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THE EXEGETICAL BASIS FOR THE EARLY LUTHERAN DOCTRINE OF  
BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

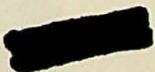
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by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis was motivated by the question often raised in the classroom about the relation of faith to the regeneration in baptism. The question can be formulated in many ways. Is faith the presupposition for regeneration? What difference is there between faith and regeneration? Must faith precede baptism? What type of faith is given in baptism? What is faith without understanding of the Word of God? If baptism regenerates the infants who do not have preceding faith, what does baptism effect in the adult who already has faith? Can we still speak of regeneration in adult baptism? Or is baptism only a sign for the adult? Must baptism be regarded as a confession of faith?

In order to get an answer for these questions we decided to direct these questions to Luther and the theologians of his time, although knowing ~~that~~ the answer could be given by God himself. So we saw our task to be the study of the exegetical basis of the early Lutherans for their doctrine of baptismal regeneration. After we started in this task we saw that the field was too large, and that we had to stay mainly with one man. We chose Luther, because of his importance in the doctrinal development of the Lutheran church. We have to confess humbly that we were not able even to compare all his sayings about baptismal regeneration.



But even so we offer this part of our study in the hope that it may bring the essential understanding of Luther's doctrine of baptismal regeneration. We could not always remain strictly with an exegetical approach, because Luther does not follow a strict exegesis, but always uses the biblical evidence for discourses in systematics, and for preaching to the daily life of his hearers. Therefore Luther's answers are essentially practical, always tied up with the central doctrine of justification by faith.

For the purpose of organization we arranged Luther's statements under two main points of view: what happens at the baptism of infants? and, what happens at the baptism of adults? These questions are preceded by a discussion of the means of grace and are followed by considerations about the meaning of baptism throughout life. In the conclusion we compare the answers of Luther with those of Melancthon, Johannes Bugenhagen, and Johann Brenz, although the study of these theologians cannot be considered as completed. The main answers that we found are the following.

1. Baptism is a means of grace, because it is instituted by God, and is connected with the Word of God. Therefore God himself is active in baptism.

2. The Holy Spirit gives his gifts in baptism: faith, regeneration, forgiveness of sins, and eternal salvation.

3. Faith is to be understood as a gift of God. It does not depend on our reason or intellect, but orients and



guides our reason and intellect as soon as they develop in the infant. Faith is at the same time renewal or regeneration, because it is the power of God in our life.

4. Since faith is renewal, there can be regeneration before baptism. This is the presupposition in the case of adult baptism.

5. There is no distinction made between regeneration and renewal. Regeneration is also described as the creation of the new man in us. The old Adam remains. The regenerated is therefore "simul iustus et peccator." Regeneration is a new creation in process. It will be completed when we are completely holy. Since we can be holy only in heaven it follows that we have a continual regeneration until the Last Day. In this view the baptism of a believing adult is still part of the continual regeneration.

6. The regeneration in process has to be fostered by our response all through life. Faith is the only power through which the Holy Spirit works in us. But since it involves our activity it becomes clear that baptism is the beginning of repentance, because [it is the turn to God effected in us by God himself.]

7. The whole life of the baptized person is therefore characterized by a continual death and resurrection: death for the sin, resurrection for the new man in us. The final goal of baptism is the eternal salvation in heaven. There we will be completely regenerated and holy.



The main source for the sayings of Luther used in this study is the Weimar edition of Luther's works. Where a printed translation into English is used this is indicated in the footnotes. All other translations are provided by the author of this thesis.

Luther's understanding of grace is based on his understanding of the nature of man. He sees man as completely corrupted by sin. Since every man is born with original sin, and therefore without any ability to approach God, he needs to be approached by God. This approach God makes through the sacraments. The means through which God gives his grace to man are the Word and the Sacraments. The medieval church understood grace from the point of view of the sacraments; the sacraments infused grace. Luther was to understand it the other way around: he understood the sacraments from the point of view of grace, as Werner Jetter<sup>1</sup> puts it. The source of this understanding he found in Scripture, and the change came with an exegetical discovery. The Word of God became for Luther the means of grace.<sup>2</sup> Christ to the "faithful" alone comes to us through the Word. This changes our hearts so that we believe, and by this faith we are saved.

