

Association of Hebrew Catholics Lecture Series
The Mystery of Israel and the Church

Spring 2009 – Series #4
Themes of St. Paul

Talk #11
St. Paul on Justification



© **Dr. Lawrence Feingold STD**
Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy
Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri

Note: *This document contains the unedited text of Dr. Feingold's talk. It will eventually undergo final editing for inclusion in the series of books being published by The Miriam Press under the series title: "The Mystery of Israel and the Church". If you find errors of any type, please send your observations to lfeingold@hebrewcatholic.org*

This document may be copied and given to others. It may not be modified, sold, or placed on any web site. The actual recording of this talk, as well as the talks from all series, may be found on the AHC website at: <http://www.hebrewcatholic.org/Studies/MysteryofIsraelChurch/mysteryofisraela.html>



Association of Hebrew Catholics • 4120 W Pine Blvd • Saint Louis MO 63108
www.hebrewcatholic.org • ahc@hebrewcatholic.org

11. St. Paul on Justification

The outbreak of the Reformation, in large part, centered initially on Martin Luther's understanding of justification in the Letters of St. Paul. After reflecting on many aspects of the thought of St. Paul, we cannot avoid considering this central and controverted question.¹

Justification refers to the process by which a person in a state of original or mortal sin is brought into friendship with God, is made to share in some way in God's justice and holiness, and is made a child of God and heir of heaven.

The term comes from the Hebrew "zadik," which means "just" not in the restricted sense of the cardinal virtue of justice, but in the broader sense of being in the right relationship with God. It is in this sense that St. Joseph is said to be "a just man" in Mt 1:19, and Abraham's faith is said to be "reckoned it to him as righteousness (zedakah)" (Gen 15:6). Justification, therefore, is the process by which a person enters into the right relationship with God, exiting from the aversion to God entailed by grave sin. This consists in repenting for sin² and in lovingly subordinating one's reason and will to God through reception of the gift of grace and the theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. In virtue of this gift one leaves the unjust relationship of enmity with God and enters into *filial friendship* with Him, which is the essence of Biblical "justice" (*zedakah*).

The council of Trent, in its famous *Decree on Justification*, chapter 7, defines justification as "not only a remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts whereby an unjust man becomes just and from being an enemy becomes a friend, that he may be an heir according to hope of life everlasting."³

It should not be surprising that great theological passions were raised around the subject of justification, for no theme could be of greater existential importance to us. Indeed, everything is at stake in justification, for an eternity of heaven or hell depends on its presence or absence.

1 Pope Benedict XVI addressed this question in the Wednesday Audience of Nov 19, 2008.

2 See the fine description of repentance (*teshuvah*) by Moses Maimonides: "And what is Teshuvah? It occurs when the sinner forsakes his sin, and removes it from his thoughts, and concludes in his heart not to do it again, as it is said, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts" (Is 55:7) Let him also regret what has happened, as it is said, . . . (Jer 31:19). And let the sinner call to Him who knows all hidden things to witness that he will never return to sin that sin again" (Hilkhot Teshuvah II.2). Cited in *Days of Awe: A Treasury of Jewish Wisdom for Reflection, Repentance, and Renewal on the High Holy Days*, ed. by S.Y. Agnon (NY: Schocken Books, 1995), 119.

3 DS1528.

The question of justification is very closely related to the theme that we discussed last week: faith, hope, and charity. Are we justified by faith alone, or by faith, hope, and charity together? The answer to this question is crucial to the burning question of justification that rent the Church in the Reformation.

If the question is posed in this way, I think that it can be clearly seen that justification is brought about by faith, hope, and love together, which are infused into our heart by the Holy Spirit, together with sanctifying grace.

Martin Luther, on the contrary, proposed that we are saved by *faith alone*, by which Christ's justice is imputed to us, and we are accounted by God to be righteous by Christ's own righteousness, without our becoming interiorly righteous. Faith is precisely that which enables Christ's justice to be imputed to us.

