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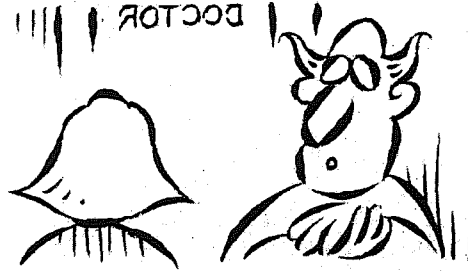
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I'M SORRY TO SAY THAT  
YOUR CHILD WILL BE BORN  
WITH CERTAIN DEFECTS, BUT  
DO KEEP IN MIND ALL THE  
ADVANCES WE'VE MADE...



THERE WILL BE EASY ACCESS  
TO WALKWAYS AND BUILDINGS,  
CONVENIENT PARKING SPOTS,  
EVEN SPECIAL ATHLETIC  
COMPETITIONS...



OR THEN AGAIN,  
YOU COULD  
TERMINATE  
THE PREGNANCY.



## Jonathan Edwards on Justification: Closer to Luther or Aquinas?



Gerald R. McDermott

Evangelicals often consider Jonathan Edwards to be “their” theologian, the one thinker in the history of Christian thought who probably “got it right.” Or, if he didn’t properly interpret every last jot and tittle, at least he would support their most important theological positions. And most certainly their take on justification, which has been said since Luther to be *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. As one friend recently wrote me, Edwards must never have accepted the concept of “infused” righteousness because that would have identified Edwards with Thomistic/Catholic/Arminian synergism, which teaches justification partly by grace and partly by works of the human will. For similar reasons, Tryon Edwards, a descendant and nineteenth-century editor, deleted the word “infusion” fourteen times from his edition of *Charity and Its Fruits*. For Tryon Edwards and my friend, Edwards could not have supported infusion because Edwards was an astute theologian in the Reformation tradition, which has tended to regard justification and infusion as mutually exclusive.<sup>1</sup> Hence Edwards must also have regarded them as mutually exclusive.

But a number of scholars have begun to question this facile assumption that Edwards, like certain evangelical and Lutheran theologians, sharply separated justification from

infusion, and faith from works. Fifty years ago, Tom Schafer said that Edwards "went beyond the doctrine of justification" and "practically eliminated" the notion of justification by faith alone (Schafer, 64 [see Works Cited]). More recently Anri Morimoto has charged that Edwards's thinking "endangers" the principle of justification of the "ungodly" and in fact is "contiguous" with Roman Catholic soteriology (Morimoto, 115, 10 [see Works Cited]). Michael McClymond agrees, finding an "affinity" between Edwards on justification and the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox conceptions of the same (McClymond, 140 [see Works Cited]).

Thus the title of my article: Was Edwards closer to Luther or Aquinas? In his teaching on what justifies sinful man, was Edwards more Protestant or Catholic? To answer these questions, I will first draw attention to terms and ways of thinking in Edwards that seem to undermine classical Protestant understandings. Then I will highlight dynamics in Edwards's soteriology that reinforce Protestant conceptions. In this section I will focus on two issues—whether (for Edwards) it is faith alone that justifies, and whether God justifies the ungodly. After comparing his soteriology with Thomas's, I will conclude with brief remarks on the relation of Edwardsean to Pauline soteriology, and then on what evangelicals can learn from Edwards on justification.

### THE "UN-PROTESTANT" EDWARDS

A close reading of the Edwards corpus turns up a remarkable number of terms and concepts that at first blush sound distinctly inhospitable to what are often thought to be Reformation insights. For example, Edwards writes frequently of "rewards." God bestows heaven as a reward for "the saints' own holiness and obedience" (Miscellanies 671 [hereafter referred to as M]).<sup>2</sup> He rewards "the weak little love" and "imperfect obedience" of believers more gloriously than he would have rewarded Adam's perfect obedience. There is no conflict between saying salvation is by Christ's righteousness and saying that heaven is a reward for believers' good works (M, 793).

