RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE CREATED ORDER: APPRECIATION AND CRITIQUE OF A NOVEL IDEA

JEFFREY J. NIEHAUS*

Abstract: *This article explores and critiques the idea that biblical righteousness equates to the "world (created) order" or conformity to it, a relative newcomer in studies of biblical righteousness. Arguments will be examined with regard to biblical data and also in light of a proposed alternative. The proposed alternative will, finally, be offered as a better foundation for understanding biblical righteousness.*

Key words: *righteousness, conformity to a standard, covenant faithfulness, created order, God's righteousness, God's Being and doing, human righteousness, law/justice, wisdom, kingship, war/victory over enemies, act and consequence, covenant, covenant lawsuit, judgment, higher criticism*

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (Rom 1:16–17, ESV)

The purpose of this article is to explore and evaluate the idea that biblical righteousness equates to the created order, or "world order" (*Weltordnung*), or conformity to it—a novel idea in righteousness studies, advanced by H. H. Schmid in several works and then taken up by others.[1] Although some have adopted Schmid's

---

* Jeffrey J. Niehaus is Senior Professor of OT at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 130 Essex St., South Hamilton, MA 01982. He may be contacted at jniehaus@gordonconwell.edu.

[1] The apparent originator and chief advocate of the view has been Hans Heinrich Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte der alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes* (ed. Gerhard Ebeling; BHT 40; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1968) [hereafter *Gerechtigkeit*]; idem., "Creation, Righteousness and Salvation: 'Creation Theology' as the Broad Horizon of Biblical Theology," in *Creation in the Old Testament* (ed. B. W. Anderson; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 102–17 [hereafter "Creation"]; Schmid's contribution to Anderson's volume is a partial translation from Schmid's *Altorientalische Welt in der alttestamentlichen Theologie* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1974), 9–30 [hereafter *AW*], and leaves out his discussion of the NT (22–25), which is engaged in this article with appropriate translations where necessary. Schmid recognizes and advances the work of A. Jepsen, "צדק und צדקה im Alten Testament," in Henning Graf Reventlow, *Gottes Wort und Gottes Land: Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg zum 70. Geburtstag am 16. Januar 1965 dargebracht von Kollegen, Freunden und Schülern* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 78–89. Jepsen in fact articulates the germ of Schmid's key idea. He says of Yahweh's righteousness (צדקה): "It is his bearing and action that have as their goal the order of creation and of the community"; my translation. The German text reads: "Sie ist sein auf Ordnung der Schöpfung und der Gemeinde zielendes Verhalten und Handeln" (ibid., 85). Walter Brueggemann, *An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2009), 188 n. 16, commented: "Hans Heinrich Schmid has most helpfully exposited the Old Testament notion of an ordering of creation to which human persons must submit and for the maintenance of which they are responsible." Others in recent decades have agreed—or interacted briefly—with Schmid. A brief sampling: T. E. Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Leviticus," *Int* 45 (1991): 354–65; John Barton, *Apocalyptic in History*

view, the present study must, out of considerations of space and justice to the original exposition of the view, limit itself to the trunk and not explore the branches, so to speak. In that regard, and because the concern of this article is with the right understanding of righteousness biblically, vis-à-vis Schmid's original contribution, the discussion that follows will be devoted to Schmid's thought, viewed in light of a proposed alternative.[2]

I. DEFINITIONS: A PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE

A pertinent question to pose at the outset of this study is: what does Schmid mean by "world order"? Schmid answers that question by making a useful distinction between "world order," in the sense of "created order," and the world as it has existed and developed since it was created. This distinction applies both in the ANE and in the Bible. When Schmid writes about *Weltordnung*, he is concerned with what one might call the post-fall world *as it ought to be ordered*. If it were ordered as it should be, it would be as it was when it was created. As will be seen, it was largely the job of the king to accomplish this adjustment or reformation and to guarantee it. This perspective is rooted in Schmid's study of the "world order" concept in the ANE, where the most frequently expressed concern was the proper managing, or restoration, of order in this world, rather than accounting for its origins.

The present discussion will propose, however, that while the created order as it appears in Genesis 1 may have some claim to be a candidate for a definition of righteousness—as that concept appears in the Bible—even that definition cannot adequately encompass the biblical concept of righteousness, and a better definition may be proposed. It will appear, moreover, that there are hermeneutical issues that prevent Schmid from presenting a better-grounded understanding of righteousness from a biblical point of view. One question that must arise from such a definition is this: If righteousness equates to conformity to the created order, does that mean God's righteousness is his conformity to the created order?[3]

Before entering into the discussion, however, I would like to "set the table" with some thoughts regarding righteousness and faith, in the hope that those thoughts can inform the subsequent analysis.[4]

---

and Tradition (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002); J. G. McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

[2] Further discussion of Schmid and those influenced by him, as well as other proposed definitions of biblical righteousness, are set to appear in a new book, *Righteousness*, a two-volume work in progress. That book will further advocate the understanding of biblical righteousness proposed in the present article.

[3] The following distinction should be made regarding the term, "righteousness." "Righteousness" can denote an absolute concept (i.e. a standard). One's conformity to that standard is one's "righteousness." The term "righteousness" is used in both senses in the following discussion: as a standard and as conformity to that standard.

[4] Righteousness and faith are considered together because those concepts first appear together (האמן, צדקה)—suggestively—in Gen 15:6.

1. *Righteousness: working definition proposed.* It has been generally recognized that "righteousness," biblically understood, has the fundamental meaning, "a standard" or "conformity to a standard."[5] The view proposed here, in contradistinction to the view that righteousness is conformity to the "created order" or "world order," is that where the Bible is concerned, the standard for righteousness is not the "created order" but God himself—his Being and doing. According to this proposal, God would be the standard of righteousness. On this understanding only God is perfectly righteous because only God conforms perfectly to his own Being and doing.[6] The view of righteousness as conformity to God's nature will be developed as an exploratory proposition, and Schmid's view will then be considered in light of it.[7] The proposed definition can only be developed in the most rudimentary way in an article, but its exposition may provide a useful and perhaps thought-provoking foil to Schmid's standard of *Weltordnung*.

2. *Righteousness and God's attributes: incommunicable and communicable.* On the proposition that biblical righteousness means in the first instance "conformity to God's Being and doing," such righteousness could not, for a creature, include conformity to God's so-called "incommunicable attributes," because on that definition it would not be proper to call any creature righteous. No one except God himself is, for example, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. If God is the standard of righteousness, then righteousness for a creature would apparently include conformity to God's other attributes. Those other attributes would be God's so-called "communicable attributes," which also appear in his Being and doing, such as the fruit of the Spirit (who possesses those qualities and produces them in us)—as well as, for example, intelligence and reason (though not omniscience), authority and

---

[5] Cf. the lead definitions in the lexicons, as per, e.g., BDB 841: "*what is right, just, normal*"; William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 303: "(what is) right, normal"; *TWOT* 2:752: "This root basically connotes conformity to an ethical or moral standard. It is claimed by Snaith (N. Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas of the OT*, Schocken, 1964, p. 73) 'the original significance of the root *ṣdq* to have been 'to be straight.' But he adds that it stands for a 'norm.'" Cf. likewise *HALOT* III, 1004; *DCH* VII, 80. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 69, concludes the same: "The concept as a rule denotes that which is right, in order, that which is, as it must be" (my translation). The German text reads: "Der Begriff bezeichnet in der Regel das, was recht, in Ordnung ist, was so ist, wie es sein muß."