The key question is whether justification changes us interiorly or not. Does justification consist in God pouring His grace into our hearts, changing them radically and writing His Torah in them, or merely in imputing Christ's justice to us, without necessarily pouring grace into our hearts?

Justification by Faith, Not by Works

Luther's interpretation of justification was based in great part on St. Paul's repeated affirmation that we are justified by faith and not by "works of the law." For example, in Gal 2:15-16, he writes: "We have believed in Jesus Christ, in order to be *justified by faith* in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified."

What does St. Paul mean, however, by "works of the Law"? This is a crucial question. As we have seen in earlier talks, St. Thomas Aquinas and other scholastic theologians distinguish the precepts of the Law of Moses into three fundamental categories: moral, ceremonial, and judicial. The moral law is expressed above all in the double commandment of love and in the Ten Commandments, as well as other subordinate moral precepts which clarify the commandments and what is implied by them. The ceremonial law refers to the precepts regarding divine worship and ritual purity. The judicial precepts give elements akin to a civil penal code.

When St. Paul says that the "works of the Law" do not justify, to which class of precepts is he referring? Does he mean that no one is justified by observing the double commandment of charity, or does he mean that we are not justified by observance of the ceremonial law, signified by circumcision? The context of the Letter to the Galatians supports the interpretation that he is referring to the ceremonial precepts of the Old Covenant, for the principal

subject of the Letter is the question of circumcision, and whether Gentile Christians should be circumcised.

The observance of the ceremonial precepts, in and of themselves, cannot justify, any more than could the blood of goats and rams atone for sin. Justification requires the circumcision not of the flesh but of the heart, by which one becomes a “new creature” (Gal 6:15).⁴ Hence Gal 5:6 states that “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.”

A similar teaching is found in Rom 3:20-25:

For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

Here too the “works of the Law” are to be understood principally of the ceremonial law represented by circumcision. Hence St. Paul goes on to say that “we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith” (Rm 3:28-30).

Justification could not be brought about by any merely human works, even though commanded by God in the Mosaic Law, because it *must be something entirely supernatural*. By justification sin is forgiven, we are brought into union with God, and made heirs of heaven. Evidently, no merely human and natural work could bring about such momentous changes in us!

Justification must principally be the work of God in us (although not without our cooperation). Thus justification must be through grace and through divine gifts: we “are justified by his grace as a gift” (Rom 3:24). Hence St. Paul says that boasting is excluded (Rm 3:27). The gratuitousness of justification is also clearly shown by Eph 2:8, in which he says: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.”

It follows that our initial justification cannot possibly be merited by us through any human work. The heresy of Pelagianism consisted in thinking that justification could be caused by human works of asceticism and virtue, without the necessity of grace.⁵ Justification requires both actual

grace which prepares our soul by illumining our mind and strengthening our will, and sanctifying grace, by which we are given a share in the divine nature, according to 2Pt 1:4, and made sons and daughters of God.

St. Bonaventure explains this second aspect well in his *Breviloquium*:

No conceivable man is worthy to attain this supreme Good exceeding in every possible way the limits of human nature, unless he is lifted up above himself through the action of God coming down to him. Not that God would come down in His immutable essence: He does so through an influence that emanates from Him; nor that the soul would rise above itself by physical ascent: it is lifted up through a God-conforming disposition.⁶

The Council of Trent on Justification

The difficulty we have in understanding the work of our salvation lies in the fact that justification is a complex mystery with several complementary facets. Heresy consists in emphasizing one or more of these aspects while excluding others which are also integral. The problem lies not in what is affirmed but in what is excluded or denied.

The Council of Trent gave a beautiful and profound, as well as infallible description of justification in its Decree on Justification, chapter 7. This teaching enables one to put in harmony the various complementary aspects of justification that we find brought out in different texts of St. Paul, and throughout the New Testament.

