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# Luther in Newman's "Lectures on Justification"

Scott Murray

John Henry Newman (1801-1890), the leading figure of English theological life in the nineteenth century, underwent a profound spiritual transformation in his lifetime. He began his life in the Evangelical camp of the Church of England. Then finding himself in sympathy with the High Church party, he became one of the leading lights of the Oxford Movement of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Newman concluded his life in the Church of Rome, eventually elevated to the rank of cardinal in that communion.

The work with which we will occupy ourselves in this essay, Newman's *Lectures on Justification*,<sup>1</sup> was occasioned by the publication of a book entitled *Remains* by Alexander Knox,<sup>2</sup> edited by Newman. The *Remains* included an essay "On Justification" in which Knox argued that the Church of England no longer held justification as an *usus forensis* but rather as a moral renovation. This article apparently stirred to a blaze a simmering controversy between the High Churchmen and the Evangelicals in the Church of England.

According to Alister McGrath, in *Justitia Dei* there was a tendency toward accepting "the positive role of inherent righteousness in justification, with faith being understood as a human work" in post-Restoration English theology.<sup>3</sup> This tendency was exposed by Knox's work. In response to Knox, G.S. Faber produced his *Primitive Doctrine of Justification Investigated*, in which he attempted to disprove Knox's contention that the early church fathers had held a doctrine of justification which tended toward moral renovation rather than an imputed righteousness.<sup>4</sup> Newman's lectures were a defense and expansion of Knox's work.

## *Via Media*

Newman's spiritual odyssey which ended in Rome was occasioned by the conclusions at which Newman arrived while preparing his history of Christian dogma, *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*. However, Newman's road back to Rome was one which he traveled progressively and gradually. It was in part made necessary by the conclusions he reached while preparing his *Lectures on Justification* delivered at Oxford in the year 1838, notwithstanding that he intended to

set forth a *via media* between the Roman doctrine of justification by renewal and the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith.

Newman claimed to be charting a *via media* by which he sought to merge the doctrine of justification by faith with the doctrine of justification by works. "These separate doctrines, justification by faith and justification by obedience, thus simply stated, are not at all inconsistent with one another."<sup>5</sup> In fact, for Newman, they were merely two different ways of stating the same truth: "Then what seemed at first but two modes of stating the same truth will be found, the one to be the symbol of what goes by the name of Romanism, the other of what is commonly called Protestantism."<sup>6</sup> In reality Newman charted no such course between an imaginary Scylla of Romanism and Charybdis of Protestantism. Having misunderstood Protestantism generally and Luther particularly, he grounded the ship of his theology on the shoals of the Roman Church and, upon finding himself a son of Rome in doctrine, he moved into her communion in confession and in reality in 1845.

In the advertisement to the 1874 third edition of the *Lectures* Newman, now firmly in the Church of Rome, said, "Unless the Author held in substance in 1874 what he published in 1838, he would not at this time be reprinting what he wrote as an Anglican. . ."<sup>7</sup> In substance, then, Newman's *via media* was really the position of Rome. Alister McGrath in his assessment of Newman's doctrine of justification wrote: ". . . Newman tends to direct his invective chiefly against the Protestant, rather than the Roman Catholic. . ." doctrine of justification.<sup>8</sup> Newman himself in his *Apologia pro Vita Sua* observed that "the essay on Justification [was] aimed at the Lutheran dictum that justification by faith only was the cardinal doctrine of Christianity."<sup>9</sup> Newman was taking aim primarily at the Lutheran position; thus he was not in a position of genuine mediation.

That Newman was not taking a legitimately mediating position was also the conclusion drawn by contemporary Evangelical opinion. One Evangelical critic was James Bennett, who wrote *Justification as Revealed in Scripture, in Opposition to the Council of Trent and Mr. Newman's Lectures*. Bennett saw Newman squarely in the doctrine of

Trent although with verbal variations: "If he differs (from Trent), it is merely in the mode of statement. . ." <sup>10</sup> Bennett indicated that there was in the English Evangelical party a concern that Newman's perceived drift to Rome was symptomatic of a greater movement toward Rome in the Church of England. Bennett wrote: "The shadowy difference between Mr. Newman and the Council of Trent serve at once to conceal and to promote what some have at heart, reunion with Rome." <sup>11</sup> Newman's doctrine was not received by contemporary Evangelicals as a true *via media*. Even if Newman was not positively Tridentine, his *via media* was nothing less than slanted toward the Roman position.

That these lectures should contribute to Newman's inclination toward the Church of Rome was indeed appropriate, as he had laid hold of that doctrine which was at the very heart of the issue between Rome and Protestantism, even at the very heart of Western Christianity itself. Twentieth-century theology has happily proclaimed that this is no longer an issue worthy of deep theological concern, for the biblical record has been found devoid of an overarching concern with the article of justification. But the doctrinal article of justification is far more significant than a mere word study on the *dikaiois* word group or even a purely exegetical treatment of Romans might reveal. Such a process ignores the importance of the biblical concept of justification as revealed in a plethora of rich biblical testimony, including many salvation themes. In the preface to Thomas Sheridan's book, *Newman on Justification*, Louis Bouyer astutely pointed out the importance of this study on justification for an understanding of Newman:

To be sure, a Protestant exegete like Albert Schweitzer could claim that justification was not the central point of St. Paul's theology — much less did it assume the all-embracing proportions that Protestant theology has come to attribute to it. But, if we grasp the fact that the word "justification" is merely an abstract formula to designate the answer to the rich young man in the Gospel: "What must I do to be saved?", then it must be admitted that the person for whom this question no longer has meaning is by that very fact incapable of any further understanding of the Gospel. That is why the question of justification occupies such an important place in the work

of Newman. In fact, his *Lectures on Justification* are scarcely less important a milestone in his career than the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.<sup>12</sup>

Such was the case for Luther; it was the turning point in his life and catalyst to his reforming bent when he discovered the gospel. Doctrinally and practically this article of justification was at the hub of Luther's system of thought and his practice of life. For Luther the article of justification was the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*.

