Righteousness."

1137, well after the "sea change" initiated by the Norman Conquest,[20] and the second from an anonymous English poem penned around 1340. The very next is simultaneous with the work of the Wycliffite translators, Thomas Usk's 1387 *Testament of Love*: Usk writes that the *"vertues of soule most worthy in our lyving"* are *"prudence, justyce, temperaunce and strength."*[21] In the late fourteenth century, it seems, "justice" was a comparatively new word.

It is also instructive to consider these words' use by other Middle English writers. In the early 1390s, Julian of Norwich employs at least three variants of *rightwiseness* (*ryghtfulhede, rygtfulnes,* and *ryght-fulnesse*) to indicate variously an attribute of God, and a human virtue enabled by Jesus' mercy and grace.[22] In the *Canterbury Tales* of Geoffrey Chaucer, the word *rightwysnesse* occurs nine times and the word *justyce*, seven. And in "The Parson's Tale," Chaucer clearly uses *right-wysnesse* with regard to acts of justice in the body politic: *"Obedience generally / is to perfourne the doctrine of god and of his souereyns to whiche / hym oghte to ben obeisaunt in alle rightwysnesse."*[23]

Rightwiseness *and Justice: The Wycliffite Versions*

Both ecclesiastical and secular authorities feared that a complete translation of the Bible into vernacular English created dangerous new possibilities for stumbling into heresy by the laity: "If the learned Fathers had struggled . . . how could a person cope" who was not proficient in Latin? Wyclif disagreed, arguing unambiguously for scripture in the vernacular.[24] Melvyn Bragg sees this as part of Wyclif's strategy to challenge what he saw as the corrupt church of his time, writing that the Wycliffites were turning Oxford rooms into "revolutionary cells," making Oxford "the most dangerous place in England."[25] The translators themselves asserted that they worked because *"cristen*

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[20]   Simpson and Weiner, *Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. VIII, s.v. "Justice."

[21]   Gary W. Shawver, ed., *Thomas Usk: Testament of Love* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 127.

[22]   Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, eds., *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich: Part Two, Introduction and The Short Text* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), 486–487.

[23]   Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale," in *The Ellesmere ms of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. Frederick James Furnivall, 641, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/AGZ8232.0001.001/1:12.3?rgn=div2;view=fulltext.

[24]   Lynne Long, *Translating the Bible: From the 7th to the 17th Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2001), 72, 81–82.

[25]   Bragg, *The Adventure of English*, 81.

men and wymmen, olde and zonge, shulden studie fast [intently] in þe newe testament, for it is of ful autorite and opyn to vndirstonding of simple men."[26]

Over 250 manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible exist, "considerably more than of any other text in Middle English."[27] Twenty are complete Bibles, 110 are New Testaments, and others are partial. They fall roughly into two groups, the "Early Version," a rather literal word-for-word translation, and the "Later Version," a more flowing and idiomatic rendering. In both, these translators chose *rightwiseness* (in various spellings) in thirty-three of the thirty-four instances where in Romans Paul had written *dikaiosyne* and Jerome had penned *iustitia*.

Extra-biblical Wycliffite writings, which "used, in a way that had not systematically been attempted since the days of Ælfric, the vernacular for the discussion of theological and political topics,"[28] are helpful in discerning what meanings they had in mind. One of these, *The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards*, was first displayed in London around 1395. ("Lollards," a term applied to Wyclif's followers beginning in the 1380s, was likely derived from a Dutch word meaning "mumbler.") Its tenth "conclusion" states that any *pretense lawe of rythwysnesse for temperal cause or spiritual"* used to justify war is contrary to the New Testament, which is *"a lawe of grace and ful of mercy."*[29] This is an unambiguous use of *rythwysnesse* with reference to justice in the public sphere.

The Lollards also produced many sermons; most are found in a collection known as the "Wycliffite Sermon Cycle," composed between Wyclif's death and around 1425. Despite destruction by ecclesiastical authorities, thirty-one manuscripts exist, eleven of which contain all 294 sermons.[30] These texts frequently employ *rightwiseness*, the sermon for the sixth Sunday of Trinity being a good example. The Vulgate text (Matt. 5:20) is given first: *"Nisi habundauerit iusticia uestra plusquam scribarum et phariseorum,"* and an English translation

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[26] Cited in Mary Dove, "Wyclif and the English Bible," in *A Companion to John Wyclif*, ed. Ian Christopher Levy (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 396.

[27] Dove, *The First English Bible*, 1. I have relied on Dove and on David Daniell, *The Bible in English* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003) for statistics given here.