The Council of Trent seeks to bring clarity to this question by distinguishing the various aspects or causes of justification. The Council distinguishes (1) the efficient cause that brings it about, which is the power of God; (2) the purpose (final cause), which is the glory of God and giving of eternal life; (3) the meritorious cause that won justification for us, which is the Passion of Christ; (4) the instrumental cause by which it is applied to us, which is Baptism; and (5) the formal or interior cause by which we are made interiorly just, which is sanctifying grace and supernatural charity (which flows from sanctifying grace).⁷ To these we should also add (6) the preparatory

anyone says that man can be justified before God by his own works, whether done by his own natural powers or through the teaching of the law, without divine grace through Jesus Christ, let him be anathema. Canon 2. If anyone says that divine grace through Christ Jesus is given for this only, that man may be able more easily to live justly and to merit eternal life, as if by free will without grace he is able to do both, though with hardship and difficulty, let him be anathema. Canon 3. If anyone says that without the predisposing inspiration of the Holy Ghost and without His help, man can believe, hope, love or be repentant as he ought, so that the grace of justification may be bestowed upon him, let him be anathema.”

⁶ *Breviloquium*, V, 1.

⁷ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1992 summarizes this doctrine as follows: “Justification has been *merited for us by the Pas-*

⁴ See Gal 6:15: “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”

⁵ The Pelagian understanding of justification was condemned at the Council of Trent in the first three canons on Justification: “Canon 1. If

cause, which is faith, by which one seeks Baptism and without which “it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6).⁸

Justification is the result of all of these causes working together. It is produced in our souls by the power of God through the instrumentality of Baptism to which we come in faith. It was merited by Christ’s Passion. It consists interiorly (formally) in the infusion of sanctifying grace and charity in our souls, conforming us interiorly to Christ. Its purpose is the communication of eternal life for the glory of God. The Council of Trent states this as follows:

The causes of this justification are: the final cause is the *glory of God and of Christ and life everlasting*; the efficient cause is the *merciful God who washes and sanctifies gratuitously*, signing and *anointing with the holy Spirit* of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance, the meritorious cause is His most beloved only begotten, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when we were enemies (Rm 5:10), for the exceeding charity wherewith he loved us (Eph 2:4), *merited for us justification by His most holy passion* on the wood of the cross and made satisfaction for us to God the Father, the instrumental cause is the sacrament of *baptism*, which is the sacrament of faith, without which no man was ever justified.

Finally, the single formal cause is the justice of God, not that by which He Himself is just, but *that by which He makes us just, that, namely, with which we being endowed by Him, are renewed in the spirit of our mind* (cf. Eph 4:23), and not only are we reputed but we are truly called and are just (cf. 1 Jn 3:1), *receiving justice within us, each one according to his own measure*, which the Holy Ghost distributes to everyone as He wills (cf. 1 Cor 12:11), and according to each one’s disposition and cooperation.

sion of Christ who offered himself on the cross as a living victim, holy and pleasing to God, and whose blood has become the instrument of atonement for the sins of all men. Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy. Its purpose is the glory of God and of Christ, and the gift of eternal life.”

8 This is treated in the Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, chapter 6: “Now, they [the adults] are disposed to that justice when, aroused and aided by divine grace, receiving faith by hearing (Rm 10:17), they are moved freely toward God, believing to be true what has been divinely revealed and promised, especially that the sinner is justified by God by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and when, understanding themselves to be sinners, they, by turning themselves from the fear of divine justice . . . to consider the mercy of God, are raised to hope, trusting that God will be propitious to them for Christ’s sake; and they begin to love Him as the fountain of all justice, and on that account are moved against sin by a certain hatred and detestation, that is, by that repentance that must be performed before baptism; finally, when they resolve to receive baptism, to begin a new life and to keep the commandments of God. Of this disposition it is written: ‘For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him’ (Heb 11:6); and, ‘Be of good faith, son, thy sins are forgiven thee’ (Mt 9:2).”

In Rom 3:25 we can see all of these complementary causes of justification put together:

Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

The final cause (or purpose) of justification is the restoration of the glory of God, trampled on by sin. The meritorious cause is “the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” Faith is the cause preparing us for justification and leading us to Baptism (not mentioned but logically present).

The efficient cause is God by whom we are “justified by his grace as a gift.” At the same time, this phrase indicates the formal (or interior) cause, which consists in the reception of grace in the heart.

