The twentieth century has seen the recognition of the importance of John Henry Newman’s 1837 *Lectures on Justification*, both in relation to the emerging theology of the Oxford Movement, and also as an independent statement of a catholic doctrine of justification.¹ In these *Lectures*, Newman defined what he took to be a *via media* understanding of justification, which allowed an authentically Anglican concept of justification to be maintained and defended in the face of the distortions of both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. In the present study, we wish to draw attention to a disturbing feature of Newman’s work, which does not appear to have been fully appreciated. Newman’s theology of justification, which he understands to constitute the *via media*, rests upon an historical analysis of the doctrines of justification associated with Luther (and, to a lesser extent, with Melanchthon and Calvin), with Roman Catholic writers such as Bellarmine and Vasquez, and with the Caroline divines; and in every case, particularly that of Luther, Newman’s analysis can be shown to be seriously in error. In other words, Newman’s construction of the *via media* rests upon a fallacious interpretation of both the ‘extremes’ to which he was opposed, as well as the Anglican divinity of the seventeenth century which he regarded as a prototype of his own position. In the present paper, we propose to develop these criticisms. It is appropriate, however, to begin with an outline of Newman’s characteristic understanding of justification.

The essential feature of Newman’s understanding of the nature of justification may be regarded to be his insistence upon the real presence of the Trinity within the justified believer, understood in terms which undoubtedly reflect his interest in the early Greek fathers, such as Athanasius.² It is this understanding of the nature of justification which underlies the most difficult verse of his most famous hymn:

> And that a higher gift than grace,  
> Should flesh and blood refine;  
> God’s presence and his very self,  
> And essence all-divine.

'This is to be justified, to receive the Divine Presence within us, and be
John Henry Newman's 'Lectures on Justification':

made a Temple of the Holy Ghost. Justification refers to a present
to a present
reality, the 'indwelling in us of God the Father and the Word Incarnate
through the Holy Ghost.' Although this presence is to be understood
in Trinitarian terms, Newman makes it clear that it is most appropriately
understood as the presence of Christ. 'If to justify be to impart a certain
inward token of our personal redemption, and if the presence of God
within us is such a token, our justification must consist in God's coming
to us and dwelling in us.' This real presence of God in the soul of man
has certain consequences, which Newman identifies as being counted
and being made righteous. Both justification and sanctification are
bestowed simultaneously with the gift of the divine presence within the
souls of the justified. In other words, Newman understands the primary
aspect of justification to be the indwelling of God, which has as its
necessary consequences those aspects of the conversion of the sinner
which are customarily termed 'justification' and 'sanctification'. This is
made clear in what is probably the most important passage in the
Lectures:

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 to water.

Justification is therefore notionally distinct from sanctification, but
inseparable from it, in that they are both aspects of the one and the
same thing—the indwelling of the Holy Trinity in believers. This
important statement allows Newman's statements on the relation be-
tween justification and sanctification to be understood correctly. 'In
the foregoing Lecture, in which I stated what I consider as in the main
the true doctrine, two points were proposed for proof: first, that
justification and sanctification were in fact substantially one and the
same thing; next, that in the order of our ideas, viewed relatively to
each other, justification followed upon sanctification.' This distinction
between the concepts of justification and renewal allows Newman to
maintain a proleptic relationship between them: 'Justification is at first
what renewal could but be at last; and therefore is by no means a mere
result or consequence of renewal, but a real, though not a separate act
of God's mercy.' The distinction between the two is purely notional:
‘We may, if we will, divide this event into parts, and say that it is *both* pardon *and* renovation, but such a division is merely mental, and does not affect the change itself, which is but one act.’

‘It is the Divine Presence that justifies us, not faith, as say the Protestant schools, not renewal, as say the Roman.’ This statement contains not merely Newman’s own teaching, but also his interpretation of the Protestant and Roman Catholic doctrines which he held to be inadequate, if not erroneous. We now propose to consider whether Newman understood the positions he chose to attack.