McGrath correctly divined the issue, contending that Newman had not properly understood either Rome or Luther. Thus the course charted by Newman, navigating as he was between these two beacons, was charted between two chimeras. Newman had navigated into a sea of theological discourse led by his own mistaken suppositions about the issues at hand. McGrath pointed out that Newman's attempt at mediation failed because he did not correctly understand the competing theologies. Newman had studied the major representatives of the opposing religious camps. He subjected to historical analysis the theology of Luther and the Lutherans Melancthon and Gerhard, the Roman Catholic theologians Bellarmine and Vasquez, and also the Caroline Divines Barlow, Taylor, and Barrow.<sup>13</sup> In his attempt to chart a mediating course among these tendencies it was imperative for Newman to understand correctly the position of each. Newman failed to do that, failing most miserably in his attempt to understand and analyze correctly the doctrine of Luther and the Lutherans. McGrath concluded: "In other words, Newman's construction of a *via media* appears to rest on a fallacious interpretation of both the extremes to which he was opposed . . ." <sup>14</sup> Newman himself seemed to have had at least an inkling of self-doubt about the validity of his treatise, saying that, towards the end, the *Lectures* were a "tentative inquiry."<sup>15</sup> That he did not reveal a genuine *via media* in this inquiry there is no doubt, but why did Newman fail to appreciate Luther properly?

#### Sources

Newman was almost certainly not using primary sources in his study of Luther. The only works of Luther from which Newman quoted in the printed edition of his *Lectures* were Luther's 1535 commentary on Galatians and his *Tractatus de*

*Libertate Christiana* of 1520. While these were indeed representative of Luther's doctrine, they did not treat the subject of justification in an exhaustively systematic way.

Newman probably did not have access to a high-quality edition of Luther's works, simply because of their dearth in the early nineteenth century. The Erlangen edition of Luther's works, the first of the nineteenth-century editions, was not completed until 1857. This edition was inspired by a revival in Luther studies around the three-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran reformation in 1817. The three previous editions, the Altenberg (1661-1702), the Leipzig (1729—1740), and the Halle (1740-1753), had all the Latin works translated into German. Newman quoted exclusively from Latin sources. Of course, there were some monograph editions of Luther's most important works printed apart from the collected editions. It is likely that the commentary on Galatians from 1535 and the *Tractatus de Libertate Christiana* would be among such publications. However, it seems most likely that Newman did not have Luther's writings at his fingertips but used secondary sources, most likely of a polemical nature.

McGrath opined: "It seems to us that Newman did not read Luther at first hand."<sup>16</sup> The evidence for this statement is based on Newman's use of Luther's statement about "believing deeds" in his commentary on Galatians 3:10:

"It is usual with us", he says, "to view faith, sometimes apart from its work, sometimes with it. For as an artist speaks variously of his materials, and a gardener of a tree, as in bearing or not, so also the Holy Ghost speaks variously in Scripture concerning faith; at one time of what may be called abstract faith, faith as such: at another of concrete faith, faith in composition, or embodied. Faith as such, or abstract, is meant when Scripture speaks of justification, as such, or of the justified (*vid.* Rom. and Gal.). But when it speaks of rewards and works, then it speaks of faith in composition, concrete or embodied. For instance, 'Faith which worketh by love'; 'This do and thou shalt live'; 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments'; 'whoso doeth these things, shall live by them'; 'Cease to do evil, learn to do well.' In these and similar texts, which occur without number, in which mention is made of doing, believing

doings are always meant; as, when it says, 'This do, and thou shalt live', it means, 'First, see that thou art believing, that thy reason is right and thy will good, that thou hast faith in Christ; that being secured, work'." Then he proceeds: "How is it wonderful that to that embodied faith, that is, faith working, as was Abel's, in other words, to believing works, are annexed merits and rewards? Why should not Scripture speak thus variously of faith, considering it speaks so of Christ, God and man; sometimes of His entire person, sometimes of one or other of His two natures, the divine or human? When it speaks of one or the other of these, it speaks of Christ in the abstract; when of the divine made one with the human in the one person, of Christ as if in composition and incarnate. There is a well-known rule in the schools concerning the '*communicatio idiomatum*', when the attributes of His divinity are ascribed to His humanity, as is frequent in Scripture; for instance, in Luke ii, the Angel calls the infant born of the Virgin Mary, 'the Savior' of men, and 'the Lord' both of angels and men, and in the preceding chapter 'the Son of God'. Hence I may say with literal truth, the infant who is lying in a manger and in the Virgin's bosom created heaven and earth and is the Lord of Angels. . . As it is truly said, Jesus the Son of Mary created all things, so is justification ascribed to faith incarnate or believing deeds."<sup>17</sup>