<sup>1</sup> Werner Jetter, *Die Lehre des Martin Luther. Eine Untersuchung über das Wesen der reformatorischen Sakramente und Taufanschauung* (Hilzingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1934), p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 130.



## CHAPTER II

### THE MEANS OF REGENERATION

Luther's view of regeneration is based on his understanding of the means of grace. He sees man as completely enslaved by sin. Since every man is born with original sin, and therefore without any ability to approach God, he needs to be approached by God. This approach God makes through certain means. The means through which God gives his grace to man are the Word and the Sacraments. The medieval church understood grace from the point of view of the sacraments: the sacraments infused grace. Luther came to understand it the other way around: he understood the sacrament from the point of view of grace, as Werner Jetter<sup>1</sup> puts it. The source of this understanding he found in Scripture, so that the change came with an exegetical discovery. The Word of God became for Luther the means of grace.<sup>2</sup> Christ is the "opus Dei" which comes to us through the Word. This changes our hearts so that we believe, and by this faith we are regenerated.

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<sup>1</sup>Werner Jetter, Die Taufe beim jungen Luther. Eine Untersuchung über das Werden der reformatorischen Sakraments und Taufanschauung (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1954), p. 131.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 132.



## The Word

In his commentary on I Pet. 1:23 Luther says clearly that "regeneration is through the Word of God," which is the imperishable seed Peter speaks about. How does it happen? "God gives the Word into the hearts of people, and where this Word remains the Holy Spirit is present and makes a new man."<sup>3</sup> Luther even calls Christ's passion a "sacrament" and a mystery. We receive it through the Word which, being heard, read, and considered, creates in us faith, or as Luther calls it, the "affectus."<sup>4</sup> The Word is the instrument of God's grace, through the Word God creates faith, and with faith God gives salvation. Luther puts the Word on the same level with the sacraments,<sup>5</sup> and even above

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<sup>3</sup>Martin Luther, "Epistel S. Petri gepredigt und ausgelegt. D. M. Luther. 1523," D. Martin Luthers Werke (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1891), XII, 298, ll. 29-31: "Gott lesst das wortt, das Evangelium, aussgehen und den samen fallen ynn die hertzen der menschen. Wo nu der ym hertzen hafftet, so ist der heylig geyst da und macht eyn newen menschen, da wirt gar eyn ander mensch, ander gedanken, andere wortt und werck. Also wirstu gantz verwandelt." Hereafter the Weimar edition will be cited as WA, followed by volume, part if shown, page, and line numbers.

<sup>4</sup>Martin Luther, "Duo sermones de passione Christi. 1518. Jes. 53,2 und Ps. 45,3. 5 April 1518," WA, I, 339, 19-24: "Nam passio Christi . . . etiam est sacramentum et mysterium. . . . Itaque passionem Christi utiliter vel auditurus vel lecturus vel consideraturus talem concipias necesse est affectum, tanquam ipse eandem passionem in et cum Christo patereris."

<sup>5</sup>Martin Luther, "Predigten Luthers, gesammelt von J. Poliander. 1519-1521," WA, IX, 440, 6-12: "Hec verba sacramentum quoddam sunt, per quod, si quis credat, et



them, because for him the Word must always be the most important part of the sacraments. In his commentary on Gen. 17:5 Luther says that baptism is binding for us because besides the external means there is the Word of God.<sup>6</sup> In the Large Catechism Luther expresses the same thought, citing Augustine's well-known word: "Accedat (!) verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum."<sup>7</sup> The Word is what makes baptism so valuable, and so "you should honor and exalt baptism on account of the Word, since God himself has honored it by words and deeds and has confirmed it by wonders from heaven."<sup>8</sup> In a sermon on the Lord's Supper he says that

A Christian should know that on earth there is no greater sanctuary than the Word of God, because even the sacrament is made, is blessed, and is made holy by the Word of God, and through it we all are born spiritually and consecrated to be Christians.