"Conditions" for justification is another example. "In one sense of the word, Christ alone performs the condition of salvation" (M, 412). But from the human side, faith is not the only condition. "Love" and "good works" are also conditions (M, 315). In fact, "obedience is the most proper condition of the covenant of grace" (M, 1354), which means that all "the fruits of love to God and our neighbor" are conditions (M, 412). Edwards also includes repentance, "the first closing with Christ," and lifelong perseverance as conditions (M, 504; M, 617). Perseverance is particularly important because justification has a future dimension, making it provisional until the full term of perseverance has been completed: "The actual possession of eternal benefits is suspended on a condition yet to be fulfilled: perseverance in good works" (M, 689).

Because perseverance is a condition, Edwards is not afraid to talk about "inherent" qualities within saints. Not only does God impute excellence to them because of Christ's excellence, but God also *makes* them excellent "by a communication of God's excellency. God puts his own beauty, i.e., his beautiful likeness, upon their souls. They are made partakers of the divine nature, or moral image of God, 2 Peter 1:4" (God Glorified, 99 [see Works Cited]). "This blessing of the saving grace of God is a quality *inherent* in the nature of him who is the subject of it" (*Charity and Its Fruits*, 157 [see Works Cited]). The beautiful holiness which saints possess inherently "induce[s]" God to reward them with happiness, since God has a propensity "to communicate goodness to that which is beautiful and holy," as well as the propensity to "communicate goodness absolutely to that which now is nothing" (M, 314).<sup>3</sup>

Hence Edwards speaks of "infused grace" (M, 1003). Morimoto points out that Edwards used the word "infusion" to distinguish himself from Arminians who taught that grace merely presents reasons to the intellect which then unaided makes a decision. In contrast, Edwards wanted to emphasize the "comprehensive" influence of grace, both creating and persuading a new heart.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, Edwards sounds Catholic in the curious way he

folds regeneration into sanctification, and suggests that justification depends upon both. While in 1727 Edwards asserts that the initial moment of regeneration is instantaneous and the vivification of the soul is gradual (M, 241), by 1740 he argues that regeneration is "in some respect continued through the whole life" because it is the gradual restoration of the image of God "through the whole work of the sanctification of the Spirit" (M, 847). Scripture speaks of both regeneration and sanctification as "the raising the soul from the dead." Hence "regeneration . . . is every part of the work of sanctification," and both remain "to be performed" until the final "sentence of justification" is "passed" (M, 847).

#### CRITICAL PROTESTANT DISTINCTIONS

If Edwards waxes Catholic at points, he nevertheless retains important distinctions which are traditionally associated with Reformation traditions. First and foremost, Edwards repeatedly insists that "God don't [sic] justify on account of anything we do but only on account of what the Savior did" (M, 416). So when God rewards believers' good works, it is only because of the relation of those works to Christ. In themselves they are not worthy of reward (M, 627). Hence "the friendliness and favor [which God shows to believers] shall not be to them in their own name, but it shall all be to Christ" (M, 1091).

Edwards's denial of all human merit rests primarily upon his extraordinary conception of human sin: every instance of which incurs infinite guilt because our obligation to love or honor any being is great in proportion to the greatness or excellency of that being, or his worthiness to be loved or honored: we are under greater obligation to love a more lovely being than a less lovely; and if a being be infinitely excellent and lovely, our obligations to love him are therefore infinitely great: the matter is so plain it seems needless to say much about it (Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," in *Works* [hereafter referred to as JBFA] 19, 161).

Since our guilt is infinite, no goodness before justification can be of any avail, since nothing can subtract enough from

that infinity of hatefulness, not even faith: "The odiousness of [even one act of sin] so infinitely exceeds the excellency, that the excellency of that very act [of faith] is, in the sight of him that judges according to the law and mere justice, nothing" (M, 712). Even our holy acts after justification, by themselves, are "in a sense corrupt, and the hatefulness of the corruption of them, if we are beheld as we are in ourselves, or separate from Christ, infinitely outweighs the loveliness of the good that is in them . . . therefore the virtue must pass for nothing, out of Christ." Hence "all our righteousnesses are nothing, and ten thousand times worse than nothing (if God looks upon them as they are in themselves)" (JBFA, 241).

Edwards's solution to the problem of the infinitude of sin is the infinite value of Christ's obedience—infinite both because of Christ's own dignity, and also because Christ put himself to infinite expense to perform it (JBFA, 199). At this point Edwards's thinking is similar to Anselm's understanding of sin as an infinite crime requiring an infinite punishment. But while Anselm restricts his understanding of justification to medieval law, in which the sinner is a bystander in a forensic drama, Edwards based his conception on personal union with Christ. The result is that, as Conrad Cherry put it, "God's forensically reckoning man righteous does not leave his concrete life untouched but invades it as a vitally present reality" (Cherry, 103 [see Works Cited]).