At first blush, this passage from Luther buttressed Newman's position on the relationship between justification and renewal. McGrath pointed out:

. . . the final sentence appears to state unequivocally the principle of justification by 'believing deeds' — an excellent description of the teaching of both Newman and the later Caroline Divines.<sup>18</sup>

This analogical argument clearly teaches that, in the same way in which divine deeds are attributed to the whole person of Christ and human deeds are attributed to the whole person of Christ, so justification may be attributed to works. "The essential point which Newman wishes us to grasp is that even Luther is obligated to concede a positive role for works in justification."<sup>19</sup>

Upon searching out the passage which Newman quoted, however, it is found that Newman or his source excised a most significant portion of Luther's lecture notes. The final sentence of this section is preceded by four periods which would indicate that some irrelevant or insignificant material has been left out for the sake of brevity. Newman omitted an entire section "which so qualifies the final sentence as to exclude Newman's interpretation of it."<sup>20</sup> According to the American Edition of *Luther's Works* this missing section reads:

I am indeed speaking about a man here. But "man" in this proposition is obviously a new word and, as the sophists themselves say, stands for divinity; that is, this God who became man created all things. Here creation is attributed solely to the divinity, since the humanity did not create. Nevertheless, it is said correctly that "the man created," because the divinity, which alone creates, is incarnate with the humanity, and therefore the humanity participates in the attributes of both predicates. Thus it is said: "The man Jesus led Israel out of Egypt, struck down Pharaoh, and did all the things that belong to God." Here everything is being attributed to the man on account of the divinity.

Therefore when Scripture says (Dan. 4:27), "Redeem your sins by showing mercy," or (Luke 10:28) "Do this, and you will live," it is necessary to see first of all what this "doing" is. For in these passages, as I have said, Scripture is speaking about faith in the concrete rather than in the abstract, in a composite sense rather than in a bare or simple sense. Therefore the meaning of the passage, "Do this and you will live," is "You will live on account of this faithful 'doing' [*propter hoc facere fidele*]; this 'doing' will give you life solely on account of faith." Thus justification belongs to faith alone, just as creation belongs to the divinity; nevertheless, just as it is true to say about Christ the man that He created all things, so justification is attributed to incarnate faith or to faithful "doing." Therefore one must not think, as the sophists and hypocrites usually do, that works justify absolutely and simply as such, and that merits and rewards are promised to moral works rather than solely to works done in faith [*quodque moralibus operibus promittantur merita et praemia, sed fidelibus*].<sup>21</sup>



This statement of Luther, when taken in context, provided a conclusion opposite to that presumed by Newman. McGrath pointed out that, for Luther,

scriptural passages which indicate the necessary implication of works in salvation are to be understood primarily and fundamentally as an assertion of the necessity of *faith*. The statement, 'Jesus the Son of Mary created all things,' is a statement that God alone is creator, just as the statement, 'Justification is ascribed to. . .believing deeds,' remains a statement that faith alone justifies.<sup>22</sup>

Given this surgically changed quotation, we are faced with two possible explanations. First, Newman deliberately left out the essential section. This idea does not fit the evidence. It was Newman's habit to be studiously correct in the quotation of sources. Yet elsewhere Newman incorrectly quotes Luther. McGrath pointed out:

[Newman] cites Luther's 'paradox of justification' as follows: *sola fides, non fides formata charitate, justificat: fides justificat sine et ante charitatem*.<sup>23</sup> The closest approximation to this we have been able to find is *sola fide, non fide formata charitate, justificat . . . haec fides sine et ante charitatem justificat*.<sup>24</sup>

Thus we conclude that Newman was working from flawed secondary sources. One can only wish that Newman had made the proper attributions.

Newman's familiarity with Melanchthon must also have been second-hand. In a footnote Newman recorded this quotation:

When it is said that we are justified by faith, nothing else is meant than that we receive forgiveness of sins and we are accounted righteous. . .Therefore the proposition 'by faith we are just' is understood correlatively, that is, we are justified or accepted by grace on account of the Son of God.<sup>25</sup>

Three paragraphs down the page from this quotation in his *Loci Communes* Melanchthon actually called faith a virtue. "Estque fides virtus apprehendens et applicans promissiones. . ."<sup>26</sup> Newman could not have read this entire section of

the *Loci Communes* and passed by this statement of Melanchthon's without having quoted it and used it to support his supposition that faith is a virtue.

Newman quoted John Gerhard's *Loci Theologici* more frequently than he quoted Luther or Melanchthon and on at least one occasion quoted Luther from the *Loci*, this time with the correct attribution. Gerhard (1582-1637) was the primary Lutheran controversialist of the seventeenth century, responding primarily to the Jesuit cardinal, Robert Bellarmine. Because of his importance and because Gerhard attempted to answer Bellarmine in his *Loci*, quotations of Gerhard have been manifold in the works of Roman controversialists. Newman may have had access to these quotations through such sources. In any case, Newman betrayed a genuine lack of understanding of the position of Luther and later Lutherans, no doubt to a great degree because he had not read the primary resources.