The Word "sanctifies everything and is higher than the sacrament."<sup>9</sup>

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nos regeneramur. . . . Ita verba Christi sunt sacramenta, per que operatur salutem nostram."

<sup>6</sup>Martin Luther, "Genesis-Vorlesung. 3 Juni 1535--17 Nov. 1545," WA, XLIII, 71, 36.

<sup>7</sup>Martin Luther, "Baptism," in "The Large Catechism," The Book of Concord, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 438, par. 18. Hereafter The Book of Concord will be cited as BC, followed by the page and paragraph numbers.

<sup>8</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 439, par. 21.

<sup>9</sup>Martin Luther, "Das Hauptstück des ewigen und neuen



Luther stressed the Word against the sacrament not because he intended to devalue the sacrament, but because he had to react against the scholastic understanding of the means of grace. The Word was for them a secondary element in the sacrament, because "the water of baptism, . . . inasmuch as it is the instrument of the Divine power, cleanses the soul," as Thomas says.<sup>10</sup> This is what Luther objected to in his Smalcald Articles, when he says in his article on baptism that he rejects this position of Thomas.<sup>11</sup> Therefore one can understand that at the beginning Luther gave more attention to the Word than to the sacrament.<sup>12</sup> Later on he had to stress also the value

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Testaments von dem hochwürdigen Sakrament beider Gestalt, Fleisch und Blut Christi, Zeichen und Zusage, die er uns in demselben getan hat Matth. 26, 26-28. 17 April 1522," WA, X, iii, 70, 28-71, 2: "Eyn Christen sol wissen, das auff erden keyn grossers heyltumb ist dan Gottes wort, dan auch das Sacrament selbs durch Gottes wort gemacht und gebenedeyet und geheyliget wirt unnd wir alle auch dardurch geystlich geporn und zu Christen geweyhet werden: so dan eyn Christ das wort, das alle ding heyligt und hoher ist dan das sacrament. . . ."

<sup>10</sup>Thomas Aquinas, The "Summa Theologiae" of St. Thomas Aquinas, literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd., 1923), Part III, Third Number (QQ. LX-LXXXIII), Qu. 62, art. 1. Werner Elert, Morphologie des Luthertums, (München: C. H. Beck, 1931-1932), I, 258.

<sup>11</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "The Smalcald Articles," BC, p. 310, par. 2.

<sup>12</sup>Gerhard Ebeling, "Luthers Auslegung des 14. (15.) Psalms in der ersten Psalmenvorlesung im Vergleich mit der exegetischen Tradition," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, L (1953), 311-312 and 319-320.



of the "sign" in the sacrament against the enthusiasts.<sup>13</sup>

### The Sacrament

Luther knows that the Word of God comes to us also in connection with the sacrament. In his treatise on "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" he considers three sacraments at the beginning, Baptism, Lord's Supper, and Penance, but at the end he settles on only two, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, because "it has seemed proper to restrict the name of sacrament to those promises which have signs attached to them."<sup>14</sup> In his catechisms Luther expands this definition of sacrament and requires three things, according to Matt. 28:19, for the Sacrament of Baptism. He understands that this passage speaks of the water, the Word of God, and the command of God as essential to baptism. "Baptism is not merely water ('go therefore . . . baptizing'), but it is water used according to God's command ('go . . . make disciples') and connected with God's Word ('in the name of the . . .')."<sup>15</sup> But on the

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<sup>13</sup>Ruben Josefson, Luthers lära om dopet, in a book review by H. H. Schrey in Theologische Literaturzeitung, Nr. 9 (1949), col. 525.

<sup>14</sup>Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church. 1520," Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), XXXVI, 124 and 81.

<sup>15</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "The Small Catechism," BC,



basis of this passage and of Mark 16:16 Luther says again that the most important thing in baptism is the Word of God, which has to be grasped by faith.