[6] Charles Lee Irons, in an important recent work, takes an inductive approach and concludes that righteousness, in God's case, "is precisely *iustitia distributiva*." The present article is not the place to engage Irons's extensive and worthwhile study or to address that definition, although the understanding of God's righteousness proposed by Irons, like the covenant-faithfulness interpretation with which he differs, as well as Schmid's interpretation of righteousness as conformity to the world order (with which Irons also differs, but with little comment), may arguably be better subsumed under the working definition proposed here. Cf. Charles Lee Irons, *The Righteousness of God: A Lexical Examination of the Covenant-Faithfulness Interpretation,* WUNT 2/386 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 193; for Yahweh and *iustitia distributiva*, cf. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 148, 181.

[7] I have already explored the concept to some extent, although only in a preliminary way; cf. Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology,* vol. 1: *Common Grace Covenants*[2] (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018), 187–91 [hereafter Niehaus, *BT 1*]; idem, *Biblical Theology,* vol. 3: *Special Grace Covenants, New Testament*[2] (Bellingham: Lexham, 2019), 349–70 [hereafter Niehaus, *BT 3*].

capacity for rule (though not omnipotence), and the ability to be in one location or another (though not omnipresence).[8]

The guiding proposal, then, is as follows: Righteousness in the Bible is defined as conformity to God's Being and doing. That definition applies overall—to God's righteousness, and to the righteousness that God expects of, and/or works in, human beings. God's righteousness is his conformity to that standard, and so is, on a lesser level of ontology and attainment, our righteousness.[9] Put another way, God's righteousness is that God is *true to himself*. The righteousness God desires in humans is that a human be *true* (or, *faithful*) *to God*. Such conformity to the likeness of our Creator is always accomplished by the Lord.

3. *Righteousness and faith.* We learn another important fact about righteousness from Gen 15:6: Righteousness and faith are intimately related—so much so, that one might say they are two sides of the same coin. For the present article an exploration of faith must be very limited, out of considerations of space.[10] A proposed working definition is that faith is the state of "amening" God's Being and doing, and the first occurrence of the faith concept illustrates the meaning. Abram "believed [האמן] the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6, NIV). The Hebrew verb translated "believed" is in fact "saying 'amen,'" or "amening." So Abram "amened" the Lord, and this act of amening the Lord was counted to him as righteousness.[11] To "amen" in this sense means to affirm or agree that something or someone is true.[12]

Arguably, the "amening" of God is not a one-time act, but a lifestyle. The more completely one "amens" God's Being and doing, the more completely one is aligned with—or conformed to—God's Being and doing, and so the more "righteous" one becomes. Moreover, the very act of "amening" God is a righteous act, because it conforms to God's Being and doing—God, who always "amens" himself, that is, who always agrees with and affirms his own Being and doing. Again, another way of saying the same thing is that God is always "true to himself." Likewise, human faith in God means a dynamic and active "amening" of God's Being and doing in any particular matter or regard, and not mere intellectual recognition.

---

[8] This roster of attributes is not meant to be a complete enumeration but is only given to distinguish what sort of divine attributes (namely, the communicable ones) would constitute the standard of righteousness for a creature under the proposed definition.

[9] This is to be contradistinguished from what Isaiah terms in effect "the righteousness of man." When Isaiah says, "But we are all like an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses [צדקת] *are* like filthy rags" (Isa 64:6, NKJV; Isa 64:5 Heb.), he is characterizing people's actions that arise out of their inner nature. Whatever standard of "righteousness" those human acts imply—or better, to whatever standard of righteousness they conform—it is not the standard to which God conforms ("filthy rags"), nor is it the standard he expects of, or works in, human beings.

[10] For further discussion of faith along the lines pursued here, cf. Niehaus, *BT 1*, 14–21; idem, *BT 3*, 349–54.

[11] Cf. Meredith Kline, "Abram's Amen," *WTJ* 31 (1968): 1–11. For Kline on the delocutive nature of Abram's amen, cf. further Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology,* vol. 2: *Special Grace Covenants, Old Testament*[2] (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018), 126 n. 36 [hereafter *BT 2*].

[12] Cf. Holladay, *Lexicon*, 20 ("view s.thg as reliable, believe").

Satan has perhaps a more detailed intellectual recognition of God than any of us, and he knows that what he recognizes is true, but he does not "amen" it.

II. CONFORMITY TO THE CREATED ORDER

1. *God and the created order.* God does not conform to the created order, but the created order conforms to God's ideas of the created order, because the created order is an expression of God's ideas. If God created all things, he had ideas of them before he created them. So God has "realized," or made real, the creatures/created things he had in mind. Moreover, those ideas, in their realized form (i.e. in the created order), tell us something of God's nature. Reason tells us this, and the Bible says the same. The heavens declare God's glory (Ps 19:1–4), and God's "invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:20, ESV).

God's "nature" has been perceived "in the things that have been made." This observation could form a foundation for a rational argument that "righteousness" relates to "conformity to the created order," on the understanding that God is righteous:

Proposition 1:   God's nature is perceived in the created order

Proposition 2:   God is righteous = true to his own nature

Conclusion: God's righteousness is perceived in the created order

The syllogism may commend itself as biblical, but it leaves questions unanswered. Moreover, the conclusion it provides—"God's righteousness is perceived in the created order"—does not enable one to say righteousness equates *simply to* conformity to the created order.[13]

2. *God's righteousness and the created order.* If God's righteousness is consummately God's faithfulness to himself, and if God was faithful to himself when he created all things—in particular, if he was faithful to his own ideas of things when he made their created counterparts—then what aspects of God's nature, besides his "glory" (Ps 19:4) and his "invisible attributes, *namely*, his eternal power and *divine nature*" (Rom 1:20, ESV, emphases added) are apparent in the created order? God's "divine nature" would apparently imply his entire nature, in which case his entire nature would be perceived in the created order. But the created order is not God, and it is clear that God's *entire* nature is not revealed in the created order. One should probably add that God's goodness is revealed in the created order, since God's assessment of the created order is that it is "very good" (Gen. 1:31), and that goodness can only come from the creator (cf. Jas 1:17).

---

[13] For that to be true, the created order would have to display God's nature exhaustively—in other words, the created order would have to equate to God—for God's righteousness to equate to the created order, and that is not the case.

God's "righteousness," then—his faithfulness to his own nature and ideas—may be perceived in the created order, but the created order is not God and does not exhaustively reveal God's faithfulness to himself and to his ideas (in other words, as has been said, the created order does not exhaustively reveal God's "righteousness"). If the created order does not exhaustively reveal God's righteousness, and if God is the epitome of righteousness, it follows that "righteousness" cannot equate *simply* to "conformity to the created order."

3. *An alternative.* On the other hand, for a human, conformity to the creational *imago Dei* may equate to righteousness, to the extent that the pre-fall *imago* conformed to God himself. Jesus illustrates this truth because he was "Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1) and "knew no sin" (2 Cor 5:21), and so he was the "second Adam" (cf. Rom 5:14, 1 Cor 15:45) and "the faithful witness" (Rev 1:5, 3:14), and could say, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9, NIV).[14] As will be seen, one pagan notion of righteousness—that it was embodied in the idea or model of kingship—echoes this reality: biblically the first Adam was a (vassal) king, and the Second Adam was and is the King of kings.

The observations made thus far raise some questions that have not been entirely answered. Some of them may not admit of definitive answers in a fallen world (e.g. "what aspects of God's nature ... are apparent in the created order?"), but they may be of use as we consider Schmid's view that righteousness signifies the created order and conformity to it.

III. SCHMID, צדק, AND *WELTORDNUNG*

H. H. Schmid has done an inductive study and concluded that righteousness equates to the created order or conformity to it (i.e. being *ordnungsgemäß*).[15] Perhaps the first thing to note about this proposition is that, for Schmid, the created order or "world order" constitutes a standard, and righteousness for a created entity is thus conformity to that standard. In this respect Schmid affirms the basic understanding of צדק found in the lexicons: It does mean conformity to a standard. But for him, the standard is not God but rather the created order.[16] Since his focus is on the created order—that is, the proper order of this world—conformity to that order does not have to mean that righteousness has an overall *supernal* meaning. He states in his *Gerechtigkeit* summary:

---

[14] Cf. further discussion, below.