General Agreement between Catholics and Protestants

Of these various causes of justification, where do Catholics and Protestants agree and disagree? As we shall see, there is agreement on the purpose of justification, its meritorious, efficient, and instrumental causes, but disagreement on the interior or formal cause.

First of all, Catholics and Protestants agree in the purpose of justification: the restoration of the glory of God trampled on by sin, and the communication of the seed of eternal life.

Secondly, perhaps the most important area of agreement concerns the meritorious cause: Christ *merited* our salvation through His Passion and Death on the Cross, by which He *atoned* for all human sins.

St. Thomas Aquinas explains atonement for sin as offering to God something more pleasing or loveable than all sin is detested.⁹ We cannot redeem ourselves because we cannot offer anything more pleasing to God than all sin is displeasing. Christ’s Passion and death, worked in infinite charity, on the contrary, was immeasurably more pleasing than all sin is displeasing to God. Thus Christ’s death atoned for all sin and made superabundant satisfaction for it.

9 See *Summa of Theology*, III, q. 48, a. 2: “He properly atones for an offense who offers something which the offended one loves equally, or even more than he detested the offense. But by suffering out of love and obedience, Christ gave more to God than was required to compensate for the offense of the whole human race. First of all, because of the exceeding charity from which He suffered; secondly, on account of the dignity of His life which He laid down in atonement, for it was the life of one who was God and man; thirdly, on account of the extent of the Passion, and the greatness of the grief endured, as stated above. And therefore Christ’s Passion was not only a sufficient but a superabundant atonement for the sins of the human race; according to 1 John 2:2: ‘He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.’”

Scripture refers to the meritorious cause of our salvation in a great number of texts. In the first Letter to Timothy, St. Paul writes: “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners . . . the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 1:15, 2:6). In 1 Cor 15:3 Paul says: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that *Christ died for our sins* in accordance with the scriptures.”

Significantly, the Old Testament, as the Apostle affirms, had already taught that the sufferings of the Messiah are the meritorious cause of our justification. Perhaps the clearest text is Is 53:11, canticle of the Suffering Servant: “My just servant shall justify many and he shall bear their iniquities.”¹⁰

Third, we agree on the fact that God alone is the efficient cause who alone produces justification in the soul. (An efficient cause is the agent who brings about an effect, like a sculptor who makes a statue.) Hence justification is the gratuitous work of God in us, and we are saved by grace. We also agree that the Baptism has been established as the instrument by which God effectively justifies the soul.¹¹

Salvation through Faith, Hope, and Charity

Finally, Catholics and Protestants also agree that faith plays a decisive and crucial role in opening the gate for justification, although we differ in the way in which this is understood. For Luther and his followers, faith alone is that which *grasps* and appropriates the salvation won for us by Christ. Catholics, on the contrary, hold that this occurs by “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). Faith is the beginning of the work of justification because it is the precondition of hope and charity, and thus the foundation of the entire life of grace and conversion.

In the last talk, we saw that St. Paul very often uses the word faith to encompass all three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. Faith can be used to stand for the other two because it is their foundation and presupposition. No one can hope in or love God in whom he does not believe. Faith shows us the promises of God in which we hope, and it shows us the exceeding goodness of God which we love through divine charity.

Thus St. Paul can say that we are saved through faith,¹² saved through hope (Rom 8:24), and saved through charity, as when he says that we are saved in “faith working through charity” (Gal 5:6).¹³ 1 Cor 13:2 shows the insufficiency of

¹⁰ Translation following the Neo-Vulgate.

¹¹ See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1257-59. The justification efficaciously produced by the sacrament of Baptism is also made present by an upright desire for Baptism and Baptism of blood. Hence CCC 1258 states that “this *Baptism of blood*, like the *desire for Baptism*, brings about the fruits of Baptism without being a sacrament.”

¹² Rom 3:22; 5:1; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8; etc.

