

## On *Dikaiomata*

One of my early assignments from Michael was a close, coherent and unbiased translation of Paul's letter to the Romans from the original Greek. When I came to chapter 2, verse 26, at first I anticipated no problems. The King James version seemed close enough to the original ("Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?"), though the language of course needed to be updated, and that ambiguous and now nearly meaningless word "righteousness," ubiquitous in Bible translations and in preachers' pulpits, had to be given a meaningful sense. The Greek word it translates is *dikaiomata*; the authoritative Liddell & Scott Greek Lexicon gives "ordinances" or "decrees" as its meaning specifically in this verse of Romans. Wasn't that good enough, and weren't some of the newer Bible translations close enough to that literal sense (e.g. the New International Version's "the law's requirements," or the New American Standard Bible's "the requirements of the Law (= "of the Torah")?)

Yet Michael seemed to have a hunch that something more than just "ordinances" or "requirements" was involved in *dikaiomata*. He urged me to stick with Jerome's original (4<sup>th</sup> century) Latin translation "justices" (*justitiae*, the plural of *justitia*, "justice"). Now, this puzzled me a bit, since one of the most comprehensive Latin dictionaries ever published (Lewis & Short's) lists that plural *justitiae* specifically from Jerome's Bible translations as meaning, again, simply "judgments, precepts, ordinances." So why translate it "justices," as if it were a technical term pertaining to a legal code?

Under Michael's encouragement, I started ransacking the corpus of Greek literature for texts that would show how *dikaiomata* actually functioned within a living, and specifically religious, context. The first surprises came with the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Paul himself so often quoted. I immediately encountered passages like Ezekiel 18:9.3ff:

(The just man) will not oppress anyone, and will restore to the debtor his pledge, and will snatch nothing by violence, will give his bread to the hungry, and will cover the naked with a garment. And will not give his silver at interest and will not take a profit, and will withdraw his hand from iniquity, will make a just judgment between man and man and between himself and his neighbor, and has walked in my statutes and has kept my *dikaiomata* for doing those things — he is a just man, he will live in the life, says the Lord.

or Job 34:27.2:

He has extinguished the impious,  
they were visible in his sight,  
because they turned away from the law of God  
and did not recognize his **dikaiomata**  
for the cry of the poor man to come up to him,  
and he hears the cry of poor people.

Such passages had nothing to do with the Torah's piety requirements circumcision, dietary restrictions, holy days, or the taboos of Leviticus —, but related specifically and exclusively to the fair and equitable treatment of one's fellow human beings. That sense of *dikaiomata* seemed closely akin to its original Greek connection with the word for fairness and justice, "*dikaio*synē," which in turn derives from the key word from the world of Greek ethics, *dikē*, Justice itself, administered by God ("Zeus" for the Greeks) as the unimpeachable rule for treatment of one's fellow human beings.

Next came the use of *dikaionata* by early Christian writers, including Origen's tantalizing comment on Luke (fragment 222, line 20ff.):

For Job was also rich, but did not pass his life in selfish luxury; his house was open with loving kindness toward everyone in need. He treated no one unjustly, instead helping the victims of injustice, arranging the provision of sustenance to widows and orphans — for that is the code of justice (*dikaionata*) of wealthy people who are just.

and the same author's commentary on the Psalms (12.1244.28):

The Lord's code of justice (*dikaionata*) in his law is what includes fairness-and-justice (*dikaiosyne*) in rendering to each according to merit — or (you could say) it is what concerns each person's stewardship. That is what "delights the heart" (Psalm 118/9:143) when it is contemplated.

And, finally, the greatest of Byzantine scholars, Photius (9<sup>th</sup> century), had actually written a commentary on our very passage in Paul (Romans 2.26). Unlike any extant treatise or translation before or after him, Photius seems to have penetrated to the real function here of *dikaionata*. Listen to his remark (*Commentary on Romans*, 483.28ff.):

"So if the uncircumcised observes the Torah's *dikaionata*:" Paul doesn't say "observes the Torah," lest the Jew say, "And how is it possible for an uncircumcised person to observe the law when he's transgressing the law on that very issue, the fact of being uncircumcised?" Therefore, so as not to give those people a handle on that issue, he doesn't put it that way. Instead, he says "the law's *dikaionata*." For the Jews, he says "the Law;" for the uncircumcised, he says "the Law's *dikaionata*." He is saying, "I didn't speak of the whole Torah, but only of the code of justice," at the same time cleverly hinting at the fact that not all things in the Torah determined what was just, but the Torah's **code of justice** (*dikaionata*) did, and justified whatever was in harmony with grace, but the rest was given only because of their weakness.