[15] As noted above, Schmid goes a step beyond the work of A. Jepsen, who had concluded that the root, צדק, meant, in general, "correctness" (*Richtigkeit*) and "order" (*Ordnung*). Schmid develops evidence that the "order" identified by Jepsen can now be more specifically identified as "world order." Cf. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 66. For righteousness as being *ordnungsgemäß*, cf. below, n. 22.

[16] He explains, "'The 'fundamental meaning' of the root, if one can speak about that at all, was apparently that of 'right, correct, in order.' In the pre-Israelite-Canaanite space, out of which the concept came to the Hebrew of the Old Testament and which is of decisive importance for exploration of the background of biblical צדק, such 'right, being in order' however oriented itself to and concretized itself in the idea of world order" (my translation).

> From the foregoing demonstrations it may in fact be stated what the norm is, which the word stem צדק denotes: the idea of world-order. This world-order was not understood, either in the ancient orient or in the Old Testament (at least outside the cultic conceptual world) as a metaphysical, ideal dimension; much more, one sensed very well that, whatever order might be, must always become clear only according to each particular time and situation.[17]

In other words, the meaning of righteousness—"world-order" (צדק), or we may add "conformity to order" (צדקה)—can appear differently, or be differently nuanced, in different contexts or literary domains.[18]

   1. *Schmid's domains.* Schmid has identified six domains or areas in which righteousness terminology appears and with which it is associated: "The domains are these: *law* [*or, "justice,"* translating *Recht*], *wisdom*, *nature/fruitfulness*, *war/victory over enemies*, *cult/sacrifice*, and finally—sometimes overlapping those already named—*kingship*."[19] Those are all elements found in the ANE and in today's world. So, as noted earlier, Schmid's main focus is on the world of the ANE, and of the Bible in effect after Genesis 2. He says, "In the ancient Near East creation faith did not deal only, indeed not even primarily, with the origin of the world. Rather, it was concerned above all with the present world and the environment of humanity now."[20]

   We turn now to consider some of Schmid's categories or domains.[21] As he distinguishes between the nuances of and צדק and צדקה, he also distinguishes between the domains to which they apply: "The substantive צדק denotes originally the cosmic order, which concretizes itself in wisdom, law etc. and is guaranteed by the king within the framework of the earthly, צדקה correspondingly denotes the bearing or action that is in accordance with the order or even creates the order within this horizon."[22]

---

[17] Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 184 (my translation). Cf. further Schmid's discussion, 182–86.

[18] In a sense, of course, this is also true on the basic understanding of righteousness as conformity to a standard—even if that standard is God—hence the variety of translations of צדק/צדקה in different biblical contexts in the lexicons. The same is also true of Schmid's overall survey of cognate evidence (cf. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 69–75). It should be noted that Schmid follows Jepsen in seeing a difference between צדק and צדקה. צדק has to do with right order; צדקה with a proper orientation that aims for order (ibid., 67). A further indication of this is that צדק—as contrasted with with צדקה—is never used in the plural (ibid., 67 n. 410).

[19] Ibid., 14 (my translation). Schmid notes, however, that these six do not all appear with the same weight in the OT as they do in the ANE: "For Israel these domains no longer formed an equivalent set. Law/justice, wisdom and kingship, those it experienced as belonging together. … However, one can no longer simply identify that order which incorporates cult and sacrifice with that of law/justice and wisdom, the order of nature no longer simply with that of war and victory over the enemies" (my translation). Schmid's study of the ANE and OT does affirm that Israel received law/justice, wisdom and kingship from the ANE, and especially from Canaan, as cohesive ideas under the rubric of *Weltordnung*.

[20] Schmid, "Creation," 103; *AW*, 11.

[21] Attention will focus on law [or, "justice," translating *Recht*], wisdom, and kingship, which pertain to Schmid's understanding of צדק; and war/victory over enemies, which pertains to his understanding of צדקה.

[22] Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 67 (my translation). This is as good a place as any to note that all of the domains are affected to some extent by a historicizing shift in Israel (posited by Schmid) away from the archaic *Weltordnung* sense of the root (see below; *Gerechtigkeit*, 168–69, 171–73). Because of historical shift, the root צדק becomes less connected with, e.g., warfare (perhaps in part because of the deteriora-

One thing that becomes clear is that, as Schmid draws on the ANE for his categories, he effectively takes the ANE perspective as his hermeneutical key for understanding the fundamental sense of righteousness in the Bible. Consequently, the review that follows will necessarily entail some interaction with, and critique of, aspects of that approach.

a. *Law/justice.* The first of Schmid's domains (in the order quoted above) is the concept of "law/justice" as related to righteousness, and Schmid traces this theme and its relationship to the created order in its ANE context.[23] He draws on the prologue to Hammurabi's Code as an example:

> That the founding of the city of Babylon was understood to be closely connected with the creation of the world is seen not only from this text but also with great clarity from the *Enuma Elish.* Hammurabi's giving of the law comes in this creation context, and so does every ancient Near Eastern legal code with the same structure. The law enacts the establishment of the order of creation seen in its juristic aspect. In short, the ancient Near Eastern cosmic, political, and social order find their unity under the concept of "creation."[24]

The connection between law and righteousness—the fact that the concept of "law" is a carrier or touchstone for the concept of "righteousness"—would probably find wide agreement (cf. the OT word pair "righteousness and justice" [צדקה ומשפט], Gen 18:19, etc.)[25] That can be a topic for further exploration. As regards the relation of law and righteousness to the created order, Genesis 1–2 provide the first biblical data. From a biblical point of view, the first laws God gave to any humans were given to the first man and woman as reported in Gen 1:28 and 2:17.[26] It should be noted that this took place not after God had defeated a chaos monster and then created the world and a city—as was the case with Marduk and Babylon—but after God created everything *ex nihilo* (as the NT later clarifies, Rom 4:17).[27]

---

tion of the concept of "holy war" in the monarchical period) and with "nature and fruitfulness" (perhaps in part because of the separation of Israelite religion from the fertility cult), which undergoes a reshaping (*Umprägung*) and appears in the form of "a figurative/pictorial speech" (*eine bildliche Rede*, 171). Although it is important to note these nuances, they require more space for their exploration than an article that hopes to convey the main points of Schmid's analysis can afford.

[23] Schmid does not follow the same sequence of domains precisely in his discussion of the OT, although he does address all of them in the OT context. His discussion of OT usage surveys the majority of OT books or sources, including "the Yahwist" ("Der Yahwist," 104–7), "the Elohist" ("Der Elohist," 107–10), "the Priestly document" ("Die Priesterschrift," 110–11), "Deutero-Isaiah" ("Deuterojesaja," 130–34), and "Trito-Isaiah" ("Tritojesaja," 134–37).

[24] Schmid, "Creation," 104–5; *AW*, 12.

[25] Cf., e.g., Deut 33:21; 2 Sam 8:15; 1 Chr 18:14; 2 Chr 9:8; Job 37:23; Pss 33:5; 36:6; 72:1–2; 99:4; 103:6; 106:3; Prov 8:20; 16:8; 21:3; Isa 1:27; 5:7, 16; 9:7; 28:17; 32:16; 33:5; 54:17; 56:1; 58:2; 59:9, 14; Jer 4:2; 9:24; 22:3, 15; 23:5; 33:15; Ezek 18:5, 19, 21, 27; 33:14, 16, 19; 45:9; Amos 5:7, 24; 6:12. Schmid documents that this word pair becomes especially significant in the context of kingship ideology in Israel (cf. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, "צדק *im Rahmen der Königsideologie*," 83–89).