¹³ See also 1 Tim 1:14, which speaks of Paul’s own justification through “the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”

faith without charity for salvation: “And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” The Church teaches that we are saved through faith, hope and charity together.¹⁴

How Is Christ’s Redemption Applied to Our Souls?

The principal disagreement between Protestants and Catholics with regard to justification concerns the way in which Christ’s redemption has been applied to our souls by actually making us just before God. Or to put it another way, disagreement concerns the precise way we have been saved by grace and saved by faith. In scholastic language, the disagreement concerns the *formal* cause of justification: in what does the *interior essence of justification* consist? A “formal cause” is an interior cause by which a thing is what it is. It may be easier to understand by referring to this as the “interior cause.” Does this consist in the mere imputation of Christ’s justice through faith, or in the actual infusion of sanctifying grace and charity into the heart through the action of the Holy Spirit? The former is the answer of Martin Luther, and the latter that of the Catholic Church, as defined in the Council of Trent.

Luther’s Understanding of Justification

Martin Luther maintained that what justified us in the eyes of God is *nothing in ourselves*, but solely the justice of Jesus Christ that God *imputes* to us in a juridical way, as if it were ours, through faith. According to Luther this imputation of Christ’s justice *leaves the interior of the heart unchanged*, but changes only God’s *judgment* of us. In other words, justification would really be more of a change in God than in us, so to speak. Justification is like putting on a *mask of Christ* through our faith, such that God sees Christ instead of us when He looks at us. Behind the mask there remains the sin and vice that was there before our justification, but it is “hidden” from God’s wrath by our faith in Christ.¹⁵

¹⁴ See Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, ch. 7: “For faith, unless hope and charity be added to it, neither unites one perfectly with Christ, nor makes him a living member of his body. For this reason it is most truly said that “faith without works is dead,” and is of no profit, and “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith, which worketh by charity.” This faith, in accordance with apostolic tradition, catechumens beg of the Church before the sacrament of baptism, when they ask for “faith which bestows life eternal,” which without hope and charity faith cannot bestow.”

¹⁵ Bossuet, in his *History of the Variations of Protestant Churches*, I, 7, p. 19, gave a good summary of Luther’s position: “Justification is that grace which, remitting to us our sins, at the same time renders us agreeable to God. Till then, it had been believed that what wrought this effect proceeded indeed from God, but yet necessarily *existed in man*; and that to be justified,—namely, for a sinner to be made just,—it was necessary he should have this justice in him; as to be learned and virtuous, one must have in him learning and virtue. But Luther had not followed so simple an idea. He would have it, that what justifies us and renders us agreeable to God was *nothing in us*: but we were justified

This gives rise to Luther's doctrine that the justified person is "*simul peccator et justus*," at once "totally a sinner" and "totally righteous."¹⁶ Perhaps we could use Christ's description of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt 23:27) to describe this doctrine: "you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."

This doctrine of Luther's lies behind the famous quotation from his letter to his disciple Melancthon of Aug. 1, 1521:

If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true and not a fictitious grace; if grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. *Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly*, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world. As long as we are here we have to sin. This life is not the dwelling place of righteousness, but, as Peter says, we look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. It is enough that by the riches of God's glory we have come to know the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. *No sin will separate us from the Lamb, even though we commit fornication and murder a thousand times a day*. Do you think that the purchase price that was paid for the redemption of our sins by so great a Lamb is too small? Pray boldly—you too are a mighty sinner.¹⁷

According to Catholic doctrine, on the other hand, our sin is really abolished by justification which effects an *interior transformation*, infusing charity and sanctifying grace into our hearts. It is true that we can still sin venially and remain justified. Nevertheless justification is incompatible with mortal sin. Luther, unfortunately, lacked this distinction between venial and mortal sin! Mortal sin destroys the work of justification by expelling the gift of charity, which can only be restored through the power of the sacrament of penance.

Luther's doctrine on justification through imputation of Christ's merits was solemnly condemned in the Council of Trent, canon 11 on justification:

If anyone shall say that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of grace and charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the favor of God, let

because God imputed to us the justice of Jesus Christ, as if it were our own, and because by faith we could indeed appropriate it to ourselves" (my italics).