In his *Apologia*, Newman made it clear that his *Lectures* were ‘aimed at the Lutheran dictum that justification by faith only was the cardinal doctrine of Christianity.’ He declared his intention to ‘build up a system of theology out of the Anglican divines’, and indicated that the *Lectures* were a ‘tentative inquiry’ towards that end. Broadly speaking, Newman’s *Lectures* attempt to resolve the dialectic between Protestant and Roman Catholic doctrines of justification on the basis of the following understanding of the spectrum of theologies of justification:

```
LUTHER, GERHARD, MELANCTHON

Protestant ——— [NEWMAN via media] ——— Roman Catholic

PIGHIES, BELLARMINE, VASQUEZ
```

This evaluation may be considered to be essentially correct. In view of the fact that Newman was chiefly concerned with the refutation of theologies of justification then current in the predominantly Protestant theological climate of England, it is understandable that he should wish to devote considerably more attention to the refutation of Luther than of Vasquez. Although both are of equal importance in the determination of the *via media*, the theological situation in England during the period in question points to Luther as the chief target for criticism. It must, however, be pointed out that Newman appears to labour under the mistaken apprehension that the evangelical doctrines of justification then current in England were of *Lutheran* provenance. In fact, Luther’s influence upon English theology suffered a major decline during the later sixteenth century, and although his influence is probably mediated to some slight extent by the Melanchthonian influence evident in some of the *Homilies*, the greatest influence on English theology from the seventeenth century onwards is *Reformed* rather than *Lutheran*: i.e., due to Calvin rather than Luther or Melanchthon.

Newman appears, at times, to confuse Protestantism with original sin. Instrumental in the development of this unfortunate prejudice was
Hurrell Froude (1803-36), who 'professed openly his admiration of the Church of Rome and his hatred of the Reformers.' Later, Newman would concede that it was Froude who made him 'look with admiration towards the Church of Rome, and in the same degree to dislike the Reformation.' Newman's study of the monophysite controversy, undertaken during the Long Vacation of 1839, led him to the astonishing conclusion that Protestants were Eutychians and therefore heretics—a conclusion which later patristic scholars have declined to draw!

Newman's criticism of Luther in the Lectures appears to rest upon the false assumption that the Reformer understood faith as a work. His criticism of Luther for his insistence upon the fiduciary aspects of faith, whilst neglecting hope, charity and obedience, reflects his conviction that the Reformer singled out the human activity of trust in God as the single defining characteristic of justifying faith. This criticism is totally misguided; for Luther, faith is a divine work in man. Man is justified passively, as if he were a stone; he takes no part in his own justification, which is totally the work of God. One of Luther's favourite illustrations in this respect is that of a woman in labour. On account of the servitude of man's free will, so positively asserted in the 1525 work De Servo Arbitrio, Luther asserts that man is totally unable to make any sort of response to the divine initiative in justification. Man is passive, and God active, in justification. God operates upon man, and man contributes nothing to the process except the inert material upon which God operates. This serious misunderstanding of Luther remains common even today, and it need not be considered a damning feature of Newman's discussion of Luther that he falls into this elementary error; except that Newman claims to have read Luther's 1535 Galatians commentary, from which he cites on occasion in the course of the Lectures, and which contains unequivocal assertions of the passivity of man in justification! If Newman did read the 1535 Galatians commentary, he cannot have read it in toto, or else, if he did, he chose to ignore those aspects of it which were not amenable to his purposes. It is a matter for regret that there is some evidence, which we shall present below, to suggest that Newman deliberately misrepresents Luther on at least one occasion, so that the second of these possibilities cannot be excluded.

How, then, did Newman come to make his classic faux pas concerning Luther? It would seem that it arose through his reading of the post-Restoration Caroline divines, and particularly the works of George Bull (1634-1710). Bull interpreted justification sola fide to mean that all that was required of man in justification was faith, which was equivalent to a libertine's charter. At any rate, Newman appears to project the Caroline caricature of Luther on to what little of the Reformer he read. Newman understands Luther to teach that man is active in justification, and that this activity is defined by the Reformer in terms of fiduciary apprehension of the benefits of Christ—which is
clearly unsatisfactory, omitting all mention of love, hope, and other such desirable qualities. In fact, Luther rarely uses the phrase *sola fide*; its elevation to the status of a primary characteristic of Luther’s doctrine of justification reflects the failure of an earlier generation of Luther scholars to penetrate to the heart of Luther’s doctrine of justification. Where Luther speaks of faith, it can be shown that he is referring to *fides Christi*—the faith by which Christ is apprehended and appropriated—and the emphasis is totally upon *Christ*, and not faith.¹⁹ This is brought out with particular clarity in the 1521 treatise *Rationis Latomianae Confutatio*, in which faith is unequivocally characterized as the *donum Dei*, given to man *in justification*—and not as its cause! The distinguishing mark of faith is Christ’s real and redeeming presence—an idea which Luther encapsulated in the concept of *fides Christi*. *Fides Christi* is the real presence of Christ in the believer, brought about by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit. The essential point which Luther makes in this treatise is that justification does not concern the mere external imputation of some impersonal attribute of Christ to the believer; it also involves the real presence of Christ within the believer. ‘Justification by faith’ does *not* mean that man has faith, and on its account is justified. For Luther, it means that God bestows upon man grace and faith, effecting the real presence of Christ within the believer without co-operation on his part. In effect, the phrase *sola fide* is simply a statement of man’s utter inability to justify himself. Again, it most emphatically does *not* mean that man effects his justification by placing his trust in God, which merely makes faith into a human work. It seems that Newman’s caricature of Luther has gained wide acceptance, and it must be appreciated that this is simply *not* what Luther meant by justification by faith.