[26] Likewise the first covenant lawsuit, arguably, was brought against Adam and his wife by the Lord in Genesis 3, because they broke the law of Gen 2:17b; cf. Niehaus, *BT 1*, 106–10.

[27] Discussion of the *Chaoskampf* idea is reserved for comments on "War/victory over enemies" below.

b. Wisdom. Schmid connects wisdom and creation thought, and highlights the Egyptian concept of Maat as an illustration:

> An even clearer confirmation of the close connection between the cosmic and the ethical-social order comes from the realm of the ancient Near Eastern wisdom. That creation plays a central and primary role in this sphere is so well known that it is unnecessary to demonstrate the special character of so-called nature wisdom. Also well known is the fundamental significance of the ethical-social dimension in wisdom, the realization of which is nothing other than the realization of the original order of creation. This was given conceptual expression in ancient Egypt, where Maat, the concept for the order of creation, is at once the central concept in both legal literature and wisdom literature.[28]

Egypt offers perhaps the clearest data source for the connections Schmid draws. It should be noted however that one can search Egyptian literature in vain for a true analogy to Israel's experience. Maat is certainly an assumed and primary value in the background for Egypt, but anything like a covenant relationship with the Lord, made in blood and having a covenant sign to be honored by each member of the covenant—which forms the context for and basis of much of biblical wisdom literature (e.g. Proverbs, even Ecclesiastes!)—is lacking, presumably because, as we know, no god broke into history and made a covenant with any other ANE peoples, as God did with Israel. [29]

c. Kingship. The overarching domain in Schmid's group of six is kingship, and it has been noted that this is for good reason:

> This comprehensive character and this fundamental appreciation of the order of creation found vivid expression in the kingship ideology of the ancient Near

---

[28] Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness and Salvation," 105; *AW*, 12–13. Cf. earlier Hans Heinrich Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit: Eine Untersuchung zur altorientalischen und israelitischen Weisheitsliteratur* (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1966), 156–59 [hereafter *Weisheit*], where Schmid argues that wisdom in Israel eventually differentiated itself from ANE wisdom (e.g. with reference to Maat) and became more man-centered and legalistic: "Wisdom will have to become anthropocentric where mankind, in the course of a progressive individuation, has lost the direct relation to the Total-Cosmos" (my translation; cf. discussion, 156–63). This conclusion regarding the move to individuation in wisdom literature does not utterly differentiate wisdom in Israel from the wisdom domain Schmid sees in the ANE—at least in its primordial relation to the created order—but it does qualify it (cf. above, n. 19); it is a late development, with notable exceptions (e.g. Proverbs 25; ibid., 196): "But also, this is valid in this form only for the Israelite late form of wisdom. The center of original wisdom is not man, but the world order, its concern is not anthropology but cosmology" (my translation). For Schmid, however, even this migration of meaning has roots in Egyptian Maat; the differentiation into, or focus on, two categories of people (צדק and רשע) relates to the antithetical designation of Maat and "wrong/injustice" (Egyptian *isft*, *Unrecht*) or "lie" (Egyptian *grg*, *Lüge*); cf. Schmid, *Weisheit*, 159.

[29] Cf. Ps 19:7 (NIV): "The law [תורה] of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple"; cf. Eccl 12:9–14. Ironically, Schmid sees the prominence of the *Lord* in Israel's thought as the reason why *wisdom* in Israel *moved away* from (although it never totally lost) its grounding in *Weltordnung* and became anthropocentric, individuated and legalistic: "For the Old Testament, Yahweh alone is creator, every cosmos-constructing power departs from humanity ... the development of an anthropological form of wisdom in Israel is without a doubt to be understood as a consequence of this, among other things—compared with Egypt and Mesopotamia—altered understanding of cosmological connections" (my translation). Cf. above, n. 18.

East. As incarnation or son—in any case the representative—of the (creator-) deity upon the earth, the king was understood to be the earthly guarantor of the order of creation. Upon him and his acts depend the fertility of the land as well as the just social and political order of the state. Apart from this reference back to the order of creation it is impossible to understand the numerous forms and formulations based on kingship ideology.[30]

What Schmid says is certainly true of the kingship idea in the ANE, as many inscriptions in one way or another attest. Schmid affirms that the same is true of the king in Israel: "As in the ancient Orient the king is also in Israel—above all in the perceptual world of the Psalms—son and representative of the most high God, who has to guarantee his order in the earthly realm."[31] In the ANE, the ideology found perhaps its clearest expression in Egypt, where it was the job of every Pharaoh to restore things as "at the beginning," including temples, images of the gods (i.e. idols), etc.[32] The Bible of course presents more clearly what Pharaonic ideology—which is remarkably Christological—entailed: The incarnate God who will indeed restore all things "as at the beginning," and even better. However, the biblical view never portrays a king of Israel as divine offspring (although adoptive sonship in the first instance with future messianic implications is certainly present, e.g. Ps 2:7; cf. Heb 1:5). Another important difference is that the Bible promises an eschatological restoration of the created order—by the King of kings—and that never appears in the ANE (as will be discussed below).

d. War/victory over enemies. As has been noted, the six domains Schmid identifies are all seen to embody righteousness—either צדק as pertains to the original order, or צדקה as the way to achieve conformity to that order now—and they all exist in relation to each other. It follows for Schmid that nature and the state are naturally connected as regards righteousness, and these also implicate, for example, not only the domain of "law/justice," but also the domain of "war/victory over enemies":

> The order established through creation and newly constituted every year is not only the renewal of nature; it is just as much the order of the state. This is seen, for instance, in the use of the motif of the battle against chaos (*Chaoskampf*) which belongs to creation typology. … In Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and Israel, the *Chaoskampf* appears not only in cosmological contexts but just as frequently—and this was fundamentally true from the first—in political contexts. The repulsion and destruction of the enemy, and thereby the maintenance of political order, always constitute one of the major dimensions of the battle against chaos.

---

[30] Schmid, "Creation," 105; *AW*, 13.

[31] Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 83 (my translation). However, Schmid also notes that the king's authority over the powers of nature disappears from the kingship idea in Israel, possibly because of the altered Israelite understanding of nature involved with Israel's departure from the fertility cult common in the ANE (Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 172).

[32] Cf. Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 171–72 [hereafter *ANETBT*].

The enemies are none other than a manifestation of chaos which must be driven back.[33]

Schmid's analysis fits the ANE context well enough, but it does not fit the Bible very well. The Bible, after all, does not present an "order established through creation and newly constituted every year," along such mythical lines as are found in the ANE. For example, although the concept of a *Chaoskampf* analogy between, for example, the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1, founded essentially on the supposed correlation between the Babylonian sea dragon goddess Tiamat (proper noun) and Hebrew *tehom* (common noun, Gen 1:2), has been a staple of OT scholarship since Gunkel drew attention to it in 1895, more recent study has called this equivalence into question.[34] A view more consistent with the biblical narrative would appear to be that God encountered no resistance when he created the universe (i.e. there was then no *Chaoskampf*).[35] He did combat, for example, Egypt at the Reed Sea, but even there his warfare was not against the sea, but against Egypt characterized elsewhere as "Rahab," a sea monster of some sort (cf. Isa 30:7, Ps 89:11).[36] The resultant picture would be that the biblical writers drew on, or alluded to, ANE myth, by way of sometimes explicit or sometimes implicit polemic against mythology and idolatry. They did not, however, produce an Israelite counterpart to, or version of, the mythology of the surrounding cultures.[37] Nevertheless, to the extent that Schmid draws attention to the parallels, he touches on an important theme: Yahweh does engage in warfare, in various forms, against the forces of evil—including the Conquest which produced the Israelite "state"—and those forces are indeed chaotic.[38]

The foregoing biblical data may draw our attention to the idea that God, who created everything, who gave the first laws and executed the first judicial process (*Recht*, Gen 1:28; 2:17; 3:9–19), whom the Bible portrays as the author and embodiment of all wisdom (*Weisheit*, Prov 8:22–31; 1 Cor 1:24), who ordained fruitfulness (Gen 1:11–12.22.28–29; cf. Schmid's *Natur und Fruchtbarkeit*), who after the fall waged war against the powers of evil and darkness (*Krieg/Sieg über Feinde*, Exod 15:3–10; 17:16; Josh 10:42; Ps 78:65–67; Isa 42:13; Zeph 1:2–18; Rev 17:14; 19:11–21), who accepted the first offerings and ordained worship and sacrifice (*Kult/Opfer*,

---

[33] Schmid, "Creation," 103–4; *AW*, 11. Schmid cites von Rad and Eichrodt in support: "Von Rad talks about 'the struggle between Yahweh and chaos' [*Theology*, I:151]. Eichrodt refers to 'the struggle with chaos' [*Theology* I:229]" (104); cf. *AW*, 91–120 on chaos and "Holy War."