Photius' understanding of Romans 2.26 proved to be the "smoking gun," because Photius recognized that *dikaionata*, far from being a vague term denoting "righteousness" or "requirements," was the technical term for an actual subset of the Torah, the Torah's code of justice and fairness between man and man. We can in fact follow Jerome in translating *dikaionata tou nomou* as "the Justices of the Law / Torah," a major category of ancient Jewish law demarcated by Leviticus 19:18, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

It remained for Michael Wood, through his research into the Dead Sea Scrolls, to recognize the name for the other division of Torah (what Photius, at the end of the above-quoted passage, calls "the rest"), the *erga tou nomou* (the "Jobs of the Law / Torah") — that body of ritual, taboos, and prescriptions regulating the relationship of man to God which was, through the Christian faith, superseded by the Justices. Finally, the recognition of those two great divisions of the Torah enabled Mr. Wood to resolve not only all apparent contradictions in Romans 2 and 3, but also apparent contradictions between Paul's doctrine and the Sermon on the Mount.—Dr. William Berg, former Professor of Greek and Roman Classics at Stanford University, UCLA, and other academic institutions (PhD in Classical Studies, Princeton 1966).

## On "The Jerome Conspiracy"

"I am wary of any work that includes 'conspiracy' in the title. However, I was led to it by other research that I have done, and was pleasantly surprised by the content. It is very well informed, and superbly written."—Reverend Morton, Anglican Priest (Germany).

## On the One-Sentence Solution to Paul's View of Law

"I am persuaded by Michael Wood's one-sentence . I do think it solves the problems, and mostly in the ways he says it does. This is incredible, and I am very grateful to him for it. After reading it, I went back and read through all the relevant portions of Paul's letters, and I cannot find one place that remains contradictory in the strong sense. He's done something truly remarkable."—Rev Dr. Colin Miller of Peter Maurin House (regarding Sections I-II of *Pauline Paradoxes Decoded*).

Michael Wood's premise is an "intelligent," "interesting," well-argued solution that "has a lot of explanatory power."—Dr. Douglas Campbell of Duke's Divinity School and author of *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul*.

"Michael Wood's proposal is not only original and fresh, but an important contribution which the academic community needs to seriously consider... Wood's manuscript has been a genuine delight to read, not only as a result of his gripping, original and important argument, but also because he has an ability to keep the reader engaged, almost as if one were reading a novel."—Dr. Chris Tilling, of St. Mellitus College and author of *Paul's Divine Christology*.

## On Homosexuality

"Wood's discussion of homosexuality is thorough and fascinating; it recognizes the complexity of the issues involved and demonstrates that, in the end, if we are to take 'Jesus' Law' seriously, then this debate must proceed in love."—Rev. Dr. Robert Moses

"As a classical Greek scholar, I had always analyzed Paul's word *arsenokoitēs* (1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:9) literally and etymologically as "male-bedder." So I had no problem with the way modern Bibles translate it: "homosexual," "sodomite," "man who abuses himself with men," etc. It was a real eye-opener to discover through Michael Wood's work that the term, for Paul, had nothing to do with sexual preference, and had everything to do with Paul's paramount values - kindness, justice, and brotherly love. Mr. Wood presents exhaustive evidence from first- and second-century documents, both Greek and Jewish, for the authentic, original meaning of *arsenokoitēs*.

"As it turns out, *arsenokoitēs* was understood as "boy-raper" not just throughout antiquity, but through the time of Martin Luther and well into the modern age. In more recent times, inexplicably, *arsenokoitēs* underwent a shift of meaning. In almost any bible you pick up, it is now translated simply as "homosexual." Paul's prohibitions are thus effectively made to condemn all forms of homoeroticism, consenting or otherwise; our attention is turned away from the violation of justice and kindness that Paul was targeting.

"Michael Wood proves to my satisfaction that Paul had no quarrel with people who lived decently as homosexuals, but instead condemned those who engaged in the appalling crime of child abuse, which was rampant in Paul's time, victimizing slave boys especially. Wood's book, *Pauline Paradoxes Decoded*, underlines the crying need for new, faithful translations of the New Testament that will reopen church doors and welcome back to the Faith those who have been unjustly rejected and condemned for loving the "wrong" people. It's time to take the Golden Rule, and the Sermon on the Mount, seriously."—William Berg, Ph.D. in Classical Languages (Princeton University)