It is not the water that produces these effects, but the Word of God connected with the water. For without the Word of God the water is merely water and no baptism. But when connected with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit. . . .<sup>16</sup>

Matt. 28:19 and Mark 16:16 are for Luther the "words upon which baptism is founded and to which everything is related that is to be said on the subject," because "these words contain God's commandment and ordinance."<sup>17</sup> In a sermon on Matt. 3:13-17 he develops the whole doctrine of baptism. There he stresses again the need of three things: the Word, the water, and the institution. Commenting on Eph. 5:26 Luther says that the Word is the essence of baptism.<sup>18</sup> The most important thing in baptism is to ask about the Founder, so that we know "who ordained and commanded such baptism."<sup>19</sup> When we baptize in the name of

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p. 348, par. 2. Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 438, par. 14.

<sup>16</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Small Catechism," BC, p. 349, par. 10.

<sup>17</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 437, pars. 3 and 6.

<sup>18</sup>Martin Luther, "Sermon at the Baptism of Bernard von Anhalt. 1540," Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), LI, 320-321. Hereafter Luther's Works will be cited as LW, followed by volume and page numbers.

<sup>19</sup>Luther, "Sermon at Baptism of Bernard," LW, LI, 321.



God, "God himself is baptizing," and "it is done indeed by the holy Trinity."<sup>20</sup> Therefore it is a "water of the divine majesty."<sup>21</sup> It is called a baptism not on account of the water, but on account of the Word and God's command.<sup>22</sup>

Commenting on Gen. 3:24 Luther rejects Lyra's exegesis of that text. Lyra, according to Luther, thinks that the tree of life in the garden of Eden had power in itself to give life to Adam. Luther says that the tree had this power only because of the Word of God. He says the same also of the bronze serpent in Num. 21:9, and the sacraments. Therefore Luther rejects the position of Thomas and Bonaventure who see a special virtue in the water. Luther recognizes the special virtue only in the Word connected with the water. Therefore he prefers the position of Duns Scotus which, he says, is correct: that baptism is a divine covenant which God makes with us through the element.<sup>23</sup> As long as the creature is apprehended by the

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid. Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 437, par. 10.

<sup>21</sup>Martin Luther, "Von der heiligen Taufe. Predigten. 1534," WA, XXXVII, 633, 18: "Das es heisst ein wasser der Götlichen Maieestet. . . ."

<sup>22</sup>Luther, "Predigten von der Taufe," WA, XXXVII, 633, 33-36, and 630, 17-21.

<sup>23</sup>Martin Luther, "Genesis-Vorlesung. 3 Juni 1535--17 Nov. 1545," WA, XLII, 170, 8-19.



Word it effects what the Word promises, and baptism has the promise that it regenerates with the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup>

In the sacrament of baptism water is to be used, but "the nucleus in the water is God's Word or commandment and God's name."<sup>25</sup> This Luther stresses again and again.

God himself stakes his honor, his power, and his might on it. Therefore it is not simply a natural water, but a divine, heavenly, holy, and blessed water--praise it in any other terms you can--all by virtue of the Word, which is a heavenly, holy Word which no one can sufficiently extol, for it contains and conveys all the fullness of God.<sup>26</sup>

This command and Word of God make baptism necessary to salvation.

Moreover, it is solemnly and strictly commanded that we must be baptized or we shall not be saved. We are not to regard it as an indifferent matter. . . . It is of the greatest importance that we regard baptism as excellent, glorious, and exalted. What God institutes and commands cannot be useless. It is a most precious thing. . . .<sup>27</sup>

In his exegesis of Gen. 17:5 Luther says that circumcision was the covenant by which God accepted not only the people of Israel, but also other people into the communion of righteousness. So also baptism is now, according to Mark 16:16, the sign of God's people, the Church, because

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<sup>24</sup>Luther, "Genesis-Vorlesung," WA, XLII, 170, 23-24: "Quamdiu autem creatura est apprehensa verbo, tamdiu est et facit, quod verbum promittit."