For Edwards, then, we are justified not because of our faith but by virtue of our union with Christ. God does not confer union with Christ as a reward for faith; faith is the very act of "union" (JBFA, 158). Faith justifies because it makes Christ and the believer one, and because God has regard for Christ's righteousness, which is now the believer's because the believer is one with Christ. In Edwards's words, "What is real in the union between Christ and his people, is the foundation of what is legal; that is, it is something that is really in them and between them, uniting [them], that is the ground of the suitability of their being accounted as one by the Judge . . . because Christ and they are so united that they may be well looked upon [as] one" (M, 568). Therefore the imputation of

Christ's righteousness simply means partaking by union in the reward given to Christ for his obedience to the Father: "The whole mystical Christ shall be rewarded for this, which is the same thing as having Christ's righteousness imputed to them" (M, 502). Christ is the head of the body whose members are believers; therefore all he did "is reckoned to the believer's account" (JBFA, 191).

Robert Jenson notes that it is Edwards' idealism that grounds his notion of union and therefore also his doctrines of imputation, atonement and justification. Since, for Edwards, persons are not "impermeably bounded entities," because God's thinking and not substance metaphysics determines what is, Christ and the believer are "a single moral unit." Therefore Christ's righteousness is the "actual character of the believer's moral existence" (Jenson 2003, 5–6 [see Works Cited]).

In other words, God has decided that at the moment when a person trusts in Christ, that person becomes so merged with the person of Christ that the two become one, and Christ's righteousness swallows up the believer's sin. Therefore imputation is not a legal fiction or a cooking of the books, but God's perception of a new fact: the new moral character of the person called Christ who includes what used to be called the sinner alone. Similarly, the atonement is effective for believers because, since we are now in union with Christ, "if the Father loves the Son he must love us also" (Jenson 1988, 126 [see Works Cited]).

#### EDWARDS AND LUTHER

Jenson observes that Edwards's emphasis on mystical union is like that of Luther, who used Aristotelian epistemology (which held that consciousness consists of both the potential to receive and the actual content of what is perceived) to teach that when the believing soul hears the preached gospel, it becomes the content of what is preached, namely Christ and therefore his righteousness. But Melancthon and later Protestant scholasticism "shunted aside" Luther's doctrine of mystical union (Jenson 2003, 4–5 [see Works cited]).

Perhaps because both Luther and Edwards grounded justification in mystical union, the two often used marriage as an analogy. Edwards used it for two purposes. The first was to explain how perseverance could be a condition of justification, just as "first closing with Christ" is. When a woman consents to be a man's wife, she embraces the "duty" not only to cleave to him but also to be faithful to him until death. He accepts her as his wife because he imagines she *will* be so faithful: he sees her life-long faithfulness to him as "already virtually performed in her accepting him" (M, 617).

Second, Edwards used marriage to show that faith is not meritorious but the very act of uniting. When a man gives himself to a woman in marriage, he explains, he doesn't do it as a reward for her accepting him. Nor is her receiving him "considered as a worthy deed in her for which he rewards her, by giving himself to her; but 'tis by her receiving him, that the union is made, by which she hath him for her husband" (JBFA, 201).

Luther uses the same analogy in *Christian Liberty* (1520) to illustrate his famous "happy exchange," in which the believer takes on Christ's righteousness and Christ absorbs the believer's sins: "If Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his."

Significantly, for Luther as for Edwards, marriage (1) illustrates the mystical union, and (2) demonstrates that faith is not a work but the act of uniting. It is faith, Luther writes, that "unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom." By faith, "Christ and the soul become one flesh" (Luther 14–15).

There are other remarkable ways in which Luther and Edwards are similar. But in order to understand them, we must see that Luther did not hold views of justification often attributed to him by later Protestants and evangelicals. In his magisterial history of the doctrine of justification, Alister McGrath argues that Luther did not see justification in classical Protestant terms—namely, (1) that justification is a change in status not nature, a forensic declaration that the

believer is righteous rather than a process of being made righteous; (2) that there is a sharp distinction between the extrinsic pronouncement of justification and the intrinsic process of regeneration and sanctification; and (3) that the formal immediate cause of justification is the alien righteousness of Christ, imputed to man in justification, so that justification is a synthetic not analytic judgment by God (*ID*, 182 [see Works Cited]).