#### *Faith as an Inhering Quality*

Newman consistently understood the New Testament terms dealing with justification, *dikaios* and its cognates, as referring to an inhering righteousness rather than as juridical terms having to do with declaratory righteousness.<sup>27</sup> Newman simply assumed that justification was a moral quality and therefore had to be inhering in the individual to be attributed to the individual. He treated justification and sanctification as part, property, or quality of one gift inhering in the individual, the other part or property of which was love, justification and love being symbols of each other. "Faith, which is the symbol of the one, contains in it Love or Charity, which is the symbol of the other."<sup>28</sup> For Newman justification could not be an attitude in God. Newman conceived of faith as a human work, the quality of which merited justification. His criticism of Luther was based on the supposition that faith was a human work like any other. McGrath writes:

His criticism of Luther for his insistence upon the fiduciary aspects of faith, while neglecting hope, love and obedience, reflects his basic conviction that Luther singled out the *human activity of trust in God* as the defining characteristic of justifying faith.<sup>29</sup>

Newman cannot have been aware of the Lutheran confessional witness to the Lutheran doctrine of passivity in

justifying faith. The Formula of Concord (1577) quoted Luther's statement that faith is *pure passive* in conversion, thereby elevating it to confessional standing:

So also when Luther says that with respect to his conversion man is *pure passive* (purely passive), that is, does nothing whatever towards it, but only suffers what God works in him, his meaning is not that conversion takes place without the preaching and hearing of God's Word; nor is this his meaning, that in conversion no new emotion whatever is awakened in us by the Holy Ghost and no spiritual operation is begun; but he means that man by himself, or from his natural powers, cannot do anything or help towards his conversion, and that conversion is not only in part, but altogether an operation, gift, and present of the Holy Ghost alone, who accomplishes and effects it by His power and might, through the Word, in the intellect, will, and heart of man, *tamquam in subjecto patiente*, that is, while man does or works nothing, but only suffers; not as a figure cut into stone or a seal impressed into wax, which knows nothing of it, neither perceives and wills this, but in the way which has been recounted and explained a short while ago.<sup>30</sup>

Luther took the passivity of faith correlatively to rule out all synergism in the article of justification. Gerhard had likewise defended this teaching of Luther:

Luther did not teach that conversion is brought about without the reflection of the mind and agreement of the will, but he denied that the will concurs with these activities of its own natural powers; that is to say, he denied that in the mind and will there remained any working power which could reach out when grace was offered and for that reason co-operate with the Holy Spirit. And the analogy of the clay in the hand of the potter—which he uses—must not be pressed beyond its point of application.<sup>31</sup>

Despite his ignorance of the position of the Formula of Concord, Newman was aware of Luther's teaching through a letter which Luther wrote to John Brenz, quoted by Gerhard in his *Loci*:

So as to take better hold of this teaching, I am accustomed to think of myself as if there would not be in my heart a quality, which is called faith or charity. Instead in their place I put Christ Himself. I say, "This is my justification; that Christ Himself is, as they say, both formally and qualitatively, my justification so that I am free from the ruination of the law and works."<sup>32</sup>

Newman incorrectly assumed a division between Melancthon and Luther on the nature of the instrumentality of faith. Melancthon described justification by faith in this way:

When it is said that we are justified by faith nothing else is meant than that we receive forgiveness of sins and we are accounted righteous. . . Therefore the proposition 'by faith we are just' is understood correlatively, that is, we are justified or accepted by grace on account of the Son of God.<sup>33</sup>

But for Luther and Melancthon this correlative relationship between faith and God's mercy was merely a way of speaking of faith and its object. Again if faith is not understood as an inhering virtue, but as *pure passive* apprehending the merit of Christ, there is no division between Luther and Melancthon. But Newman was absolutely committed to the concept of faith being an inhering virtue, the power of which was to justify. This was a fatal misunderstanding of the doctrine of Luther and the Lutheran church. Eduard Preuss, reflecting his prodigious knowledge of Lutheran doctrine, denied that faith was a virtue in the sense of a power which merits God's mercy. "Ancient and modern errorists have concluded. . . that God regards us righteous on account of the excellent qualities of our faith."<sup>34</sup> It seemed that what little Newman knew of Luther's doctrine he had discerned from the Caroline Divines. Newman understood Luther as having taught that faith was an action, one work among many.

Newman assumed that, since righteousness was given as a gift, it was given as "a definite power or virtue committed to us."<sup>35</sup> But when Scripture speaks of justifying faith as a gift it indicates the free nature of the thing imparted, not its inhering character. A gift is freely given. A gift need not necessarily be an inhering quality. A sweater may be given as a Christmas gift and yet it is worn externally. A gift is

something given freely; it is not part of the definition of a gift that it be a definite power or virtue. McGrath speculated that, if Newman had actually studied Luther rather than a caricature, he might have been more congenial to Luther's position. This idea seems doubtful in view of Newman's insistent attacks on Luther's doctrine that Christ is the content and sole object of faith.