<sup>25</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 438, par. 16.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 438, par. 17.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 437, pars. 6 and 7.



without baptism there is no salvation.<sup>28</sup> Luther knows that God can save also without baptism but we in the Church are bound to the means commanded by God, that is, that without the external baptism nobody will be saved,<sup>29</sup> that the Holy Spirit does not work without the external means.<sup>30</sup>

That God is the author of baptism and that He performs the baptism was the central thought also for Augustine.<sup>31</sup> But for him the Word and the sacrament received their power as means of grace primarily from the Church, and not, as Luther sees it, that the Church receives all its power from the Word and the sacrament.<sup>32</sup> With Peter Lombard the sacraments are the only means through which God acts in his grace, because they bring the "positive powers of grace" to the believer.<sup>33</sup> Thomas sees the sacraments as "causae instrumentalis gratiae" which have the grace

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<sup>28</sup>Luther, "Genesis-Vorlesung," WA, XLII, 624, 2: "Extra baptismum enim non est salus. . . ."

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., XLIII, 71, 20-24: "Potest Deus salvare sine Baptismo, . . . sed nobis in Ecclesia secundum ordinatam Dei potestatem iudicandum et docendum est, quod sine Baptismo illo externo nemo salvetur."

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., XLIII, 71, 35-37: "Haec quidem omnia externa sunt, sed in verbum inclusa. Igitur sine eis spiritus sanctus nihil operatur."

<sup>31</sup>Jetter, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup>Jetter, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup>Jetter, pp. 333 and 334.



constantly in themselves.<sup>34</sup> With this emphasis the elements have an important role in Thomas' doctrine of the sacraments. With Gabriel Biel the focus is directed again from the elements to the institution.<sup>35</sup> Finally with Luther the central point is the Word of God and his command. The reason for this is that we can be saved without the sacrament, but not without the Word.<sup>36</sup>

### Conclusion

Since Luther learned that there is no hope in ourselves for a restoration of the image of God in us, because we are sinners by birth and are under God's judgment and condemnation in our total being, he found the way out of this calamity by looking to God only and asking him for the answer and solution of our problems. Only God himself can restore the relation between himself and the fallen man. Only God himself can reveal his action and intention towards man. The revelation of God came to us in His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ, who is the Word incarnate. He reconciled God and the fallen man through his death and resurrection. The message of this action of God comes to

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<sup>34</sup>Jetter, p. 334.

<sup>35</sup>Jetter, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup>Luther, "Vom Sakrament beider Gestalt," WA, X, 111, 68, 30-32: "es ist vil mer ann den wortten odder verheysung gelegen dan ann den zeychen, dan des zeychens kunnen wir entberen, der wortt können wir aber nicht geratten."



us through the witness of Scripture, which is the written Word of God. When this message is preached to us God himself is present. He is present in a concreteness that we can understand, that can reach us. He is present even in a concreteness that we can touch and feel, because he attached his Word to signs in which he promised to be present.

When therefore we hear the message of the Word of God or use the sacraments God is dealing with us concretely. He himself comes to us, he approaches us so that we may return to him. This concreteness of God's dealing with us Luther saw very clearly and insisted on it against the scholastics and the enthusiasts of his time, because this was for him the only foundation on which our salvation can be built. He says that when we hear "Word" mentioned, we understand the promise and the preaching. In the Roman Church he only understood "word" as a part of the sentence, and had no understanding of the promise of God.<sup>37</sup> This is the importance of his insight, that he understood that the preaching of the Word of God gives us God's promise,

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<sup>37</sup>Luther, "Genesis-Vorlesung. 3 Juni 1535--17 Nov. 1545," WA, XLIV, 711, 10-14: "Nam hodie post restitutam lucem Euangelii, quando audimus verbum nominari, intelligimus promissionem et ministerium. Tum vero, cum mentio verbi fieret, referebam ego animum et cogitationem ad Donatum, in quo definitur: Verbum est pars orationis cum tempora et persona, etc. Quia nihil prorsus docebatur de promissionibus."



because God is present in his Word. When this Word reaches us Christ makes his dwelling in us,<sup>38</sup> and the Holy Spirit works in us.

