

## About This Special Issue

In this issue of *Affirmation & Critique* we depart from our usual collection of articles and departments and instead present a condensation of a recently published evaluation of justification by faith across the various historical Christian traditions. The two-volume evaluation, entitled *Challenging the Traditional Interpretations of Justification by Faith*, looks at the teaching of justification by faith from the early church to modern times in light of the Scriptures and the ministry of Watchman Nee (1903-1972) and Witness Lee (1905-1997). While the truth concerning justification by faith may seem to be basic and hardly contestable, the fact is, few believers have more than a rudimentary understanding of this matter in God's full salvation, and many believers fail to appreciate the importance of coming to a full knowledge of this foundational truth. Indeed, many believers today seem stranded on the shores of traditional understandings of this truth and are therefore held back from the full benefit of their justification before God. By examining these traditional interpretations, one by one and in their historical contexts, the shortcomings and the advances in understanding are easily perceived, and we are greatly helped in our appreciation and apprehension of the truth concerning justification by faith. What seemed to be basic and unworthy of our attention now becomes a vital foundation for our whole Christian life, giving us great boldness for the progress and joy of our faith. While being justified by God is something at the beginning of our complete salvation—following the forgiveness and the washing of our sins (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 1:3)—it is impossible to progress in our full salvation without the assurance and without the security that come with a proper realization and experience of justification by faith. The faith that joins us to Christ as righteousness for our justification is the very faith that permeates and operates throughout all of God's salvation work in His believers (1 Tim. 1:4), and thus, a proper understanding of justification by faith sets us on the right path to

the full salvation of our entire being. Our hope is that in reading these accounts of the church's advancing understanding of justification by faith across the millennia, our readers will come to the same appreciation and the same boldness that we have arrived at in writing these accounts.

Because the articles in this special issue condense the much longer chapters in the two-volume work, there are no individual authors for the articles. Instead, our readers will find repeated short citations to the two volumes throughout the articles at the end of each condensed section (for example, "Campbell et al. 1:75-79"). The full citation of the published work is given at the end of each article, but we also give it here for ready reference:

Campbell, John A., Tony H. Espinosa, Martin H. Fuller, Mitchell J. Kennard, Joel I. Oladele, John-Paul Petrash, and Kerry S. Robichaux. *Challenging the Traditional Interpretations of Justification by Faith*. 2 vols. Anaheim, CA: Living Stream, 2021-2023.

Further, because these articles seek to condense and not necessarily to prove our evaluations, we have deliberately excluded the full "justification" for many of our claims. This may give the articles a somewhat provocative and perhaps even a somewhat cavalier quality, and for this we beg our readers' forgiveness and indulgence. If we wish to provoke at all, it is to encourage our readers to examine the longer work from which these articles are drawn and to assess there our claims and our heart. At the very end of this issue, there is full information for obtaining the two-volume evaluation in print and electronic formats, and we invite all our readers to get and read the full historical account of this important truth in the church's understanding.

*The editors*

### IN THE NEXT ISSUE

In the April 2025 issue of *Affirmation & Critique* we inaugurate a new series of issues called The Words of This Life. This series will focus on some of the foundational words of the Christian life, words in common Christian parlance and yet sometimes with vastly different meanings among Christians. We begin with an issue on *faith*, that ubiquitous word that characterizes not only God's New Testament believers (those who have faith) but also all that God does in His New Testament economy ("which is in faith"—1 Tim. 1:4). We devote one article to what subjective faith (our believing ability) is and is not, and another to what objective faith ("the faith") is and is not. In the third article we unpack the crucial expression "God's economy, which is in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4) and show the principle of faith (both subjective and objective) operating in all that God does in the New Testament age. Then, we follow with an article on what living by faith means practically in our Christian experience and church life. In the next two articles we present that great benefit of faith, that is, the victory of our faith, and that great responsibility to faith, that is, our properly contending for it. Our hope is that this issue will be a great service to the faith of all our readers (Phil. 2:17) and will protect all of us from the unique sin of unbelief, which so easily besets even Christ's believers.

*This new series of issues also comes in a new issue size and page format for A&C. Look for it in April 2025.*