[28] Anne Hudson, *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 13.

[29] Hudson, *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings,* 28.

[30] Hudson, *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings,* 11.

provided: *"But zif zour riztwisnesse passe a poynt þe feynud rizt-wisnesse of scribes and of pharisees, ze schal neuer come to heuene."* A practical description follows: *"For riztwisnesse generally is fulfullyng of lawe; and so fulfullyng of Godys lawe is verrey riztwisnesse."*[31] In a context where Jesus is both affirming and reinterpreting Jewish law as he emphasizes the compassion and mercy at its core—and where Jerome has *iusticia* for the Greek *dikaiosyne*—Wycliffite preachers are speaking of *rightwiseness*.

In summary, *rightwiseness* was a well-established term already in Anglo-Saxon times, whereas "justice" was coming into the English language only after the Norman Conquest through Old and Middle French. It seems neither Wycliffite translators nor Lollard preachers needed what likely seemed a recent Latinism because there was at hand a word with a centuries-old English pedigree which was already being used to express such notions as an attribute of God, a quality of personal morality, and the demands of justice in the public sphere: *rightwiseness*.

Influence of the Wycliffite Versions

In the late fourteenth century, many English clerics feared that commoners reading the Bible as "the source and justification of all authority" might begin to question both church and state.[32] Any association with Wyclif was particularly suspect, since during the so-called Peasants' Revolt of 1381 people were demanding some of the same reforms for which his writings had been calling.

Then in 1401 the English statute *De heretico comburendo* instituted death by being burned alive as the penalty for heresy, which soon included the reading of any part of the Bible in English; in 1409 Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutiones*, in force until 1529, specifically prohibited reading the Bible as translated by Wyclif or his successors. Yet Wycliffite Bibles were treasured and widely copied for a century and a half, and were remembered by generations of scholars: in a sermon by John Donne preached at St. Paul's Cathedral around 1625, he quotes approvingly from the Wycliffite "Later Version," calling it simply "the first translation of all into our language."[33]

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[31] Anne Hudson, ed., *English Wycliffite Sermons: Volume I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 244–245.

[32] Dove, "Wyclif and the English Bible," 384–385.

[33] Janel M. Mueller, ed., *Donne's Prebend Sermons* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 124.

But did Wycliffite texts also influence the work of William Tyndale in the early sixteenth century, whose translation (as we will see) was formative for most subsequent English-language versions of the New Testament? Tyndale's claim that he was working "without fore-example"[34] can reasonably be discounted: even if he had a Wycliffite Bible in front of him while translating, he could not have acknowledged the debt. Tyndale intended to produce a new, accurate vernacular Bible for the English people, a project he prayed the King would bless; any explicit association with Wyclif or Lollardy would have undermined that goal.

From Wyclif's England to Tyndale's: Changing Texts and Contexts

In the early fifteenth century, fleeing the advancing Turks, Greek scholars emigrated west, bringing with them Greek manuscripts of the scriptures and the fathers. Lorenzo de Valla is the first Western scholar known to have attempted a correction of the Latin Vulgate based on these manuscripts; in his work "the Scriptures were treated linguistically as any other important literary text might be treated; errors and misreadings were exposed and corrected, not assumed to be the uncorrectable word of God . . . [T]he translator himself [Jerome] was criticized for interfering with the uncomplicated Greek style."[35] David Daniell suggests that Erasmus's discovery of Valla's work was, "in the world of Bible studies, the moment of the break from the medieval to the modern." Erasmus produced a text of the Greek New Testament in 1516, publishing four more editions in his lifetime; he also "asserted the heretical point that no layman should be denied access to Scripture in his own language."[36]

While the late fourteenth century had seen a flowering of vernacular religious literature, this creativity was constrained in the fifteenth by the church's "new severe orthodoxy" marked by a focus on heresy which was fueled in part by widespread circulation of Wycliffite Bibles.[37] Yet the momentum of a developing language is not easily reversed: many in the upper classes were speaking English, and literacy was becoming an economic and social benefit available

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[34]   William Tyndale, "W.T. unto the Reader," in *Tyndale's New Testament: Translated from the Greek by William Tyndale in 1534, in a modern-spelling edition,* ed. David Daniell (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 3.

[35]   Long, *Translating the Bible,* 123.

[36]   Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 114, 116.