[34] Cf. David Toshio Tsumura, "The 'Chaoskampf' Motif in Ugaritic and Hebrew Literatures," in J.-M. Michaud, ed., *Le Royaume d'Ougarit de la Crète à l'Euphrate. Nouveaux axes de Recherche* (Proche-Orient et Littérature Ougaritique II; Sherbrooke, Quebec: Gérald Guy Caza, 2007), 473–99. Cf. earlier Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895).

[35] As the psalmist says, "The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land" (Ps 95:5, NIV).

[36] For Rahab cf. further Job 9:13; Ps 87:4; Isa 51:9.

[37] Cf., e.g., the use of Ugaritic Baal poetry material polemically in Isaiah 27; cf. Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 111–16, and sources cited there.

[38] Among many examples that could be cited cf. P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (WBC 19; Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 245–49 (discussion of Psalm 29); cf. Niehaus, *God at Sinai*, 160–71.

Gen 4:2b–4; Exod 3:12; Leviticus), and who is the King of kings and model of all kingship (*Königtum*, Pss 47:2; 95:3; Mal 1:14; Matt 5:35; Rev 15:3), is in himself and in his realized ideations the source of the categories Schmid has seen in the ANE.

2. *Act and consequence grounded in the created order.* Schmid has given six domains in which righteousness is articulated and has thereby also outlined the constituent elements of *Weltordnung.* He has shown how in the ANE it was the king's responsibility to restore that created or "world order" once something (or someone) had disrupted it. He also makes it clear, however, that creation itself and "the (creator-) deity" are instrumental in judging those who cause disorder, and this judgment takes the form of what has been called "the connection between act and consequence":

> To this way of thinking about creation belongs that view which scholars designate as "the connection between act and consequence." Whoever transgresses against this order inflicts on it objective damage that must be repaired again. The act must fall back upon the actor or otherwise be "expiated." … Whoever does what is right conforms to the created order—understood to be fundamentally *heilsam* [wholesome, healthful]—and hence stands under the blessing. Whoever acts wrongly must in some special way bear the consequences of this deed and thus stands under the curse. In some ancient Near Eastern texts, as well as some in the OT, the relation between act and consequence is effected automatically, by inner necessity. In other texts the (creator-) deity is the executor. There is no substantial contradiction between the two, so long as the inner force of the order of creation and the action of the creator god are not differentiated. In this way people of the ancient Near East understood broad areas of life and many events within the horizon of creation faith.[39]

The analysis offers what is, first, an ANE perspective. When one *acts* to violate the created order, the *consequence* will come either (1) "automatically, by inner necessity," or (2) by some action of "the (creator-) deity." Schmid says of the "inner necessity" vis-à-vis the action of the deity, "There is no substantial contradiction between the two, so long as the inner force of the order of creation and the action of the creator god are not differentiated." These conclusions are drawn from the idea of *Weltordnung* (also in Israel Yahweh's *Ordnung*) and invite further comment.

Schmid's observations are grounded in the ANE, but they also apply to the Bible. Without an extensive review that would far outstrip the boundaries of an article, the following points seem clear enough. First, it is certainly true that God has so constituted things—and people—that sins against him carry their own consequences for the person who commits them. This seems to be Paul's perspective when he says, "Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error" (Rom 1:27b, NIV). In a manner of speaking, then, as Schmid says, "the relation between act and consequence is effected automatically, by inner necessity." Since God has ordered things in such a

---

[39] Schmid, "Creation," 105–6; *AW*, 13–14. He also relates the act-consequence pattern to wisdom and law in the ANE and OT (ibid.). For earlier discussion of the "act-consequence" idea, cf. Schmid, "Tat (Haltung) und Ergehen" in *Weisheit*, 163–64; cf. subsequently *Gerechtigkeit*, 175–77.

way that acts do have inevitable consequences (e.g. if I abuse my *imago Dei* by over-eating, I will suffer certain consequences), and since the created order (with the natural consequences that attend upon its violation) is an expression of some of God's nature, one may, to that extent, not want to distinguish between "the inner force of the order of creation and the action of the creator god"—at least, not too severely. Second, briefly, and to Schmid's second point, the Bible certainly makes clear that the Creator God can and does bring judgments himself. [40]

3. *Judgment for breaking covenant and sinning against God.* Schmid's observations on acts and consequences, however, arguably do not do justice to two major realities in the OT. Those are now briefly considered.

a. *Covenant.* First, if one seeks an explicit definition, it is not the created order but God's laws, enshrined in his covenants (and especially for the OT the Mosaic covenant), that define effectively what is and is not "righteous."[41] A sin (or unrighteous act) is therefore an act of covenant breaking, which God will judge. The point here is that God brings a negative consequence because the vassal has broken the covenant.[42] Schmid, consistent with his commitment to *Weltordnung* as the standard of righteousness in the Bible, sees *Weltordnung* as the governing idea that antedates and lies behind covenant. He says:

> צדק denotes a very foundational dimension of order, which itself stands beyond every covenant or election statement. צדקה is a still more all embracing and foundational "Being in Order," than for example the concept of "faithfulness to community" or "covenant faithfulness" denotes. Yahweh wants precisely this foundational "Being in Order"; and precisely this develops into the call for covenant and election.[43]

---

[40] The ANE offers what might be called a famous case of a god directly involved in the punishment an individual king, when Shamash, overseer of laws and treaties, interferes psychologically against the Babylonian vassal king, Kashtiliash IV, for that king's treaty violations against his Assyrian suzerain, Tukulti-Ninurta I, and leads the vassal to make militarily disastrous decisions in war against his suzerain. It is important to note that in that case, the sun god (Shamash) is punishing the rebellious vassal explicitly because he was a rebellious vassal—a treaty breaker—and not because he violated the created order. In this case, the punishment suffered by Kashtiliash was not "effected automatically, by inner necessity." It was produced in a specific and targeted way, from outside the covenant breaker, by the sun god himself, who was overseer of laws and treaties. Cf. discussion in Jeffrey J. Niehaus, "Joshua and Ancient Near Eastern Warfare," *JETS* 31 (1988): 43. For צדקה/צדק and Yahweh's judgments cf. further Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 177–79 ("Gibt es eine 'strafende Gerechtigkeit' im Alten Testament?")

[41] So Moses says, "If we are careful to obey all this law [מצוה] before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness [צדקה]" (Deut 6:25, NIV). As Schmid notes, מצוה in the singular in Deuteronomy signifies "the sum of all individual commands" (my translation of "Summe aller Einzelgebote," Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 124 n. 215). For Schmid, however, צדקה in this verse means the ability to have right consequence in one's life according to "an oldest aspect of the idea of order"; my translation of "ein ältester Aspekt der Ordnungsvorstellung" (124). *Weltordnung*, and not covenant, is the governing concept.