### *Faith as Trust*

Newman's understanding of faith as an inhering, meritorious work led him to reject faith as trust. Newman set forth his definition of the Lutheran doctrine of faith in this way:

Faith, an act or motion of the mind produced, indeed, by Divine Grace, but still utterly worthless, applies to the soul the merits of Him on whom it looks, gaining at the same time His sanctifying aid, and developing in good works; which works are the only evidence we can have of its being true. It justifies then, not as being lively or fruitful, though this is an inseparable property of it, but as *apprehending* Christ, which is its essence.<sup>36</sup>

Newman was psychologizing in the matter of justifying faith. Newman thought that the Lutherans emphasized the apprehending nature of faith as its essence, when in reality the quality of faith was always its object for the Lutherans. For Newman the *principium cognoscendi* is the *cognitum* [the thing known]. This *principium* put him at odds with the mild realism of orthodox Lutheranism and Luther, especially in the area of doctrinal verities. For Luther, the only adequate description of psychological sensations was to be found in the scriptural record of faith, no more, no less. If this was at odds with what was felt, so be it. Newman treated the nature of justifying faith psychologically. Such speculation about the inner feelings connected with justification was for Luther hardly an adequate touchstone for this Christian teaching. In fact, such a treatment was alien to the whole Lutheran dogmatic tradition. Luther's own pastoral heart motivated him to point the repentant soul away from seeking the counterfeit assurance of inner experience. Instead Luther pointed the individual outside himself to the reality of Christ's work:

The absolved should make every effort to keep himself from doubting that his sins are remitted by God, and he should be quiet at heart. . . But he who seeks peace in a different way—for instance, through an inner experience—certainly seems to tempt God and seek peace in things (*in re*), not in faith.<sup>37</sup>

Here Luther was conceiving of faith in view of its justifying object, external to man, Christ. In the last analysis there could be nothing in man, whether faith, hope, or love, that could make man acceptable to the Almighty God. Only God's own Son could accomplish such a goal.

Finding himself squarely in Rome's camp, Newman accepted the Roman position that faith's form was love (*fides formata charitate*):

He [Christ] is *spiritually* present in it [faith]; and if He is present, His merits are present in it, and are in this way conveyed to the soul which exercises it. In this sense Luther seems to speak as if Christ were the *forma fidei*, or that which makes faith what it is, justifying. . . On the other hand, his opponents, whether of the Roman or Anglican school, are accustomed to urge that the thought of Christ may be possessed by those who have not Christ, and therefore that it is in no sense the form or characteristic principle of justifying faith; rather that love, as I noticed above, is the true form. . .<sup>38</sup>

Newman was not really charting a course between Lutheranism and Romanism. He had his feet firmly implanted in the church of Rome. By making love the form of faith he attributes to the work of love the power of justification. He makes man's apprehension of the righteousness of Christ active and thus meritorious. This is clearly the Pelagian or semi-Pelagian position of the Roman church, not some mediating position.

#### *Faith and Works*

Newman not only presumed that Luther's teaching of justification by faith resulted in the necessary counterpart of the denial of the binding necessity of doing good works according to the moral law; he actually charged that Luther taught so. "He taught that the Moral Law is not binding on the conscience of the Christian. . ." <sup>39</sup> In so doing Newman absolutely misunderstood Luther, as any student of Luther's

catechism knows. Luther directly and clearly contended for the “activeness of faith.” He never forbade good works and specifically enjoined the necessity of good works for Christians. Having understood him in that way, the Formula of Concord quoted Luther:

Thus faith is a divine work in us, that changes us, and regenerates us of God, and puts to death the old Adam, makes us entirely different men in heart, spirit, mind, and all powers, and brings with it [confers] the Holy Ghost. Oh, it is a living, busy, active, powerful thing that we have in faith, so that it is impossible for it not to do good without ceasing. Nor does it ask whether good works are to be done; but before the question is asked, it has wrought them, and is always engaged in doing them. But he who does not do such works is void of faith, and gropes and looks about after faith and good works, and knows neither what faith nor what good works are, yet babbles and prates with many words concerning faith and good works. [Justifying] faith is a living bold [firm] trust in God’s grace, so certain that a man would die a thousand times for it [rather than suffer this trust to be wrested from him]. And this trust and knowledge of divine grace renders joyful, fearless, and cheerful towards God and all creatures, which [joy and cheerfulness] the Holy Ghost works through faith; and on account of this, man becomes ready and cheerful, without coercion, to do good to every one, to serve every one, and to suffer everything for love and praise to God, who has conferred this grace on him, so that it is impossible to separate works from faith, yea, just as impossible as it is for heat and light to be separated from fire.<sup>40</sup>

As was said before, Newman’s knowledge of Luther was evidently restricted to the Galatians commentary and the *Liberty of the Christian Man*. Newman’s familiarity with Gerhard’s *Loci* appears to have been confined to *Locus Decimus Sextus: De Justificatione per Fidem*. Obedience to the law was absolutely necessary for Gerhard and all theologians who reflected the theology of the Formula of Concord:

We believe, teach, and confess also that all men, but those especially who are born again and renewed by the Holy Ghost, are bound to do good works. In this sense the words

*necessary, shall, and must* are employed correctly and in a Christian manner also with respect to the regenerate, and in no way are contrary to the form of sound words and speech.<sup>41</sup>

Newman did not grasp the Lutheran distinction between good works properly speaking and mere civil righteousness; he actually contended that everyone who does good works may be understood as having faith. ". . .since no good works can be done but through the grace of God, those works are but evidence that grace is with the doer; so that to view them as sharing in our justification tends to elate us, neither more nor less than the knowledge that we are under divine influences is elating."<sup>42</sup> Luther had always emphasized the importance of good works. But he always strove to distinguish spiritual works from the works of hypocrites. Works alone could never identify a Christian. Newman's criticism of Luther's so-called antinomianism revealed Newman's misunderstanding of Luther and clearly showed Newman a disciple of the most radical Roman Catholic critics of Luther's teaching on the law and its spiritual character. In fact, the defense of the doctrine of good works was uppermost in the minds of the Lutheran confessors at the Diet of Augsburg (1530). In Article 20 of the Augsburg Confession the Lutherans contended that the evangelical preachers now taught properly about good works, reciting the works specifically enjoined upon evangelical Christians by the Lutheran preachers.<sup>43</sup> Neither Luther nor the Lutherans ever forbade good works; they diligently enjoined them on all, especially on Christians.