[37]   Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 109–110.

for a wider audience. Famously, Henry V "used English to unite the English" when writing from Agincourt. Translations of texts by writers such as Sir Thomas Malory (*Morte d'Arthur*) and Richard Rolle (*de Incendio Amoris*) from French and Latin into Middle English contributed to shaping the vernacular, and the invention of the printing press rendered texts more available and affordable. This technological leap produced copies not easily amended for local dialects, making decisions by translators and printers increasingly determinative in an England where Anglo-Saxon, Latin, Danish, French, and Anglo-Norman were combining to move toward "Modern English."

William Caxton, a printer active in London during the 1470s and 1480s, published many vernacular texts, including *Canterbury Tales*. Yet a Wycliffite Bible was too dangerous to print in Caxton's England, a danger which persisted in Tyndale's lifetime: Arundel's *Constitutiones* remained in force, and Henry VIII, seeing widespread unrest in German-speaking lands, feared that a vernacular Bible "might encourage readers to consider alternative interpretations, to question authority, to offer their own interpretation."[38]

William Tyndale's Passion

Born in Gloucestershire around 1494 and earning an M.A. at Oxford in 1515, William Tyndale's avowed goal was to translate the Bible into the English of his day. Failing to obtain a position in London with Erasmus's friend Bishop Tunstall—and evidently concluding that England was too inhospitable a place to continue his work—he crossed the Channel in 1524. While most of his initial texts were confiscated by the city of Cologne, an edition of six thousand copies of his New Testament "was selling in England by April 1526," where those "who bought or sold them were threatened, sometimes tried for heresy, sometimes put to death."[39]

Closely identified with Lutheranism, which was "believed to bring anarchy, schism and the dislocation of authority," on the Continent Tyndale lived "a hand-to-mouth existence, dodging the Roman

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[38]   Long, *Translating the Bible*, 140.
[39]   S. L. Greenslade, "English Versions of the Bible, 1525–1622," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Volume 3: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 147.

Catholic authorities."[40] He spent his last months imprisoned near Brussels, dying by strangulation at the stake in 1535. By then, in addition to the New Testament, Tyndale had translated the Pentateuch, the book of Jonah, the Old Testament passages used as Epistle readings in the liturgy, and Joshua–2 Chronicles.

In a context where others had shown that Latin was in reality not "the tongue of the angels," William Tyndale was indeed attempting a fresh translation from Hebrew and Greek manuscripts—yet it is nearly inconceivable that someone whose life passion was translating the Bible into vernacular English had not heard or read the only such translation available, that of the Wycliffites. Indeed, scholars have noted many phrases that are common to the "Later Version" and Tyndale, as well as exact parallels between Tyndale's writings and the Wycliffite text. For present purposes, however, I will remain focused on Tyndale's translation of *dikaiosyne*.

Rightwiseness *in Tyndale's New Testament*

In Wyclif's time various forms of "justice" and *rightwiseness* had been in use (the latter having a considerably longer pedigree); in Tyndale's England, both were current. A 1548 sermon declares any man "*giltie of eternall damnation*" who "*dot giue I saye yt by his brybes he might corrupt iustice and ryghtuousnes.*"[41] And in a 1535 translation of Marsilius of Padua's *Defensor Pacis*, qualities essential to a "*perfyte gouernor*" are enumerated, including "*morall vertue and pryncypally among al others iustice or ryghtuousnes wherefore in the v. boke of Etikes and the vi. chapter Aristotle sayth thus.*"[42] Here both words are given for Marsilius's *iustitia*, itself an explicit reference to Aristotle's *dikaiosyne*. Working from Erasmus's Greek texts, Tyndale had at least two options with which to translate *dikaiosyne*, yet nearly always chose *rightwiseness*. What were the likely reasons behind that choice?

In addition to the influence of Wycliffite Bibles, Tyndale probably interacted with Lollards themselves. Alec Ryrie asserts that "former Lollards and their texts did pervade parts of the worlds of clandestine

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40   Daniell, "Introduction," in *Tyndale's New Testament*, xxviii, 9.

41   Johann Aepinus, *A very fruitful & godly exposition vop[n] the. xv. Psalme of Dauid called Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle,* trans. Nicholas Lesse (London: Iohn Daye, 1548), 146.

42   Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis,* trans. William Marshall (London: Robert Wyer, 1535), chap. xiii.

reform,"[43] and Daniell argues that "account must be taken of the hundred and fifty years of open-air preaching in England, on the texts of Wyclif New Testaments."[44] This widespread presence of Lollards and their writings (both employing *rightwiseness* to indicate what we would now call "justice") makes it almost unimaginable that Tyndale was insulated from them.