¹⁶ This doctrine is repeated in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, par. 29.

¹⁷ In *Luther's Works*, vol. 48, *Letters*, vol. 1, edited and translated by Gottfried Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), pp. 281-282.

him be anathema.¹⁸

The Essence of Justification: The Infusion of Sanctifying Grace and Charity

Given the fact that Luther claimed Scripture, and St. Paul in particular, as the source and foundation for his view of justification, we have to ask whether the letters of St. Paul, rightly understood, teach that justification essentially involves the infusing of charity in our hearts, as taught by the Council of Trent, or not.

In fact, St. Paul frequently speaks about justification in terms of the transformation of the human heart through the infusing of charity and the gift of the Spirit. This is in profound continuity with the Old Testament prophecies of the New Covenant and the outpouring of the Spirit.

In Ez 36:24-27, justification, to be worked by Baptism, is described as the giving of a new heart which causes us to walk in the commandments of God:

And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name. . . . For I will take you from among the Gentiles, and will gather you together out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. And I will pour upon you *clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness*, and I will cleanse you from all your idols. And *I will give you a new heart*, and put a new spirit within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you a heart of flesh. And I will *put my spirit in the midst of you*, and I will *cause you to walk in my commandments*, and to keep my judgments, and do them.

Here we see various causes of justification mentioned by the Council of Trent. The final cause or purpose is the restoration of the glory of God; the efficient cause is the power of God who gives a new heart. The interior (or formal) cause is precisely the reception of the new heart and spirit, enabling one to walk in the commandments.

Jeremiah gives a similar description of justification in Jer 31:31-33, according to which the New Covenant essentially consists in God writing the Law of God interiorly on human hearts:

This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Here Jeremiah connects three aspects of justification: it is (a) an interior rectification of the heart (on which the Law is interiorly "written"), by which (b) one becomes related

¹⁸ DS 1561. See also canon 10.

to God in a new (filial) way, and through which (c) sin is forgiven. The rectification of the heart works the forgiveness of sins and restores one's relationship with God.

St. Paul is thus faithful to the prophetic witness when he stresses the role of the infusing of charity (a new heart) in the process of justification. This is especially prominent in three very significant texts which we shall briefly examine: Gal 4:4-6, Rom 5:1-5, and Rom 8:1-17.

Galatians 4:4-7

In Gal 4:4-7, St. Paul synthesizes the entire mystery of our Redemption in a few lines:

In the fullness of time God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

In this profound and dense text, we have the mystery of the three divine Persons of the Trinity, the mission of the Son into the world through the Incarnation which marks the center of history (the fullness of time), the participation of the "woman" through whom the Son comes into the world, the role of Judaism in preparing for the Messiah "born under the Law," the redemption of mankind, our adoption as sons in the Son (divine filiation, which we receive through Baptism), and the sending of the Holy Spirit to give us the spirit of the Son by which we adore the Father as Christ has taught us.

This entire process together results in our justification, which is the culmination of the process. After being sent into the world through being born of the Virgin Mary, Christ redeemed mankind on Calvary. We are not justified, however, until Christ's redemptive work has been applied individually to our souls. This occurs when the Spirit of the Son is "sent into our hearts" so that we too can cry "Abba, Father!" In other words, we are made into sons of God by receiving filial love infused into our hearts by the Spirit. This reception of the spirit of filial love of God by the Spirit renders us like unto Christ by giving us a share in the same interior sentiment and disposition as Christ Himself. Needless to say, our share may be tiny(!), but this does not keep it from being real according to St. Paul.

Romans 5:5-10

Another synthetic statement of justification is given in Rom 5:5-10:

Hope does not disappoint us, because *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us*. While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet

sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved *by his life*.

In this text, St. Paul speaks of justification under two aspects: Christ's dying for us (meritorious cause), and the infusion of God's love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (formal or interior cause). By dying for us, Christ merited justification for us through His blood. However, the justification comes about in the soul insofar as it comes to live *Christ's life* (Rm 5:10), through the fact that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rm 5:5).