#### *Imputation*

Newman could not accept the doctrine of justification by imputation. This teaching seemed to him to attribute a lie to God. How could a man be considered righteous by a mere outward declaration? This declaration would be merely a pious fiction. Thus Newman contended:

Man did not become guilty except by becoming sinful; he does not become innocent except by becoming holy. God cannot, from His very nature, look with pleasure and favour upon an unholy creature, or justify or count righteous one who is not righteous.<sup>44</sup>



Newman failed to take into account the biblical teaching that sin itself is, in fact, imputed in the case of original sin, a teaching asserted by both Luther and the Roman Catholics. Luther taught that, if God had in fact said (in justification) that man was to be counted righteous, it had to be so by virtue of the power of God's word. For, by virtue of His very nature, what God says is so must be so. However, Newman consistently emasculated the imputative nature of justification not only by making it an inner virtue, but also by attributing to works its concurrent cause:

. . . [that] there has been a co-operation on our part, has proved a reason, over and above those already mentioned, why justification has been said to consist in our services, not in God's imputation; those services forming a concurrent cause of that imputation being ratified.<sup>45</sup>

Newman contended that the primary sense of the term "justification" included making righteous, albeit after conversion.<sup>46</sup> Newman said that justification could only be completely forensic in the case of past sins, but in the case of a human's present spiritual condition justification must be a making righteous. For a man must cooperate with God in his conversion and thus must have the inhering qualities of faith, which are for Newman part of justification.<sup>47</sup> Newman generated some sophistical juggling to support his position:

In exact propriety of language, justification is *counting* righteous, not *making*. I would explain myself thus: to justify *means* counting righteous, but includes *under* its meaning making righteous; in other words, the sense of the *term* is counting and the sense of the *thing* denoted by it is making righteous.<sup>48</sup>

This definition is a contradiction. If justification is not making righteous "in exact propriety of language," how can it include making righteous "under its meaning"? Bennett, who at points had understood Luther no better than Newman, criticized Newman's imprecise definition of justification. To declare that "to justify" means "to count righteous," but also includes under its meaning "to make righteous," both contradicted the Scriptures and ultimately was self-contradictory. Bennett complained: "How any word can *include* anything *under* itself, we cannot understand, much less how it can include under itself what was admitted to be *not* its meaning. . ."<sup>49</sup>

Newman's understanding of justification as imputation only for the moment of conversion was at odds with the Lutheran position. The Lutheran position was ably set forth by Eduard Preuss in his *Justification of the Sinner before God*. Preuss conceived of justification as "perpetual forgiveness." He adduced Luther:

"Therefore it is the same righteousness which is given unto men in baptism and at all times in true repentance" [St. Louis, X, 1264]. And in another place: "Since sin eternally inheres in our flesh as long as we live on this earth, and since we never cease to sin and err, we must verily also have an eternal and perpetual forgiveness" [St. Louis, V, 1094]. On this topic Martin Chemnitz wrote in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*: "For God does not only once in this life, namely when we are baptized, offer, communicate, and apply the benefit of justification to us." Again: "The papists limit justification to a single moment, when a sinner is at first made righteous. It is obvious that this opinion is in direct conflict with the Holy Scriptures; for when they teach that we become righteous by grace, for Christ's sake, without works, they are not only speaking of the first conversion. The justification which the Scriptures teach is not a justification which takes place and then is done."<sup>50</sup>

The Lutheran tradition of the first two centuries is monolithic on this point. For example, Gerhard states: "Just as remission of sins is renewed daily, so also is our justification, and so faith is not just at the beginning, but daily is imputed to the believer for righteousness."<sup>51</sup> Thus Preuss writes:

So, then, the fact remains that justification continues throughout the believer's entire life, that the merit of Christ is at all times imputed unto him, that all sins, also those which he does not expressly know, Ps. 19, 12, are forgiven and all treasures of salvation perpetually conveyed to him, and that therefore he is perpetually prepared to die a blessed death. . . F.H.R. Frank, in his *Die Theologie der Konkordienformel*, speaks in the same strain: "The consciousness of the believer comforts itself with the knowledge that he obtained, and continuously obtains, his full and complete justification in Him who of God is made unto him Righteousness. 1 Cor. 1,30." All

these men, and with them many others, clearly confess God's perpetual forgiveness.<sup>52</sup>

For the Lutherans justification was not only an imputation, but a perpetual imputation.