Instead, according to McGrath, Luther did not distinguish justification from sanctification as later Protestants did. He treated justification as a process of becoming: *feri est iustificatio* (WA 56.442.3; *ID*, 200). Justification for Luther was a healing process which permits God to overlook remaining sin because of a proleptic knowledge of the final outcome—not unlike Edwards's notion that "God in the act of justification, which is passed on a sinner's first believing, has respect to perseverance, as being virtually contained in that first act of faith; and 'tis looked upon and taken by him that justifies, as being as it were a property in that faith that then is" (JBFA, 203). For Luther, then, justification is both event and process (*ID*, 231), similar to the way in which Edwards saw final justification as depending upon both regeneration and sanctification.<sup>5</sup>

Luther and Edwards were also similar in the way they linked faith and the presence of the indwelling Christ. For Luther, faith and Christ are given simultaneously. McGrath observes that Luther rarely used the phrase *sola fide*, but when he did the reference was to *fides Christi*, the real presence of Christ within the believer. Hence the righteousness of Christ which justifies is not some impersonal attribute of God fictitiously ascribed to man, but the presence of Christ himself. *Sola fide* therefore meant "the justification of man on Christological grounds without his cooperation" (*ID*, 313), which means that neither Luther nor Edwards taught that man is justified by God on account of his faith. Instead, "God bestows upon that man faith and grace, without his cooperation, effecting within him the real and redeeming presence of Christ as the 'righteousness of God' within him, and justifying him on *that* account" (*ID*, 313).

Edwards agreed with Luther that justification is not on account of faith, but he also argued for the "natural fitness" of faith for justification. This was Edwards's attempt to respond to voluntarist critics such as deist Thomas Chubb who argued that God could have forgiven sins without the cross or any other means. In other words, there was no rational or necessary connection between justification and the means God used to procure it. God's arbitrary power and decision alone were responsible. In reply, Edwards made a series of arguments throughout his career that it was rationally appropriate for God to use the means and modes which he in fact did use. So, for example, Edwards repeatedly argued that God's offer of salvation to those with faith is not "arbitrary" but naturally fitting. It would be arbitrary to save only those with "a certain stature or hair color" (M, 1096), but fitting to save those who want to be saved—just as it is fitting for a man to offer joint possession of his estate only to a woman who accepts his offer (M, 1092). This reflects not God's reward for what is amiable or moral or beautiful—that is what Edwards called the "Arminian" position and "moral fitness"—but God's "love of order and hatred of confusion" (JBFA, 159; M, 712). God links salvation with faith not because of the beauty of faith but because of the beauty of the order of uniting those things that have a "natural agreement and congruity"—namely, bestowing Christ's benefits on the soul that by faith is united to Christ.

Edwards uses the analogies of a ring containing a precious jewel, and glass permitting light to shine through it. By faith the soul "is suited as the socket for the jewel that is set in it; by this the soul admits it, as things transparent admit light when opaque bodies refuse it" (M, 507). By the same measure of natural fit, there is a rational connection between a forgiving God justifying creatures who are willing to receive forgiveness. Edwards held that a forgiving disposition is implied in a principle of faith. Faith naturally and necessarily forgives, which means that forgiveness is a condition for receiving justifying mercy (M, 670).

Edwards's defense of the rationality of God's mode of jus-

tification was perhaps more philosophically elaborate but not intrinsically at odds with Luther's countless attempts to explain *why* it is faith and not works which receives Christ for salvation. Nevertheless, Luther and Edwards diverged slightly in their understandings of justification. Luther, for example, was "reluctant to admit that man becomes righteous in justification" (ID, 205). Although he frequently referred to the righteousness of believers, he made it clear that he was not "referring to the morality of believers, but to the real and redeeming presence of Christ" (ID, 205).

Edwards had no such reluctance. He spoke openly and often of believers partaking of God's own holiness, goodness and beauty. God is the author and cause of everything, "but he also lets created beings participate in his own life" such that they really share in his moral goodness (Lee, 61). By God's grace we "do all" and are "proper actors" (Edwards in Lee, 251 [see Works Cited]). His moral goodness becomes ours—by increasing degrees.