This text is one of the sources for the teaching of the Council of Trent that the essence of justification consists in the reception of the gift of sanctifying grace, from which charity flows into our hearts together with faith and hope. The Council of Trent, in the *Decree on Justification*, chapter 7, teaches this as follows:

For though no one can be just except he to whom the merits of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ are communicated, yet this takes place in that justification of the sinner, when by the merit of the most holy passion, *the charity of God is poured forth by the Holy Spirit in the hearts (cf. Rm 5:5) of those who are justified and inheres in them*; whence man through Jesus Christ, in whom he is ingrafted, receives in that justification, together with the remission of sins, *all these infused at the same time, namely, faith, hope and charity*.

Justification therefore consists formally or properly in the infusion of charity (together with faith and hope) into the heart through the work of the Holy Spirit (infusing sanctifying grace), which infusion works the remission of sins.

Romans 8:1-17

Another very significant text which shows that justification consists essentially in the infusion of charity through the Holy Spirit is Rm 8:1-17:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. . . . Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the *Spirit of God dwells in you*. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, *your spirits are alive because of righteousness*. . . . *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children,*

then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

The “spirit of sonship” by which we cry “Abba, Father,” is clearly the same love of God that “has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit,” mentioned earlier in Rm 5:5. For it is only through the gift of supernatural charity that we are given the power to love God as Father, on the pattern of Christ’s own filial love.

In virtue of the infusion of the “spirit of sonship,” the human person is justified by being interiorly conformed to Christ, whose filial spirit he has received, making the human person a “son in the Son,” capable of crying “Abba, Father!” The infusion of charity by the gift of the Holy Spirit makes the recipient a son of God, and thus a co-heir with Christ of His inheritance, which is eternal life. Clearly this is the essence of justification, which is the seed of glory.

Infusion of Charity and the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

The texts of St. Paul that we have just examined connect two closely related inconceivable and immeasurable gifts: the gift of charity infused into our hearts by the Spirit, and the gift of the Spirit Himself, who is given to us. The latter is referred to as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, promised to us by Christ at the Last Supper.

For example, in Rom 5:5, St. Paul says: “*God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.*” God’s love is poured into the soul, and simultaneously the Spirit Himself is given to the soul.

Supernatural charity is the supreme gift of the Spirit, and through this gift we are given the supernatural capacity to love God with a share or participation in the love of the Son for the Father. Through this supernatural love, God Himself becomes present in the soul in a new way: as the *Beloved* of our souls.

Although sanctifying grace and charity are created realities in the soul (created grace), it truly causes God to be present in the soul in a new and special way (uncreated grace), precisely as the *Beloved* of our soul. At the Last Supper, Jesus revealed to the Apostles the great mystery of the divine indwelling:

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “*If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him* (Jn 14:22-23).

When the soul receives charity and begins to love the Lord in a supernatural way, both the Father and the Son come and make their home with him. The Holy Spirit is also included in this promise of indwelling, as Christ specifies in Jn 14:26: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit,

whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

The indwelling therefore is of all three divine Persons together, but it is attributed in a special way to the Holy Spirit, because He is the divine Person who proceeds precisely as the fruit of the mutual love of the Father and Son.

St. Thomas Aquinas has given the classical theological explanation of the sending of the Holy Spirit and His indwelling in the souls of the just. He writes:

The divine person is fittingly sent in the sense that He exists newly in any one; and He is given as possessed by anyone; and neither of these is otherwise than by sanctifying grace.

For God is in all things by His essence, power and presence, according to His one common mode, as the cause existing in the effects which participate in His goodness. Above and beyond this common mode, however, there is one special mode belonging to the rational nature wherein God is said to be present as the object known is in the knower, and the beloved in the lover. And since the rational creature by its operation of knowledge and love attains to God Himself, according to this special mode God is said not only to exist in the rational creature but also to dwell therein as in His own temple. So no other effect can be put down as the reason why the divine person is in the rational creature in a new mode, except sanctifying grace. Hence, the divine person is sent, and proceeds temporally only according to sanctifying grace.