### *Baptism*

Newman attributed to Luther the understanding of English Evangelicalism as to the doctrine of baptism and its relationship to faith:

And now perhaps enough has been said in explanation of a theology familiar to all ears present, which differs from our own in these two main points among others;— in considering that Faith and not Baptism is the primary instrument of justification, and that this Faith which justifies exercises its gift without the exercise or even the presence of love.<sup>53</sup>

Newman had attributed to Luther the anti-sacramental attitude of the English reformation when he assumed that Luther taught that baptism was merely a sign of justification, not its cause. Newman's contemporary Evangelical critic, James Bennett, made clear the Zwinglian tendency in English Evangelicalism as touching the means of grace. Of Titus 3:5-7 he wrote: "This text is assumed to be proof of Baptismal Regeneration, and thus of Baptismal Justification too; but they alone can find baptism here, that have brought it with them to the text, which certainly does not mention baptism."<sup>54</sup> Bennett placed the sacramental means of grace into the category of a work, denying the necessity of the means of grace. Luther most definitely taught the justifying power of baptism as water connected with the word: "It works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare."<sup>55</sup> Of course, for Luther, "forgiveness of sins" was nothing other than justification itself.

Luther himself had a high theology of the sacraments, as twentieth-century Luther studies have shown. In the Large Catechism Luther certainly taught that baptism is the cause of faith and therefore a divine instrument in the justification of the individual. In fact, he identified the doctrine which Newman attributes to him as the theology of the "would-be wise":

But as our would-be wise, new spirits assert that faith alone saves, and that works and external things avail nothing, we answer: It is true, indeed, that nothing in us is of any avail but faith, as we shall hear still further. But these blind guides are unwilling to see this, namely, that faith must have something which it believes, that is, of which it takes hold, and upon which it rests. Thus faith clings to the water, and believes that it is Baptism, in which there is pure salvation and life; not through the water (as we have sufficiently stated), but through the fact that it is embodied in the Word and institution of God, and the name of God inheres in it. Now, if I believe this, what else is it than believing in God as in Him who has given and planted His Word into this ordinance, and proposes to us this external thing wherein we may apprehend such a treasure?<sup>56</sup>

For Luther baptism produces the faith it solicits.

*The Indwelling of the Trinity*

For Newman the primary meaning of the term justification was the presence of the Trinity within the person of the believer:

Lastly, we now may see what the connection really is between justification and renewal. They are both included in that one great gift of God, the indwelling of Christ in the Christian soul. That indwelling is *ipso facto* our justification and sanctification, as its necessary results. It is the Divine Presence that justifies us, not faith, as say the Protestant schools, not renewal, as say the Roman. The word of justification is the substantive living Word of God, entering the soul, illuminating and cleansing it, as fire brightens and purifies material substances. He who justifies also sanctifies, because it is He. The first blessing runs into the second as its necessary limit; and the second being rejected, carries away with it the first. And the one cannot be separated from the other except in idea, unless the sun's rays can be separated from the sun, or the power of purifying from fire or water.<sup>57</sup>

Newman had again attributed a teaching to Protestantism which may have been current in the Reformed circles of nineteenth-century England but which was not the doctrine of

Luther or the Lutheran church. For Lutheranism the indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity was a result of justification. The Formula of Concord rejected the statement "that faith looks not only to the obedience of Christ, but to His divine nature, as it dwells and works in us, and that by this indwelling our sins are covered."<sup>58</sup> The Lutherans never rejected the indwelling of God, just the idea that this indwelling of God was the essential meaning and content of the article of justification:

Likewise also the disputation concerning the indwelling in us of the essential righteousness of God must be correctly explained. For although in the elect, who are justified by Christ and reconciled with God, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is the eternal and essential righteousness, dwells by faith. . . yet this indwelling of God is not the righteousness of faith of which St. Paul treats and which he calls *justitiam Dei*, that is, the righteousness of God, for the sake of which we are declared righteous before God; but it follows the preceding righteousness of faith, which is nothing else than the forgiveness of sins and the gracious adoption of the poor sinner, for the sake of Christ's obedience and merit alone.<sup>59</sup>

Thus Newman had again misunderstood the position of the Lutheran church.

### *Conclusion*

Given Newman's lack of primary sources, it is no wonder that his view of Luther and Lutheran theology was so flawed. However, even if Newman had had access to Luther's works, he still would not have been capable of charting a genuine *via media*. He had already conceptually placed himself in the Church of Rome, despite his seeming addition of the concept of the indwelling of the Trinity. This concept did not clearly enough distinguish his position from the mainstream of Roman Catholic doctrine. This Newman admitted later in his life. According to Newman's presuppositions, his move into the Church of Rome was a genuine move on his part; it was not a self-serving or equivocal conversion as some of Newman's opponents charged. But it did make it impossible, given the state of Luther studies in Newman's England, for him to have read Luther in a sympathetic way. Even those like Bennett,

who considered themselves the genuine heirs of Luther's reformation, did not correctly grasp the doctrine of the reformer. Newman's native theological insight caused him to struggle with the article of justification as the *crux theologorum*. He knew that it was a pivotal issue, one which presents itself to every generation.