Second, there is a tension in Luther between his insistence on the alien and external nature of Christ's justifying righteousness, and the real presence of Christ within the believer (ID, 201). Edwards avoids this tension by speaking of grace not only as God's favor toward individuals (like Luther) but also as the real presence within the believer of the Holy Spirit, who becomes a new disposition. The Holy Spirit is not "domesticated" (Morimoto, 46) or given over to "human possession" (Lee, 52), but acts as a new principle of action through the believer's natural faculties. Hence there is no ambiguity about the relation between Christ's righteousness and the believer herself.

But this raises a further concern: perhaps Luther would worry that Edwards's enthusiasm for natural fitness and the believer's real moral righteousness undermine the sense that God saved the ungodly and by faith alone.

#### WAS EDWARDS UN-LUTHERAN?

Would Luther have been right to worry? Not really. Edwards was committed to the principle that faith is the

motor of all the Christian life. And that faith is the only virtue that can stand alone:

*Faith, when spoken of as compared with works, or an universal and persevering obedience, it may be said alone to be the condition of salvation, if by "condition" we mean that which of itself, without the actual performance of the other, will, according to the tenor of the divine promise, give a man a certainty of life (M, 518; emphasis added).*

In other words, no other Christian virtue by itself can save. Saving faith will necessarily produce obedience and a host of other Christian virtues, and so, when given opportunity, will never stand alone. But when opportunity is lacking, such as for infants who die, faith stands alone and is the only condition for salvation.

It is "most fitting" (M, 1260) that faith alone should stand alone. For faith is "the heart's giving entertainment to Christ and the gospel." By it hearts are joined to Christ. Since it is they and not others who are one with Christ, it is "a meet thing" that "they rather than others should be received to salvation," so that "what Christ has performed should be looked upon as belonging to them" (M, 412). That is, faith joins a person to Christ, and only those joined to Christ are saved, so it is fitting that "the condition of justification . . . is but one, and that is faith" (M, 669).

Furthermore, faith is a "comprehensive" term (M, 669) for the disposition of consent to Christ that by virtue of union with Christ entails every other Christian fruit. "Evangelical obedience" is an "expression of faith" (M, 670). Repentance "manifests faith" (M, 670). In the "first covenant," revealed in the Old Testament, faith was expressed by "giving all to God" or "trusting in him, hoping in him, waiting for him" (M, 1120). In the "second covenant," faith is expressed by "coming to him to receive all from him" (M 876). In other words, the condition of justification is always, formally, faith. But materially, the expression of that condition varies "under different dispensations" (M, 659).



Faith is the biblical term for the disposition of consent to God's offer of reconciliation through Christ. It accepts everything that is good, and rejects whatever is evil (M, 669). It behaves by love, since "love is of the essence of faith, yea, is the very life and soul of it" (M, 820). And love repents and obeys and forgives and perseveres. Faith is the badge of those who have consented to and therefore are joined with Christ. Because Christ in his righteousness will love and obey until the end, the condition of faith will necessarily entail all other conditions: repentance, obedience, love and perseverance.

In that sense, faith alone is justifying. But does it justify the ungodly? Cherry and McClymond have warned that Edwards's descriptions of faith as a "holy act" containing "virtual" love suggests that it is something other than the "ungodly" who are justified (Cherry, 96; McClymond, 140).<sup>6</sup>

Edwards's soteriology, however, is something like the New Testament's. There are expressions that suggest human ability; one thinks, for example, of Jesus' statement that "the good man brings good things out of the good stored in him" (Matthew 12:35, NIV). But there is also overwhelming insistence that humans are completely dependent upon God for anything good. Edwards declared that "God don't [sic] justify on account of anything we do but only on account of what the Savior did" (M, 416); he stressed repeatedly that in ourselves there is nothing "lovely" (M, 627), but that our guilt is infinite, even after only one sin (M, 712), and that "there is NO GOOD WORK BEFORE CONVERSION" (M, 797; original emphasis). Outside of Christ all our holy acts are infinitely hateful (JBFA, 212).