[42] The same biblical reality entails the practice of covenant lawsuit, a genre that constitutes the bulk of the prophetic material, ironically anticipated in Deuteronomy 32; cf. G. E. Wright, "The Lawsuit of God: A Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage* (ed. B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson; New York: Harper, 1962), 26–67.

[43] Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 129 (my translation).

It appears that Schmid neglects covenant lawsuit as a genre or, perhaps better, characterizes the prophets' rebukes as having to do not so much with Israel's violations of the covenant but rather Israel's violations of the created order, because for him *Weltordnung* is the idea that underlies even covenant.

In sum, Schmid sees *Weltordnung* as the foundational idea. One might justly agree that God's covenantal program aims at restoring *Weltordnung*, and most theologians would probably affirm the same, and so in that sense one can and should affirm the importance of God's desire to restore the created order.[44] The present proposal differs in this: whereas Schmid sees *Weltordung* as foundational to covenant, and as the standard indicated by צדקה/צדק, the present work sees *God himself* as foundational to both *Weltordnung* and covenant, and as the ultimate standard indicated by צדקה/צדק.

b. *God himself.* Second, and more deeply understood, *any* sin is actually a sin against God, and not merely, or even primarily, an act of violence against the created order. As David says, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. *Against you, you only, have I sinned* and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge" (Ps 51:3–4, NIV, emphasis added). David's sins (in this case, against Uriah and with Bathsheba) were primarily sins against God, and David recognized them as such.

David's sins were much more than sins against the created order, even though one may say they were that (cf. Gen 2:24; Matt 19:1–9 regarding adultery; and Gen 4:11, 9:6 [in covenant renewal of the created order] regarding murder). They were also more than acts of covenant breaking, even though David broke the Mosaic covenant by his acts of murder and adultery. God is the ultimate and primary standard, because the Mosaic covenant, like the created order, is arguably an expression of God's nature.[45] Ultimately, then, in his assessment, David got it right: "Against you, you only, have I sinned."

IV. PROBLEMS

1. *Two problems with the OT.* Schmid's studies have exposed an array of domains in which "righteousness" finds expression. Those domains have much to do with life in the world after Genesis 2, or "after the fall." The exposition of these domains is clearly a useful contribution, but that does not mean Schmid's work does not have hermeneutical problems.

There are arguably two such problems that underlie his studies. First, Schmid does not assume the historicity of the Bible or the legitimacy of its authorial claims.

---

[44] Cf. William Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament* (Homebush West, NSW: Lancer, 1985); idem, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); Gerard van Groningen, *From Creation to Consummation* (Sioux Center: Dort College Press, 1996 [vol. 1], 2004 [vol. 2], 2005 [vol. 3]); G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011)—all in a long tradition of biblical theology that has made the same affirmation.

[45] Cf. discussion of the Adamic covenant, and of the divine-human covenant idea as an expression of a power relationship, and fundamentally an expression of God's nature, in Niehaus, *BT 1*, 35–37.

His approach to the Bible is higher critical, and so he works easily with "the Yahwist," "the Elohist," "Deutero-Isaiah," etc. This orientation means that he under-emphasizes (or, actually, does not mention) a critical aspect of God's judgments in the OT, that of covenant lawsuit (that is, *qua* covenant lawsuit, an established and recognized genre in the ANE and OT; of course he discusses prophetic rebukes but views them as rebukes for violations of *Weltordnung*). The Lord brings covenant lawsuits through the prophets against his people, not primarily because they have violated *Weltordnung*, but because they have explicitly broken the requirements of God's covenant.[46] The biblical covenant lawsuit prophets reflect a process also undertaken by, for example, Hittite and Assyrian suzerains who prosecuted covenant lawsuits and attendant punishments against vassals who had broken treaties.[47] Second, Schmid's heavy reliance on the ANE as a perspectival background to his study of *Weltordnung* in the OT means that he either misses relevant OT issues (such as the covenant lawsuit genre just mentioned) or that he underplays the acute difference between the OT and its cultural environment. Each of these matters is now considered briefly.

a. *Covenant lawsuit.* When Schmid discusses the pre-exilic prophets, for example, he affirms that the great issue for them was violation of the "order of creation":

> They expose the false behavior of the people and their leaders, indicating that the judgment of Yahweh will and must come on account of this. Here we see the basic structure of the act-consequence syndrome. … The prophets follow the general knowledge of the time and criticize the people in terms of what is "order" in the sphere of interpersonal relationships. And this is the same order that is found in the context of creation faith as well as in the sphere of law and wisdom. Moreover, it was assumed in creation-thought, as well as in the sphere of law and wisdom, that these orders could not be violated with impunity. To be sure, the circumstances in which the prophets appeared, the radical consistency of their indictment of the people, and the deadly earnestness with which they demand righteousness and justice comprise a specifically Israelite phenomenon quite without any ancient Near Eastern parallels; nevertheless the substance of their proclamation, the horizon and even the logic thereof, is that of the general Near Eastern view of the order of creation.[48]

An important fact to remember about the pagan cultures of the ancient world is that they "worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:25, NIV). That is what made the prophets so different. The prophets did not "follow the general knowledge of the time and criticize the people in terms of what is 'or-

---

[46] Cf., by way of contrast, Schmid's evaluation of the promise in Isaiah 40: "Second Isaiah begins with the announcement that Israel's debt has been doubly paid and that salvation is close at hand (Isa 40:1ff.). This announcement accords with the thinking about creation sketched above: once the marred order is restored through punishment (here, the exile), the world returns again to its order, it again becomes whole and healthy" ("Creation," 107; *AW*, 15).

[47] In the pagan realm, the treaty violations were committed by a vassal king against his imperial suzerain. In the OT, the covenant violations were committed by God's people against their suzerain, the Lord, whose covenant they had broken.

[48] Schmid, "Creation," 106–7; *AW*, 14–15.

der' in the sphere of interpersonal relationships" and with the created order as the ultimate and often referenced standard. Rather, as Peter wrote later, "prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1 Peter 1:21, NIV), and as Micah, for example, says, "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin" (Mic 3:8, NIV). The reason that the "deadly earnestness with which the prophets demand justice and righteousness comprise a specifically Israelite phenomenon" is that only Israel had a covenantal relationship with God that could be violated and whose violation must be punished—a relationship that required "righteousness and justice," a word pair that occurs first in the context of Abraham's covenant relationship with the Lord (cf. Gen 18:19).[49] The prophets, by the Spirit, announced those judgments in covenant lawsuits.

Consequently, the summary offered by Schmid does not do justice to the emphasis the prophets lay on covenant breaking as the reason for the Lord's judgments (cf., e.g., Deut 31:14–29; Hos 6:7; 8:1; Jer 11:10; 31:32), nor to the fact that the people's restoration would be inseparably linked to their repentance and obedience to the Lord of their covenant (Deut 30:1–10). Indeed, the curses laid down in the Mosaic covenant are shown to be fulfilled ultimately in the fall of Judah, as Jeremiah warns, and as Lamentations explains with heavy reliance on the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28.[50]

Ultimately Isaiah, in what has been called the "Isaiah Apocalypse," makes clear that the Lord brings about the undoing not only of Judah but of the whole "created order," not primarily because the people have violated that order somehow (although they have), but expressly because "The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and *broken the everlasting covenant*" (Isa 24:5, NIV, emphasis added). The earth does lie defiled but does so because those who were meant to care for it have "broken the ... covenant."[51] Had they been obedient to the covenant, they would also have been good stewards of the earth, which then would not have become defiled. In short, primacy belongs to their covenant breaking as the ground of God's judgments, not to the defiling of the created order, nor even to the violations of righteousness in interpersonal relations, although such defiling and violations damage the created order. Finally, the most serious thing about breaking the Lord's covenant—*any* of the Lord's cove-

---

[49] Cf. the references to the word pair in the prophets in n. 25.