#### ENDNOTES

1. John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification*, third edition (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1900).
2. Alexander Knox, *Remains*, ed. John Henry Newman (London, 1836-37).
3. Alistair E. McGrath, *Justitia Dei* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), II, p. 121.
4. McGrath, II, p. 233. Faber also contended that Knox's personal view of justification was Tridentine, rather than Anglican. The Lutheran treatment of this question has varied. Martin Chemnitz in his enormous works surely attempted to show an adherence of the fathers to the article of justification as conceived by Luther. More recent followers of the German reformer are far more sober in their assessment of the doctrine of the fathers; cf. Theodore Dierks, *Reconciliation and Justification* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938).
5. *Lectures*, p. 1.
6. *Lectures*, p. 1.
7. *Lectures*, p. ix.
8. McGrath, II, p. 123.
9. John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (London, 1964), p. 86.
10. James Bennett, *Justification as Revealed in Scripture, in Opposition to the Council of Trent and Mr. Newman's Lectures* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Company, 1860).
11. Bennett, p. xii. How much of this was concern about doctrinal issues and how much was purely xenophobia is a question for another paper.
12. Louis Bouyer, quoted in the preface to Thomas Sheridan, *Newman on Justification* (New York, 1967), p. 11.

13. McGrath, II, pp. 105ff., documented the devolution of the Anglican divines' doctrine of justification in the post-Restoration period. Newman was deeply affected by the doctrine of justification represented by later divines, restricting his sample "to the 'holy living' divines, to the total exclusion of several earlier generations of Anglican divines — men such as Andrews, Beveridge, Davenant, Downham, Hooker, Jewel, Reynolds, Ussher, and Whittaker."
14. McGrath, II, p. 122.
15. *Apologia*, p. 86.
16. McGrath, II, p. 127.
17. *Lectures*, pp. 300-301.
18. McGrath, II, p. 128.
19. McGrath, II, p. 128.
20. McGrath, II, p. 128.
21. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 26, pp. 265-266.
22. McGrath II, p. 129.
23. *Lectures*, p. 129.
24. Martin Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, 1883; hereafter cited as *WA*), 40 I, p. 229, quoted in McGrath, II, p. 129.
25. Philip Melanchthon, quoted in Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici* (Frankfurt and Wittenberg, 1690) II, p. 240.
26. Melanchthon, quoted in Chemnitz, *Loci*, II, p. 241.
27. *Lectures*, p. 47. For "justification" *usu forensi*, cf. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, II, pp. 215-216 et passim.
28. *Lectures*, p. 63.
29. McGrath, II, p. 126.
30. F. Bente and W.H.C. Dau, eds., *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II: 89.
31. John Gerhard, *Loci Theologici* (Berlin, 1865), locus XII, caput VI, sectio VI, par. 81, quoted in Robert D. Preus, "The Significance of Luther's Term *Pure Passive*," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, August 1958, pp. 567-568.

32. Gerhard, *Loci*, III, p. 163, quoted in *Lectures*, p. 12.
33. Melancthon, quoted in Gerhard, *Loci*, p. 240.
34. Eduard Preuss, *Die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung* (1868), p. 19.
35. *Lectures*, p. 140.
36. *Lectures*, p. 16.
37. *WA*, 1, p. 540.
38. *Lectures*, pp. 20-21.
39. *Lectures*, p. 24.
40. *FC*, *SD*, IV:10-12.
41. *FC*, *Epitome*, IV:8-9.
42. *Lectures*, pp. 24-25. Here Newman certainly anticipates Karl Rahner, who, contrary to what conservative Roman critics think, has drawn the most logical conclusion from Rome's Pelagianism by attributing anonymous Christianity to those who are not Christians.
43. *AC*, XX:1-6.
44. *Lectures*, p. 83.
45. *Lectures*, p. 92.
46. Interestingly, later in the nineteenth century all leading continental and American Protestant theologians were known to have, in fact, given up the strictly juridical doctrine of justification by faith. Johann von Doellinger had made mention of it in his lectures on the reunion of the Christian church (quoted in *Lehre und Wehre*, 1872, p. 352). Franz Pieper pointed out in his *Christliche Dogmatik* that the modern theology of his day had rejected "the *satisfactio vicaria* as too legalistic and juridical; it teaches that grace is offered not only by the Word of the Gospel, but through the appearing of the 'historical Christ'; it holds that conversion is effected through man's 'self-determination' (synergism); it maintains that faith justifies as an ethical act, or as the germ of renewal, or as the means of ingrafting into the new humanity." Pieper was firmly convinced that these accommodations were nothing but a capitulation to the doctrine of the Roman Church as most clearly represented by Ritschl's *Justification and Reconciliation*. "Thereby modern Protestant theology has taken its place in the camp of the Romanists and the 'enthusiasts' as is also evident from the fact that it repeats their slander of the Christian doctrine of justification, namely, that this doctrine, being too 'juridical' and



'intellectualistic,' interferes with sanctification." For Pieper the crux was still at the *principium cognoscendi*. "But it is a fact that modern Protestant theology, which by the denial of inspiration has surrendered the Scripture principle and develops doctrine from 'experience' and other subjective sources, has discarded the Christian doctrine of justification." Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), pp. 555-557.

47. *Lectures*, p. 63.
48. *Lectures*, p. 65.
49. Bennett, pp. 10-11.
50. Preuss, pp. 87-88.
51. Gerhard, *Loci*, III, p. 396.
52. Preuss, pp. 87-88.
53. *Lectures*, p. 29.
54. Bennett, p. 212.
55. SC, IV:6.
56. LC, IV:28-29.
57. *Lectures*, p. 154.
58. FC, Epitome, III:16.
59. FC, SD, III:54.