One sees this insistence on human dependence not only in statements to that effect but also in the larger structures of Edwards's thinking. As Tom Schafer pointed out, grace for Edwards is not the act of justification but God's physical influence on the will to bend it toward himself in love and aesthetic vision (Schafer, 67n). The thesis of *Freedom of the Will* is that every human movement toward God is due to divine determination, not to a supposedly self-determining human will. *Religious Affections* and *Original Sin*, two of Edwards's

greatest treatises, argue at length that without the divinely imparted "sense of the heart" unregenerate humanity is capable of nothing good. Finally, as Paul Ramsey has observed, there are two philosophical moves that prevent Edwards from ever attributing merit to any act of the human will: his idealism, by which all that is, is by God's free determination, and (not unrelated) his doctrine of continual creation, whereby everything that appears continuous is in reality only the recreation of what was before—just as the steady appearance of the moon belies the sun's light rays renewing an image nanosecond by nanosecond (Ramsey, 742 [see Works Cited]).

In sum, Edwards and Luther disagreed on whether believers share the moral righteousness of Christ. But they agreed that the basis of justification is mystical union with Christ, that justification and sanctification cannot be separated, and that justification changes not just the sinner's status but also her nature. In these respects, they are closer to each other than to many Lutherans and evangelicals.

#### WAS EDWARDS A CRYPTO-CATHOLIC?

Many Protestants would be surprised to learn that Thomas Aquinas sounds remarkably un-Catholic<sup>7</sup> in his Protestant-like assertions about grace and divine initiative. McGrath tells us that while the early Thomas said man can naturally dispose himself toward the reception of grace, beginning with *Summa Contra Gentiles* Thomas argued that justification is an internal divine operation, with God making the first move. The early Thomas believed man can achieve merit *de congruo* (imperfect acts which God rewards not by strict justice but mercy), but in his later *De Veritate* Thomas asserted flatly that there are only demerits before justification. No human merit can ever make a just claim on God, for there is too great a dissimilarity between God and man. God is in debt only to himself, as when he has ordained that he will reward his own gifts. Besides, Thomas added, salvation was decided in God's predestinating will, without reference to any foreseen merit (*ID*, 82, 86f., 114, 134).

Strangely enough (to many evangelicals), Edwards and

Thomas share important convictions about salvation. While both affirm the divine initiative in salvation and the christological character of grace, both also focus more intently than many Protestant thinkers on the relations between faith and the Christian virtues, and on the underlying realities that ground justification. Both are more interested than most Protestants in the ontological changes that take place in the souls of believers. And both reject a voluntarist approach that would make justification “merely an arbitrary aspect of the divine will” (*ID*, 63). Thomas said *iustitia* depends instead on *sapientia*, which is discernible to the intellect. Therefore while satisfaction (through the cross) was not absolutely necessary (contra Anselm), it was most appropriate to right reason and universally recognized to be so by rational beings (*ID*, 63). This is Thomas’ version of Edwardsean “fitness,” a pervasive concept in the Edwards corpus.

Was Edwards a crypto-Catholic? In many respects, no. Like most in the Reformed tradition of the eighteenth century, he believed the papacy was one of the twin Antichrists (Islam was the other). He denounced Roman veneration of Mary and the saints, belief in purgatory and indulgences, and its other “superstitions and idolatries” as “contrary to the light of nature” (*History of the Work of Redemption* [HWR], 445 [see Works Cited]). He also rejected the possibility that a true believer could lose her salvation, a possibility that Thomas affirmed (*ST*, 2a.24). More importantly, Edwards rejects the Thomistic idea of “created grace” that is distinguishable from the Holy Spirit; for Edwards, the Holy Spirit in the believer does not become an intermediate principle of virtue but acts “after the manner” of a human principle of action, so that “there is nothing in the human person that is produced by, or is similar to, the Holy Spirit that mediates the Holy Spirit’s presence.”<sup>8</sup>

But Edwards’s supreme devotion to Petrus van Mastricht, the late-seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed theologian who was steeped in Suarez, was not without effect.<sup>9</sup> Edwards agreed with Thomas—more than with many of his evangelical followers—that faith is inherently related to Christian living,

that justification changes the regenerate soul, and that we can discern in part why God saved us the way he did.