It will be clear, however, from the above discussion that Luther regards the primary aspect of justification to be the indwelling of Christ in the believer. The righteousness of justification is none other than Christ himself: ‘The Christ who is grasped by faith and lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us righteous and grants us eternal life.’²⁰ The essential feature of justifying faith is that it is *fides apprehensiva*, a ‘grasping faith’: ‘Faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ.’²¹ It is clear that Luther regards the basis of Christian righteousness in justification to be the real presence of Christ in the believer, a presence which is brought about by faith, itself a gift of God. Both these statements noted above are taken from the 1535 *Galatians* commentary, which Newman singled out for special discussion in his *Lectures*. Newman’s own opinion concerning the nature of justifying righteousness is this: ‘This indwelling (i.e. the Divine Presence) accurately answers, as I have already said, to what the righteousness which justifies has already been shown to consist in.’²² It is on account of *this* righteousness—that is, the Divine Presence—that man is justified,
sanctified and ultimately glorified: 'whatever blessings in detail we ascribe to justification, are ascribed in Scripture to this sacred indwelling.' This opinion is remarkably similar to the 1535 statement of Luther, noted above, and which Newman should have encountered, had he read Luther's 1535 commentary.

This point may be taken further. We have already noted how Newman regarded justification and sanctification as the two inseparable consequences of the indwelling of Christ in the believer. Newman makes occasional reference to Calvin in the course of the Lectures, although he never attempts a serious analysis of the Reformer. If he had, he would have been placed in a somewhat difficult position, for Calvin’s teaching on justification is astonishingly close to Newman’s in several important respects, of which we here note but one. As we have shown elsewhere, Calvin regards both justification and sanctification as aspects of the believer’s incorporation into Christ in a mystical union. Calvin speaks of believers being ‘grafted into Christ’, so that the concept of incorporation becomes of central importance to his doctrine of justification. ‘Christ, when he enlightens us with faith by the power of the Spirit, at the same time grafts us into his body, that we may become partakers of all his benefits.’ Calvin insists that the union of the believer with Christ is real, but not physical (to avoid falling into the abyss of the Osiandrist position). Man is incorporated into Christ by the divine gift of faith, evoked by the action of the Holy Spirit. As a consequence of this incorporation, man receives the ‘double grace’ (duplex gratia) of justification and sanctification: ‘even as one cannot tear Christ in pieces, so these two things are inseparable, as we receive them together and conjointly in him, that is, righteousness and sanctification.’ Both justification and sanctification are conceived Christologically, as aspects of the believer’s union with Christ. The similarities between this teaching and that of Newman is evident—indeed, reading Calvin’s words, it is difficult to believe that they are not Newman’s. Both regard justification and sanctification as notionally distinct, yet inseparable, for both are given with Christ to the believer. Again, it may be noted that Calvin, like Luther before him, regarded faith as a divine work within man, effected by the Holy Spirit, so that it is possible to state that the real presence of Christ in the believer is effected by the Holy Spirit—which again, as we have noted, corresponds to Newman’s teaching. It is evident from Newman’s comments regarding Calvin’s doctrine that he is quite ignorant of its character, let alone of the similarities which exist between them. A possible point of contact between the two men is Athanasius, for whom Calvin is known to have had an especially high regard.

It is possible to put Newman’s misrepresentation of Luther (and also Calvin) down to simple ignorance, rather than malice. As we indicated above, however, there are indications that Newman deliberately misrepresents Luther. We propose to consider one such instance in detail.
In his discussion of the relation between faith and works, Newman develops the idea that good works may properly be said to justify. Newman takes the remarkable step of quoting Luther in support of this teaching! Newman prefaces his reference to Luther with the caustic remark that this opinion might appear unusual, coming from Luther, but that Luther was obliged to make it 'in consequence of the stress of texts urged against him.' He then quotes—in English translation—Luther's 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 (vide 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 in 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 so speaks even 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 other of these, it speaks of Christ in the abstract; when of the Divine made one with the human in 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 Saviour” 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, That 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 to believing deeds.’