There is also a linguistic factor which would have moved Tyndale toward *rightwiseness*: his preference for Anglo-Saxon words. Asserting that Tyndale understood "the real source of power in the English language, which is a plain Saxon base in vocabulary and syntax,"[45] Daniell cites a passage in Matthew (26:36–41) where "out of 148 words, apart from proper names, only five . . . are not pure Anglo-Saxon,"[46] and regarding Matthew 6:1–11, "Give us this day our daily bread," comments: "The simplicity of those seven words, in Saxon vocabulary and syntax . . . has continued since 1526 in almost all English Bible translations."[47]

Whether by Wycliffite influence or Anglo-Saxon preference (and likely by combination of the two), Tyndale chose *rightwiseness* (in various spellings) to translate *dikaiosyne* in thirty-two of its thirty-four instances in Romans, and his work became definitive for the English tradition. According to Daniell, 83 percent of Tyndale's 1534 New Testament (widely considered his best) was carried through to the King James Version of 1611.[48] And in each of those thirty-four instances, the King James Version—which was to become "the Vulgate of the Protestant faith"—reads "righteousness."

From Tyndale to the Present: A Tale of Tradition

At the urging of Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII did finally place English Bibles in churches for public reading and worship. A virtual flood of translations followed, and their influences on one another are very complex. Briefly, Tyndale's New

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[43]   Alec Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 237.

[44]   David Daniell, "Introduction," in William Tyndale, trans., *The New Testament: 1526 Edition* (London: The British Library, 2008), vi.

[45]   Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 133.

[46]   Daniell, "Introduction," in *The New Testament: 1526 Edition*, iii.

[47]   Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 137–138.

[48]   Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 151–152.

Testament (1534) was adopted in full in the Bible of Tyndale's asso-
ciate and friend John Rogers (1535/37), and largely through Rogers
proved deeply influential for Coverdale's Great Bible (1540/1541) and
the Geneva Bible (1560). In turn, both of these were determinative
for most of the beautiful and enduring King James translation (1611).
Even when nineteenth-century scholars raised the question of fur-
ther, more accurate translations based on ancient manuscripts, the
revised editions made few alterations to the King James text.

This remarkably conservative tradition of English biblical trans-
lation can be seen when focusing on *dikaiosyne* in Romans. Of the
thirty-four instances of *dikaiosyne* found in the Greek text, it is ren-
dered as *rightwiseness* or "righteousness" at least thirty-two times in
all mainstream Protestant translations published between Wyclif's
"Early Version" in 1384 and the Revised Standard Version of 1971.
In fact, the New Oxford Annotated Bible, incorporating the New
Revised Standard Version of 1989 and widely considered a scholarly
standard, employs "righteousness" for *dikaiosyne* only two times less
than Wyclif, and only one less than Tyndale! F. F. Bruce expresses this
self-conscious conservatism when he notes that the RSV translators
were charged to "remain recognizably within the tradition established
by Tyndale,"[49] and Goodspeed voices the common scholarly judg-
ment: "To the familiar forms of the English New Testament Tyndale
has contributed not only more than any other man, but more than all
the others combined."[50]

Alternative Voices: The Roman Catholic Tradition

In 1568, a group of Roman Catholic scholars—failing to expe-
rience true religious freedom in England—established a college at
Douai, Flanders, where Gregory Martin then translated the New Tes-
tament. Taking as his basis the Latin Vulgate, Martin "watched the
Greek, occasionally putting it in the margin" and "made extensive use
of the English versions he condemned."[51] He also began at least one
alternative tradition of translation: while the word "righteousness" is
not found in Martin's version of Romans, the word "justice" appears
thirty-three times. Through at least eleven revisions between 1582

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[49] Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 186.
[50] Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Making of the English New Testament* (Chicago, Ill.:
University of Chicago Press, 1925), 13.
[51] Greenslade, "English Versions of the Bible, 1525–1622," 162.

and 1941, this use of "justice" for *dikaiosyne* would hold. And when Msgr. Ronald Knox made his influential 1944 translation of the New Testament, he employed eight different words and phrases to render *dikaiosyne*; "righteousness" was not among them. While this tradition has moderated somewhat in later Catholic translations, the New Jerusalem Bible (1985) employs both "uprightness" and "justice" for the Pauline *dikaiosyne*.

This history of differing traditions of translation originally played out against the background of two Reformations, one Protestant and one Roman Catholic. The Protestant understanding that persons are justified by faith alone—and that God imputes righteousness to the believer's account in response to that faith—troubled Catholic theologians, who feared that justification might then lack implications for whether a Christian must live justly. For their part, Protestants worried that the Catholic position entailed "justification by works."