#### EDWARDS AND PAUL

For most evangelicals, and for good reason, it doesn’t matter what Edwards shared with Thomas or Luther. All that matters is what Edwards rightly explicated of the New Testament, and on the subject of justification what Edwards shared with Paul. It turns out that Edwards, in fact, was close to what the “New Perspective” on Paul has claimed for the “least of all the apostles” on justification.

Both proponents of the “New Perspective” and others have argued recently that the Pauline doctrine of justification has been misunderstood for much of church history. First, it has been given a prominence foreign to the New Testament. “The church has chosen to subsume its discussion of the reconciliation of man to God under the aegis of justification, thereby giving the concept an emphasis quite absent from the New Testament” (*ID*, 2). Second, the word has taken on meanings different from what Paul originally meant by *dikaiosis* and its cognates, because in its first 1500 years the church relied principally on Latin translations in which *iustitia* took on juristic connotations, and “imputation” became more significant for post-Reformation debates than it was for Paul (*ID*, 1–15).<sup>10</sup> In much of this long debate, justification was abstracted from its biblical context, where it found meaning only as part of God’s covenant with Israel and principally denoted God’s saving *acts* on behalf of his people.

By this interpretation, Paul’s doctrine of justification helps describe God’s action in history to fulfill his covenantal promises to work through Abraham’s seed to undo the evil unleashed by Adam’s sin. Paul’s law-court language is necessary to help explain *how* God reconciled sinful humanity, but it cannot be understood apart from the covenant and eschatology. By itself, legal language can appear to be “a cold piece of business, almost a trick of thought performed by a God who is logical and correct,” rather than a God of love who rights “the wrongs of his suffering by taking their weight upon

himself" (Wright, 110 [see Works Cited]). But taken in the context of the covenant, justification means that believers are declared now to be what they will be seen to be in the future, the true people of God. It takes seriously not only the past and present dimensions of justification but also its future (Romans 2:13): "Present justification declares, on the basis of faith, what future justification will affirm publicly (according to Romans 2:14–16 and 8:9–11) on the basis of the entire life" (Wright, 129).

Edwards would have agreed with the New Perspective that, for Paul, faith and works are not mutually exclusive, and justification has an eschatological dimension. We have seen that Edwards understood justification as dependent, in one sense, on sanctification (or "perseverance," as he put it). He also spoke of a two-fold justification, distinguishing between the judge's approbation and the public manifestation of that approbation at the last judgment (JBFA, 233). But more significantly, Edwards was less concerned with the juridical aspects of justification, and more interested in placing forensic righteousness within the larger covenantal story of God's determination to reconcile sinful humanity to himself. This is why in the second half of his career he was constructing a massive "History of the Work of Redemption" that would not only expand his 1739 sermon series by that title, but incorporate all apologetics, history of religions, and biblical studies into an enormous systematic theology cast in the historical mode. A compelling historical drama would replace abstract topical loci as the way to portray God's redemption of a people for himself. It is no surprise that Edwards published next to nothing on justification in the last twenty years of his life: the timeless legal transaction was swallowed up by the larger and more exciting story of God's redemption through time. That, he would have said, is what Paul meant by justification.

#### EDWARDS AND EVANGELICALS

So what does all this mean for evangelicals in the church today? How can Edwards help us understand and preach the gospel? I have time to state but a few suggestions. First,

Edwards would have us understand that the gospel is not justification *per se*, at least as justification is often presented as simply a juridical transaction in the heavens, "over the head" of the believer.<sup>11</sup> Rather, the gospel is the good news that God has been saving the world since its creation through his Son, and that by his death and resurrection he is redeeming a body in mystical union with the Son. Faith is not the instrument that gets members attached to the body, but is the act of union itself, and so is the badge identifying the members. Since these are members of the person of Christ, they will gradually begin to resemble that person. Any discussion of justification must therefore include both juridical and participationist language. This means there is no contradiction between justification and deification properly understood—that is, becoming not gods but "partakers of the divine nature in increasing degrees" (Morimoto, 158). In other words, faith cannot be abstracted from works of love.

Edwards suggests that we must eschew false dichotomies between faith and works, imputation and infusion, justification and sanctification, soteriology and ecclesiology. Making the terms in each of these pairs mutually exclusive has damaged our churches and witness. For example, separating imputation from infusion has turned many Christians into Pelagians because they have concluded that "since Christ died for my sins, now it is up to *me* to live a life of gratitude."<sup>12</sup> Far better is the Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1997), which speaks of the "distinction" but not "separation . . . between justification itself and the renewal of one's way of life that necessarily follows from justification and without which faith does not exist" (26).