We have cited this passage in full exactly as it is found in the Lectures. As it stands, it is quite astonishing, as it clearly indicates that justification is to be ascribed to ‘believing deeds’, which is an excellent description of the teaching of the post-Restoration Caroline divines and also, of course, of Newman’s own position. The essence of the passage, as it stands, is this: Scripture sometimes speaks of faith in a composite
sense, meaning ‘faith active in love’, just as it sometimes speaks of Christ in a composite sense, meaning ‘God and man composite or incarnate’. Just as it is possible to employ the standard concept of the ‘communication of attributes’ to Christ, so that attributes of Christ’s divinity are predicated of his humanity, so justification may be ascribed to believing deeds. The argument is not particularly convincing, but the essential point which Newman wishes to make is that Luther here admits that justification may be ‘ascribed to faith incarnate or to believing deeds’—which is astonishing, coming from Luther. Astonishing, that is, until the matter of the omitted section, indicated by four periods ( . . . ) is considered. This might be taken to indicate a portion of a sentence which is omitted because it is of no relevance. In fact, it denotes the omission of an entire section which so qualifies Luther’s understanding of the communication of attributes as to exclude Newman’s interpretation! The omitted section is here reproduced, with the parts Newman included in italics: 29

That Infant who is lying in a manger and the Virgin’s bosom, created heaven and earth, and is the Lord of Angels.

I am indeed speaking about a man here. But ‘man’ in this proposition is obviously a new word and, as the sophists say, stands for the divinity; that is, this God who became man created all things. Here creation is attributed solely to the divinity, since the humanity does 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.

Luther then considers some scriptural passages to illustrate this point, before continuing:

Therefore the meaning of the passage, ‘Do this, and you will live’, is ‘You will live on account of this faithful doing; this doing will give you life solely on account of faith.’ Thus justification belongs to faith alone, just as creation belongs to the divinity. As it is truly said, Jesus the Son of Mary created all things, so is justification ascribed to faith incarnate or believing deeds.

The significance of the section which Newman omitted is that it indicates the correct interpretation of the final sentence, which Newman cites to refute Luther from his own pen. The statement ‘Jesus the Son of Mary created all things’ is correct, because God created all things, and what may be said of God may be said of man in the hypostatic union; it remains, however, a statement that God, not man, created all things! By ‘justification is ascribed to faith incarnate or believing deeds’, Luther is saying that faith alone justifies, but, in so far as faith is ‘incarnate’ in believing deeds, believing deeds may be said to justify. In other words, it is a restatement of the sentence immediately preceding
Churchman

it, and which Newman—understandably!—chose to omit. Furthermore, it will be obvious that Luther understands the *communicatio idiomatum* to apply in *one direction only*. Luther refuses to attribute divine activity (such as creation) to the human nature in isolation from the divine nature: i.e., outside the specific context of the incarnation. ‘Believing deeds’ are equivalent to the incarnation, containing faith and works in the same relation as the divine and human natures of Christ. The priority of faith over works is explicitly stated by Luther (in the section Newman left out, of course), so that no justifying efficacy may be attributed to works apart from faith; and within the specific context of ‘believing works’, it is understood that it is *faith* which justifies! Faith alone justifies, and believing works justify because of faith, just as God alone creates, but Christ may be said to create because of his divinity.

Luther therefore states in the above passage precisely what one would expect him to state, and Newman must have known this. In order to reach the final sentence which he *does* cite, he must have read the section which he chose to omit, and realized its implication. The only alternative is that he learnt of the passage at second hand, already in its mutilated form. Newman’s use of Luther in general is far from accurate or fair, which makes his criticism of the use made of Scripture by some Protestants somewhat ironical. According to Newman, these Protestants—such as Luther!—‘make Scripture not a volume of instruction to which we must reverently draw near, but at best a magazine of texts in behalf of our own opinions’.