Attempts were made to bridge this theological gap. Richard Hooker asserted in the 1590s that we "participate in Christ partly by imputation, as when those things which he did and suffered for us are imputed unto us for righteousness," and "partly by habitual and real infusion, as when grace is inwardly bestowed."[52] In 1615 the Anglican priest and Oxford scholar Thomas Jackson, in a treatise demonstrating agreement between James and Paul, asked: "How are we not justified by inherent righteousness, if justified by such a working faith, as Saint Paul commends?"[53] And the Congregational theologian John Owen wrote in 1677 that "God doth indispensibly require personal obedience" of a Christian "which may be called his evangelical righteousness," and that "upon it, we shall be declared righteous at the last day, and without it none shall be so."[54]

From the Roman Catholic side came an effort "to combine the dominant Catholic teaching that the justified man is made intrinsically righteous in his own self with the view that his justification is not complete without some imputation of God's righteousness to him."[55] Called "double justification," it became part of a Reunion Formula

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[52] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Books 1–5* (London: William Stansbye, 1632), 310.

[53] Thomas Jackson, *Justifying Faith* (London: John Martyn, 1673), 739.

[54] John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith through the Imputed Righteousness of Christ* (Brandeston, England: T. Gooch, 1823), 111.

[55] H. O. Evennett, "The Counter-Reformation," in *The Reformation Crisis*, ed. Joel Hurstfield (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 64.

proposed during talks between Catholics and Lutherans at Ratisbon, Bavaria in 1541—but the notion was finally rejected at the Council of Trent. As theological trajectories hardened, such efforts to reach a broader, common understanding of what happens when individuals and communities are embraced and transformed by God's *dikaiosyne* were largely sidelined.

Today most theologians might well agree that there is little ontological distance between justification and sanctification: as Raymond E. Brown asks simply, "Can people be *reconciled* to God without being transformed?"[56] Yet most traditions of English Bible translation remain mired in the stream-bed of these centuries-old arguments.

Alternative Voices: Protestant and Ecumenical Traditions

After 1611, the work of Protestant translation continued to flourish. While many are considered by scholars to be worthy of note, few gained wide circulation, and nearly all followed the lead of the KJV in choosing "righteousness" for *dikaiosyne*. Goodspeed's 1923 *An American Translation*[57] is a noteworthy exception, employing "uprightness" over six decades before the NJB did so. The New English Bible (1961) and Revised English Bible (1989) also stand somewhat outside the powerful, nearly controlling tradition of Tyndale. Commissioned by a majority of British churches (including Roman Catholic and Quaker), their translators discarded "righteousness" as a translation of *dikaiosyne* in seven of its thirty-four instances in Romans; more recently the broadly ecumenical Common English Bible (2010) has followed a similar path.

Some examples may help clarify the force of these differences. In the KJV (1611) of Romans 6:13, Paul tells readers: "[Yield] your selves vnto God, as those that are aliue from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousnesse vnto God." By way of contrast, in the Rheims version (1610), Christians' bodies are to be "instruments of iustice to God," a phrase which Knox modifies to "instruments of right-doing," the NJB terms "instruments of uprightness" and the CEB renders "weapons to do right." Each of the latter four translations seems clearer today with regard to what Paul was likely intending than

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[56] Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 577.

[57] Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The New Testament: An American Translation* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1923).

that of the KJV, whose rendering continues substantially unaltered in the NRSV nearly 370 years later. The REB also provides an unambiguous, refreshing translation of an oft-cited text near the end of this remarkable letter: "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but justice, peace and joy, inspired by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

The Justice of Righteousness

Despite the challenges posed by this particular aspect of Protestant biblical translation, many preachers have understood the term "righteousness" in ways very close to Paul's apparent intent when he wrote *dikaiosyne*. Hugh Latimer, an Anglican bishop martyred under Queen Mary in the sixteenth century, paraphrased Ephesians 6:13–15: "'And be ye apparelled or clothed,' saith Paul, 'with the harbergeon or coat-armor of justice, that is, righteousness.' . . . Ye must live rightely . . . [in] faithful love to our neighbors . . . in justice."[58] A century later, George Fox asked regarding his fellow Quakers, "[Do] they not fear God? and do they not walk justly and truly among their neighbors . . . and do not they take much wrong, rather then give wrong to any? . . . Is their suffering . . . not for righteousness sake?"[59] And in our own time William Sloane Coffin, in a sermon at Riverside Church entitled "Thirsting for Righteousness," suggested the first Beatitude might better be translated, "How blessed are they who long with their hearts for right to prevail."[60]