Abstracting faith from works of discipleship, and imputation from the history of redemption, have helped breed an individualism that is all too familiar. Salvation is seen to be unrelated to the church or costly discipleship, contributing to the easy believism of Lone Ranger "Christians" accountable to no one. Edwardsean justification, in contrast, teaches that salvation is participation in the Christ whose sign is Christian practice, and who lives only in a body of believers. It warns

pastors that because faith naturally contains forgiveness and persevering love, they should be chary of declaring final justification for those who merely pray the sinner's prayer or go forward at the altar call. Or they should preach the difference between provisional and eschatological justification, the reality of the latter evidenced by practice not profession.

Finally, for the question of my title: Is Edwards closer to Luther or Thomas? As I have tried to show in this article, Edwards stands closer to *both* Luther and Thomas than to many of his own evangelical followers. On justification, the three theologians have more in common with one another than with great numbers of those who claim their mantles—whether it be scholastic Lutherans and evangelicals who separate imputation and justification from infusion and sanctification, or Catholics who believe God rewards their religious efforts with a foothold in purgatory.

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#### Notes

1. It is possible, of course, that Tryon believed his great-grandfather actually believed in infusion and was trying to hide it from readers of the edited text. But even if that is the case, Tryon sought to present an Edwards who sounded more Protestant than Catholic.
2. "M" refers to the "Miscellanies," Edwards' private theological notebooks that are being published in four volumes of the Yale edition.
3. This is why Jaroslav Pelikan cites Edwards as one who defines "salvation as deification" (Pelikan 5:161).
4. Morimoto, *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1995), 19–21. On Edwards's use of "infusion," see also Ramsey, who notes that Calvin asserted that saints are "infused with his holiness" (*Institutes* III, vi, 1), and that both Tur-

- retin and Mastricht spoke similarly; Ramsey, "Infused Virtues in Edwardsean and Calvinistic Context," 746, 742–43.
5. If Luther did not make the breaks with tradition that are often claimed, he nevertheless made some novel moves. He "introduced a decisive break with the western theological tradition as a whole by insisting that, through his justification, man is *intrinsically* sinful yet *extrinsically* righteous." He rejected the medieval notion that grace is a quality of the soul because, he argued, man cannot possess righteousness. But faith is the mark of the presence of Christ. So while grace is God's absolute favor toward an individual, external to man, faith is partial and internal. And it is the sign of the presence of Christ, whose righteousness is the believer's—yet still extrinsic. Luther also differed with Augustine methodologically by asserting that God's righteousness is revealed exclusively in the cross, and that the same can be said for God's glory, wisdom, and strength (*ID*, 182, 201, 313, 195).
  6. Both Cherry and Morimoto conclude, however, that such charges are unfounded, Cherry, 106; Morimoto, 129–30.
  7. By "un-Catholic" I assume stereotypes such as the ones cited on the first page of this paper, and the evangelical canard that Catholic theology teaches salvation by works.
  8. Lee, (see Works Cited), 51.
  9. Edwards famously wrote that Mastricht's systematics was "better than Turretin or any other book in the world, excepting the Bible." Jonathan Edwards's letter to Joseph Bellamy, 15 Jan. 1747, *Works* 16, 217.
  10. McGrath explains that Protestant emphasis on forensic imputation derived, ironically, from the Catholic monk Erasmus, whose 1516 translation of the New Testament at Romans 4:3 changed the Vulgate's *reputatum* to *imputatum*: "*credidit aut Abraham deo et imputatum est ei ad iustitiam*." According to McGrath, this new word plus Luther's concept of extrinsic justifying righteousness explain Melancthon's subsuming all of justification under forensic imputation (*ID*, 218).
  11. According to the Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1997), justification "stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith, which are to be seen as internally related to each other. It is an indispensable criterion, which constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ" (18).
  12. Thanks to Paul Hinlicky for this observation. Of course, Pelagius did not teach that Christ's death saves. But he did teach that we have only our own power to obey Christ, which is the implicit presumption of evangelicals who take this position.