We will argue in a forthcoming article that the Caroline divines are equivocal in their support for Newman, to say the least, so that his claim to have developed or reproduced an authentically Anglican doctrine of justification must be questioned. Although there are considerable points of contact between Newman and the post-Restoration divines, particularly Taylor and Barrow, Hooker’s teaching on justification is quite distinct from that of Newman, as Newman himself is aware. Furthermore, the realist understanding of the presence of Christ in the justified believer, which is so characteristic an aspect of Newman’s thought on the matter, is quite distinct from the consensus of both pre- and post-Restoration divines. In addition to this, it must be pointed out that Newman’s characterization of Roman Catholic doctrines of justification as teaching justification on account of renewal is seriously in error, perhaps more so than his interpretation of the *sola fide*. If the *via media* is constructed dialectically, in terms of the antithesis of, for example, Luther and Vasquez, it must be conceded that Newman’s failure to understand the extremes must have serious repercussions for his attempted synthesis, in the form of the *via media*. Furthermore, the scriptural basis of certain aspects of Newman’s thought, particularly
John Henry Newman's 'Lectures on Justification':

where he is dependent upon St Augustine, would be shattered by the work of later Anglo-Catholic theologians in the twentieth century, particularly by that of N. P. Williams, who demonstrated that justification was a forensic concept in the thought of St Paul. 32 These points, when taken together, and added to the most serious of all—Newman's misrepresentation of Luther in particular, and Protestantism in general—must cast considerable doubt on the value of the Lectures on Justification. Whatever their influence at the time, and whatever their value as a positive statement of Newman's own understanding of justification, it must be conceded that they are seriously inaccurate as regards their historico-theological foundations. The judgement of theological scholarship upon Newman's critique of Luther is that it is the future cardinal, and not the Saxon Reformer, who emerges discredited. The interpretation of Luther is notoriously difficult, particularly in connection with the articulus iustificationis, 33 but even allowing for this, Newman appears to have read what little Luther he did read purely in order to damn him with his own words. There is no serious attempt to come to grips with the Reformer's thought.

The evangelical who hesitates to read Luther, because he has been told that Newman discredited him in the last century, need therefore pay no attention to this canard. Luther has an astonishing power to stimulate theological reflection, identifying problems which still perplex today, and making comments which show him to possess an insight rarely paralleled. The lesson to be learned from Newman's failure is that Luther must be mastered before he can be overwhelmed.

THE REV'D DR ALISTER E. McGRATH lectures in Christian Doctrine and Ethics at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford.

NOTES


3 J. H. Newman, Lectures on Justification, 3rd ed. (Rivingtons, London 1874), p.144. See also pp.150-1. It may be noted that Newman was not the only High Churchman to misrepresent Luther, possibly deliberately. See Charles Hastings Collette, The Revd S. Baring Gould on 'Luther and Justification': A Reply (Partridge, London 1873). I owe this reference to the Revd Robin A. Leaver.

4 Newman, op. cit., p.144.
Churchman

5 ibid., p.149.
6 ibid., p.154.
7 ibid., p.63.
8 ibid., p.74.
9 ibid., p.101.
11 Lectures, pp.343-404.
13 Apologia, p.47.
14 ibid., p.48.
15 ibid., p.119.
16 Weimar Ausgabe, D. Martin Luthers Werke (Weimar 1883—[hereafter cited as WA]), 56, p.379.2.
17 WA, 40, I, p.41.2.
18 See A. E. McGrath, 'The Emergence of the Anglican Tradition on Justification 1600-1700', Churchman (forthcoming issue).
19 e.g. E. G. Rupp, 'Patterns of Salvation in the First Age of the Reformation', Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, 57, 1966, pp.52-66, especially p.58.
20 WA, 40, I, p.229.28.
21 WA, 40, I, p.229.4.
22 Lectures, p.148.
23 ibid., p.149.
25 Institutes of the Christian Religion, 3, 2, 35.
26 ibid., 3, 11, 6.
27 Newman, op. cit., p.300.
28 ibid., pp.300-1. We have cited this passage in full to avoid any possibility of distorting Newman's meaning.
29 We have taken this translation directly from volume 26 of Luther's Works, 54 vols (Fortress Press and Concordia, Philadelphia and St Louis 1955-), pp.265-6.
31 A. E. McGrath, 'The Emergence of the Anglican Tradition on Justification', Churchman (forthcoming issue).
33 For the question of Karl Barth's relation to Luther on the articulus iustificationis, which is of interest in this connection, see A. E. McGrath, 'Karl Barth and the Articulus Iustificationis: The Significance of his Critique of Ernst Wolf within the Context of his Theological Method', Theologische Zeitschrift (forthcoming issue). For the development of Luther's doctrine of justification, see A. E. McGrath, 'Mira et Nova Definitione Iustitiae: Luther and Scholastic Doctrines of Justification', Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, 74 (forthcoming issue).