[50] Cf. especially the devastating poem of Lamentations 5 and its relation to the covenant curses of Deuteronomy: Lam 5:4 // Deut 28:44; Lam 5:6 // Deut 28:68; Lam 5:7 // Deut 5:8 (Exod 20:5); Lam 5:8 // Deut 28:36, 43; Lam 5:10 // Deut 28:22, 32:24; Lam 5:11 // Deut 28: 30; Lam 5:12 // Deut 28:33; Lam 5:14 // Deut 28:32; Lam 5:15 // Deut 28:34, 65–67; Lam 5:16 // Deut 28:44; Lam 5:17 // Deut 28:65.

[51] The covenant in view is arguably the Noahic covenant, or the Adamic covenant along with the Noahic covenant as its renewal. Cf. Niehaus, *BT 1*, 210–13; Paul Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 65. Williamson, however, does not agree that there was an Adamic covenant but relates Isaiah 24 only to the Noahic covenant.

nants—is that one is thereby rejecting the Lord of the covenant. It is as David said: "Against you, you only, have I sinned" (Ps 51:4).

b. *Acute difference between the OT and its cultural environment.* The primary difference between what one finds in the OT (and NT) and what one finds in the ANE is, arguably, quite simple: The Bible presents revelation, whereas the ANE presents humanly developed thought. Even the human ideas of the ancient world, to the extent that they embodied some truth, were possible only because God under common grace engendered or allowed their development. [52] As James says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (Jas 1:17, NIV). So, one finds in the ANE some truths also presented in the Bible. This dimension is unfortunately—although predictably, given his higher-critical orientation—lacking in Schmid's works. Biblical eschatology may serve as the most acute example of the problem.

Because of the views noted, Schmid describes biblical eschatology not as revelation but as an idea that developed out of increasing realization that the world could not be put right by human effort, and he sees this development as analogous to magic in the ANE:

> To round off the discussion let us consider finally those parts of the OT in which we may discern *the emergence of an eschatological faith.* It has long been recognized that there is a close relation between views of creation and consummation. The salvation (*Heil*) expected at the end of history corresponds to what the entire ancient Near East considered an orderly (*heil*) world. … What the so-called messianic prophecies attributed to the King of the end time is expressed *materialiter* in what in the thought of the ancient Near East, based as it was on mythical-magical presuppositions, was expected of the reigning king. This is the new dimension in the eschatological horizon: in the course of time there was an increasingly sharpened awareness of the difference between the world of creation and that which can be realized in history. Consequently the period of salvation was postponed to an ever-receding future and eventually was expected to be the in-breaking of a completely new eon. To be sure, even this experience was not completely alien to ancient mythical thinking. For the continual attempt by means of magic to induce reality in the direction of an orderly (*heil*) world shows that one was already somewhat aware that the orderly (*heil*) world cannot be identified with the actual world.[53]

This view of the development of biblical eschatology is not new but consistent with a view of the Bible that does not accept its divine origin and God-breathed nature. Accordingly, Schmid says that Israel's eschatology and "creation faith" arose out of engagement with the ANE:

> Israel participated fully in the thought world and in the creation faith of the world of the ancient Near East and understood—and indeed could only understand—her particular experiences of history and experiences of God in this

---

[52] For discussion and also the possibility of spiritual sources of pagan thought, cf. Niehaus, *ANETBT*, 29 nn. 52, 54, 179.

[53] Schmid, "Creation," 110; *AW*, 21–22.

> horizon. As would be expected, Israel's historical experiences necessitated some modifications, but that was the case also with other cultures of the ancient Near East which likewise gave their own relatively independent expression to the common way of thinking. … From the outset Israel's experiences occurred in the context of and in vigorous engagement (*Auseinandersetzung*) with the already given sphere of the common ancient Near Eastern way of thinking, particularly creation thought.[54]

This characterization of Israel's awareness unfortunately does not do justice to (indeed it virtually ignores) the Lord's inbreaking into history and salvific purposes for Israel, which were highlighted, for example, at the outset of God's covenant renewal with them on the Plains of Moab: "Has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?" (Deut 4:34, ESV). In light of such recorded historical experience, it does not seem adequate to say that Israel "could only understand … her particular experiences of history and experiences of God" in the horizon of a creation faith analogous to what one finds in the ANE. As was observed of the prophets, who did not address Israel on the basis of a shared understanding of *Weltordnung* or a shared creation faith, but rather on the basis of the Lord's unique covenantal relationship with them and their violation of it, so here, Israel could look back to genuine divine inbreakings into history for the sake of God's covenantal purposes with them.[55] The ANE presents nothing analogous to those memorable events.[56]

    2. *Problems with the NT.* As noted earlier in this article, Schmid also summarizes his thought on the NT in relation to the created order as the definition of righteousness. As he introduces the topic he turns to the question of righteousness as it relates to faith—an issue explored at the outset of this article:

> I choose as example the justification message of Paul. There it is a question of the proper status, the proper "righteousness" of man before God. … The answer, that Paul gives, is new: the Christian does not find his righteousness—and therewith the righteousness of God—by keeping the law, but rather the

---

[54] Ibid., 111; *AW*, 21–22. He adds, "Therefore it seems to me to be of the highest significance that the order of creation in the Bible and the description of creation found in the surrounding countries are largely in agreement. What creation—that is, orderly and harmonious (*heil*) world—is, or should be, is a general human perception, to which *mutatis mutandis* the Enlightenment also came in a new way centuries later" ("Creation," 111; *AW*, 25).

[55] One could adduce many other examples, some of them very dramatic, e.g., the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18, done by the Lord so that, as Elijah says, "these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again" (1 Kgs 18:37b, NIV).

[56] It would therefore seem to understate seriously the uniqueness of Israel's revelatory and covenantal experience of God to say, as Schmid says, that "Israel's historical experiences necessitated some modifications, but that was the case also with other cultures of the ancient Near East which likewise gave their own relatively independent expression to the common way of thinking."

δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ["righteousness of God"] is revealed to him χωρὶς νόμου ["apart from law"], and he gains a share in it … διὰ πίστεως ["by faith"].[57]

One could hardly fault the orthodoxy of this statement. But behind this account of Paul's thought Schmid still has in mind faith in creation, which he sees as implicit and fundamental when it comes to faith in God. That is what he sees lying behind Paul's statement about receiving the righteousness of God: "The thought of Paul remains determined by the horizon of the old question of the harmonious world and the harmonious relationship between God and man, which places at his disposal not least of all the means for expressing his (new) answer."[58]

What does Schmid mean by this line of thought? It might be paraphrased as follows. For a person to be righteous, that person must fit into the created order in the way that people were meant to do. For the world to be righteous, it must be as harmonious and well ordered as it was at the beginning, and can only be again at the renewal of all things (from a biblical point of view).[59] In the Bible, only Christ can make these things possible. But all such matters, including the creation mediation (*Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*) of Jesus, and his teachings and Christology, are rooted in the complex of ANE creation ideas that also appeared in the OT.[60] That the theological category of apocalyptic expectations, for instance that of a new heaven and earth, is also to be mentioned in this regard is obvious (*liegt auf der Hand*).[61]

V. RESULTS

Schmid has identified six domains which expressed the idea of righteousness in the ANE. On his understanding, the ANE provides the hermeneutical key for the concept in the OT. He says:

That the Hebrew concept צדק encompasses precisely the six dimensions, kingship, wisdom, law [or "justice," translating *Recht*], nature/fruitfulness, war/victory over enemies and cult/sacrifice, is not an accident. … The great ancient oriental cultures … experience reality by and large as a unity of different aspects. … And so the result is: the Hebrew root word appears in its Canaanite background to belong to this conceptual realm of a comprehensive world order.[62]

It has been proposed in this article that all of these qualities are derivative of God or, more particularly, of his ideas. To the extent that they show up in the Bible—and in the ANE, for that matter, under common grace—they are expressions

---

[57] Schmid, *AW*, 11 (my translation).