Neil Elliott's understanding of the Pauline vision of God's *dikaiosyne* broadens the contemporary discussion even further. "The questions at the heart of Paul's theology," Elliott writes, "do not center on how the conscience-stricken individual may be saved, or on how a movement that includes Gentiles as well as Jews may be legitimized. His questions are the questions of his fellow apocalyptists: How shall God's justice be realized in a world dominated by evil powers?"[61] This perspective enlarges immensely our understanding of the picture Paul

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[58]   Hugh Latimer, *Sermons by Hugh Latimer* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1844), 29–30.

[59]   George Fox, *The Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded* (London: Tho. Simmons, 1859).

[60]   William Sloane Coffin, *The Collected Sermons of William Sloane Coffin: The Riverside Years, Volume Two* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 289–293.

[61]   Neil Elliott, "The Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 182.

is drawing, re-centering it not on interiority or on individuals, but on creation itself, all of which—including every human being—stands in need of God's faithful, restorative, loving justice. In his letters, Paul often focused on how this justice is being incarnated in the world: by means of the Spirit's work in those scattered communities (*ekklesia*) for whose sake he was called to spend his life. As Helmut Koester asserts, "This is where God's justice becomes a reality. Members of the new community are asked to establish justice and equality in their own midst, and to spread the message, the gospel, . . . inviting [others] to join the new community of justice and love."[62]

Surely it is significant that Paul uses the word *dikaiosyne* most frequently in his letter to the community at the heart of an empire whose own trumpeted "justice" was often in practice great injustice. He reminds these Christians that true justice is ultimately from God; that the God they have come to know in Messiah Jesus gave them a promise of ultimate, thoroughgoing, redemptive justice by virtue of Jesus' resurrection from the dead; and that their own community was called to be both locus and vehicle of the loving *dikaiosyne* of a God at work restoring and transforming all of creation.

This larger understanding of Paul does not turn on the translation of one word, no matter how central. However, I have suggested that Protestant translations of the New Testament would be significantly improved if in many instances they were to exchange the English term "righteousness" for "justice" or "uprightness," if Paul's theme in Romans were unambiguously stated as "the justice of God," and if it were clearly understood that all Christians are called to be "foot-soldiers" or "weapons" of justice.

Reflecting beyond Paul, would it not be clearer to read that a God who is "faithful and just" (*dikaios*) in forgiving sins would also promise to cleanse his people from injustice (*adikias*) rather than from "unrighteousness"? (1 John 1:9). And much can be learned from William Sloane Coffin's rendering of the first Beatitude, or from Charles Williams's 1937 translation of Matthew 6:33, "But you must look for his kingdom and his way of doing right."[63]

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[62]   Helmut Koester, "Paul's Proclamation of God's Justice for the Nations," *Theology Digest* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 311, 314.

[63]   Charles B. Williams, *The New Testament: A Translation in the Language of the People* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1950).

Translation beyond Tyndale?

Here, then, lies the irony of our current situation: the Wycliffite translators, first-rate scholars committed to making the Bible available in vernacular English for the very first time, consistently chose *rightwiseness* to translate *justitia* (and thereby *dikaiosyne*). Based on Wycliffite texts, these men clearly understood that venerable Anglo-Saxon term to include the notion of "interpersonal justice," that is, justice in the public sphere. Nearly 150 years later, when William Tyndale engaged the further task of translation based on newly available Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, a combination of his preference for Anglo-Saxon words and the widespread influence of Wycliffite Bibles, texts, and sermons led him to the same decision—a decision which, largely due to the penetrating brilliance of Tyndale's work, would remain powerfully influential for another half-millennium. Yet connotations of *rightwiseness* / righteousness have changed substantially over that time, and the critical connection between *dikaiosyne* and "interpersonal justice," clear to these gifted early English translators, is now so obscure as to be lost to most readers of English-language New Testaments.

Given this story, and reflecting on the challenge which scholars have placed against the tradition of translating *dikaiosyne* as "righteousness," is it not likely that other aspects of translation in the tradition of Tyndale and King James and the New Revised Standard Version have been rendered, by time and place and usage, at once highly misleading and nearly inviolable? Were someone to attempt a fresh translation of the New Testament, intending not to be constrained by the tradition of Tyndale, this seems but one of many pieces of ground worthy of careful excavation.