Again, we are said to possess only what we can freely use or enjoy: and to have the power of enjoying the divine person can only be according to sanctifying grace. And thus the Holy Spirit is possessed by man, and dwells within him, in the very gift itself of sanctifying grace. Hence the Holy Spirit Himself is given and sent.¹⁹

The Moral Law and Justification

In Jn 14:23, we have seen that the indwelling of the divine Persons is connected by Christ with two conditions: love for Him and keeping His word. The divine indwelling presupposes the infusion of charity into our hearts through sanctifying grace, and our keeping the double commandment of charity and the Ten Commandments, through the power of the grace that we have received.

As mentioned above, when St. Paul teaches that we are saved by faith and not by “works of the Law,” he clearly does not mean to say that it is irrelevant for justification that we observe the moral law, for he teaches the opposite in many texts, as does Jesus in dialogue with the rich young man who asked him about salvation: “If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (Mt 19:17). For example,

¹⁹ *Summa of Theology*, I, a. 43, a. 3.

in Gal 5:14-21, St. Paul distinguishes between “works of the flesh” and “works of the Spirit,” and says that those who do the former cannot inherit the Kingdom of God:

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” . . . But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh. . . . Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.²⁰

It is clear from this that justification involves the reception of a new spirit, by which one is enabled to walk according to the Spirit. This new spirit can be nothing other than the infusion of charity into our hearts together with sanctifying grace. Through these gifts the Spirit Himself comes to dwell in the soul, as long as we do not chase Him out through mortal sin, signified here by St. Paul in the “works of the flesh.”

Growth in Justification

Protestants commonly distinguish between justification and sanctification. Justification would consist in the imputation of Christ’s merits to us and the consequent remission of sins. Sanctification would refer to the gradual process by which one grows in the works of the Spirit.

For Catholics, justification already is inchoate sanctification, precisely because justification consists in receiving the infusion of sanctifying grace. The gift of justifying grace, however, is not something static and fixed, but destined to grow throughout the Christian life, if we cooperate with God’s grace. Hence St. Paul speaks of “measures” of grace, which are given so that we may tend to the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). The initial gift of sanctifying grace that we receive upon our first justification will grow to greater and greater fullness, if we cooperate with the gift of God.

Can Good Works Merit an Increase of Grace and Eternal Life?

Although purely human works cannot merit justification in any way, as we have seen, it is different with regard to works moved by charity that God has gratuitously poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, as merited by the Blood of Christ. A purely human work is in no way proportionate to eternal life, and so cannot possibly merit it. However, a human act motivated by supernatural charity is in a quite different condition. By stemming from supernatural charity, it is no longer completely disproportionate with eternal life, for charity is the essence of eternal life.

²⁰ See also Rom 1:28-32.

In order to rightly understand the value of good works, it is crucial therefore to distinguish two different kinds of “good works”: natural and supernatural. In a person in a state of mortal sin, there can still be “good works” according to natural human virtue. Thus a person in a state of mortal sin can still love his family, be generous to others in need, work for the common good of his country, even die for his country in military service. In addition, a person in mortal sin can have faith and hope (dead faith and dead hope). However, none of these works, since they are not inspired by supernatural charity, are meritorious for eternal life. Hence St. Paul says that “if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” (1 Cor 13:2). Such works done without charity may be naturally good, but they are not proportioned to eternal life, which is the life of God who is love.

Works moved and inspired by supernatural charity, on the contrary, are “good works” in a far higher sense. Because they stem from God’s own gift of love, they can merit an increase of that same gift of love. Thus they contribute to a growth in justification/sanctification and merit eternal life, in accordance with the words of St. Paul to Timothy shortly before his death: “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tm 4:8).²¹

²¹ See Council of Trent, Decree of Justification, canon 32: “If anyone says that the good works of the one justified are in such manner the gifts of God that they are not also the good merits of him justified; or that the one justified by the good works that he performs by the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does not truly merit an increase of grace, eternal life, and in case he dies in grace, the attainment of eternal life itself and also an increase of glory, let him be anathema.”