[58] Ibid., 22–23 (my translation).

[59] Cf. Schmid, *AW*, 23: "Through human fault the divine order of the world has been violated; the urgent question is, how it can return to order" (my translation).

[60] Ibid., 24: "Numerous particulars of New Testament Christology could be added—at least to the extent that these cohere with the Old Testament-Jewish messianic expectations *derived in the end from ancient Near Eastern royal ideology*" (my translation; emphasis added).

[61] Ibid., 25.

[62] Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 65–66 (my translation).

or aspects of God's nature, and perhaps more precisely, ideas in the mind of God. We propose, however, that a subset of God's ideas, or even a subset of aspects of his nature—as those are expressed in the created order—whichever of those subsets one might consider Schmid's domains to be, does not sufficiently define biblical righteousness.

It is important to make a distinction at this point. One might object that we have in this article affirmed that righteousness, for a creature, consists in one's conformity to God's communicable attributes, which surely constitute a subset of aspects of God's nature (the other aspects being the incommunicable attributes). But the difference is this: The reference for such an affirmation is God, not the created order. In other words, one does better to explore what the Bible says about God in order to understand righteousness than to explore what the ANE and the Bible (analogously) say about *Weltordnung*.

Schmid does at times mention God as the source of *Weltordnung*, and one would, consequently, expect him to shift focus, or change his definition, and declare that God must actually be the definitive standard of biblical righteousness, since he is the source of whatever might constitute *Weltordnung*, but that is an idea that Schmid does not explore very much, because his attention is focused on *Weltordnung* as the standard.[63] If he took that step, he would say that God, and not *Weltordnung*, is the ultimate and true standard which defines the concept, צדק.[64]

If one recognizes God as the standard of righteousness, one can, arguably, recognize God's own righteousness with greater clarity. We have proposed that God's righteousness is not just his conformity to the created order—or, for that matter, his conformity to the Mosaic law/covenant, as has often been thought.[65] God's righteousness is not simply that he is "true" or faithful toward anything he has *produced*. God's righteousness is that he is true to *himself*. In this regard, God's righteousness would appear to be intimately involved in his aseity, or self-existence. In fact, one could propose that God's aseity is the profoundest expression of God's righteousness.[66]

One can also look to a man who was perfectly righteous and see what his righteousness was. The NT tells us that Jesus was "Jesus Christ the righteous" (1

---

[63] Hence the title of his book, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*. Cf. Schmid, "Creation," 114: "Only the theme of God's righteousness makes it possible to speak *coram deo* properly of the righteousness of the world, about which all of us must speak because it is the fundamental problem of our existence"; cf. *AW*, 29. Schmid does recognize that the defining domains come from the *summus deus*, and even that the creator god maintains (*erhält*) them. Speaking of the unity of the domains, or "aspects" in ANE thought, he says: "The exponent of this unity is the one creator, who has created the world, indeed the gods themselves, and who maintains the order of this world, who is most high lord. The king is, in this office, his earthly representative" (my translation; cf. *Gerechtigkeit*, 78–82, 151–54).

[64] Ibid., 184: "It may be stated as a matter of fact what the norm is, which the word stem צדק denotes: the idea of world-order." Cf. n. 17 above.

[65] Or, as has been expressed, his "faithfulness" to these entities.

[66] Because God's self-creating/recreating/refreshing is always faithful to what God was before—always *conforming to the standard* of what God was before. The idea depends on one's understanding of the divine self-naming in Exod 3:14. For more discussion of this topic than is possible here, cf. Niehaus, *BT* 2, 180–82, 224; *BT* 3, 57–62, 369–70.

John 2:1). Since Jesus's righteousness would be (at least) part of his identity, what does the NT tell us of Jesus's identity? He was God incarnate, and without sin as a man, so his righteousness would presumably pertain to God, and not to the created order. He said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9, NIV). The NT never says that Jesus conformed to the created order. Perhaps, on an understanding of righteousness as conformity to the created order, one might say that Jesus was, in the context of that order, everything that a person should be, and so he fitted into it, or even conformed to it. But to the extent that may be true, he did so not because he took the created order as his standard, but because he conformed to his Father, who was his standard: "The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (John 5:19, NIV); "These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me" (John 14:24b, NIV). Jesus fitted into the created order just the way a person should, not because he conformed to it, but because he conformed *to his Father*. If one conforms to God, one is righteous, and so one relates to the created order as one should. (The same is true of God: he is righteous, and so relates to the creation, and to his covenants, as he should.) And Jesus, who was God incarnate, set the standard for us: "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master" (Matt 10:25, NKJV).

Because Schmid locates the definition of righteousness in *Weltordnung* and believes that idea—in both the ANE and the Bible—is a humanly produced idea and has to do chiefly with setting things right in this world, he can make such a statement as the following: "In this worldwide discussion [i.e. regarding righteousness and justice in the ongoing world], the bearers of the biblical message have lifted their voices and have brought before us *their own conceptions* of how the world is to be understood as creation, that is, as related to God."[67] The present work takes a different view of the origin of the biblical message—and of the role its bearers played in conveying it (cf., e.g., 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21).

It would follow, then, from the foregoing that God himself, who is the source of all that constitutes the created order (Gen 1:31; cf. Jas 1:17), and who is himself the epitome of righteousness, would be a better candidate than the created order, or world order, for the ultimate standard by which the concept צדק should be understood. As David says,

The LORD is righteous (צדיק),
> he loves justice (צדקה);
> the upright will see his face.
> > (Ps 11:7, NIV)

One can argue—as we have argued—that Schmid's case for a definition of righteousness (צדק) as world order (or conformity to it, צדקה), suffers from the higher-critical background that conditions his attitude toward the Bible and also from an adoption of ANE thought as the hermeneutical key for understanding a concept that is actually revealed more clearly in the Bible, and, arguably, better un-

---

[67] Schmid, "Creation," 114–15 (emphasis added); *AW*, 29–30.

derstood from within the Bible. His work notes at many points that one must be careful to document ways in which the idea of righteousness in Israel moved away from the original ANE (and especially Canaanite) idea of righteousness simply as *Weltordnung* because of Israel's historically developing thought regarding God and the world.[68] This putative movement could appear ironic if one considers, contrarily, that righteousness biblically is better understood as conformity to Yahweh. God revealed, it is here proposed—in himself and his actions and covenants *in history*—the true meaning of the root צדק. As a result, Israel's understanding of righteousness could not help but differ at significant points from the common grace understanding of her neighbors.

Whatever questions may be raised concerning Schmid's approach to a definition of righteousness in the works cited, it is nonetheless true that Schmid has contributed to the investigation of righteousness in the Bible. It may be—as is here maintained—that a better and more biblical definition of righteousness can be had than the one he attained. Like all thinkers, Schmid had the benefit of what others before him had thought. But on the basis of that accumulated knowledge, supplemented by extensive investigations of his own into ANE texts, he came up with an original, albeit—on our view—incomplete definition of a cardinal biblical concept. Anyone who explores the question of biblical righteousness and seeks to arrive at a comprehensive overview of what it is, and how it should be understood, will probably be indebted to Schmid and his work.

---

[68] Cf. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit*, 173, regarding the historical changes, in Israel, of the ideas of order and righteousness: "All things considered one will have to regard both, ultimately, as a consequence of Israel's historical understanding of God and the world" (my translation).