Our natural condition is so desperate that God has to transform us completely through the Word. God calls it a new birth, a regeneration. About this regeneration we will speak in the next chapter. But for Luther the means to produce this effect in us is the Word. This Word can reach us simply through preaching, or together with other means commanded by God. In baptism the Word reaches us through the means of water. Therefore Luther stresses the importance of baptism so much, because it is a means of grace. It is one of the means commanded by God to put man in contact with the transforming Word of God. Through this means God reaches man and changes his life, restoring the relationship between God and the one baptized. God himself comes to man through this means. And when God comes in his Word and sacrament he comes in a completely concrete way.<sup>39</sup> This concreteness of God's presence is expressed by the element commanded in the sacrament. As this is applied personally and privately to the one baptized,

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<sup>38</sup>Ragnar Bring, "Gesetz und Evangelium und der dritte Gebrauch des Gesetzes in der lutherischen Theologie," Zur Theologie Luthers, aus der Arbeit der Luther-Agricola Gesellschaft in Finnland (Helsinki: Akademische Buchhandlung, 1943), I, 52.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 52.



God deals personally and privately with him.<sup>40</sup>

Since Luther identifies the Word with God's presence and promise it is not strange that he emphasizes the Word more than the sacrament. The sacrament is for Luther a continuation of the Word, or a "verbum visibile."<sup>41</sup> Both Word and sacrament are effective because of the presence of God. Since God acts through these means, Word and sacrament are also called the "symbola, tesserae et characteres ecclesiae,"<sup>42</sup> because where God works in the hearts of people, there is the Church.<sup>43</sup>

Because of the Word connected with the water Luther can call the water a "durchgottet, durchgeistet, gottlich, himmlisch Wasser."<sup>44</sup> And because God himself works the regeneration through the Word in baptism it can be called "verbum actuale."<sup>45</sup> This is Luther's understanding of the means of grace, and therefore his presupposition for his understanding of the sacrament of baptism. This is also

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<sup>40</sup>Elert, p. 258.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Luther, "Ad librum eximii magistri nostri Mag. Ambrosii Catharini, defensoris Silv. Prieratis acerrimi, responsio M. Lutheri. 1521," WA, VII, 720, 32-36.

<sup>43</sup>Elert, p. 256.

<sup>44</sup>Luther, "Predigten von der Taufe," WA, XXXVII, 264, 27; 265, 24; 266, 3.

<sup>45</sup>Paul Althaus, "Was ist die Taufe?: Zur Antwort an Karl Barth," Theologische Literaturzeitung, LXXIV (Dez. 1949), 707.



the reason why H. Sasse said that "any discussion of the sacrament of baptism must begin with the fact that baptism is a sacrament, a means of grace in the strict sense. . . ."46 For Luther baptism is one of the means of grace.

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<sup>46</sup>Hermann Sasse, "The Doctrine of Baptism," The Lutheran Outlook (Sept. 1949), p. 265.



## CHAPTER III

### THE ACT OF REGENERATION

Luther gave lectures primarily in Exegesis, but even as an Old Testament scholar he presented the whole of Scripture and Theology to his hearers, uniting Exegesis with Dogmatics and Preaching.<sup>1</sup> Some think that this weakened Luther's scientific approach,<sup>2</sup> while others assure us that this was the best solution for the hermeneutical problem of his time.<sup>3</sup> This makes it difficult to follow Luther's exegesis in a pure form. We always will find digressions in his sermons and lectures in which he expresses his dogmatic point of view in the course of his exegesis. This should not disturb us, since it tells us that he was not interested in the mere analysis of a particular saying of the Scriptures, but had in mind a general view of theology and the concern to apply it existentially to his hearers. Theology was for him essentially something practical. He wanted to be an instrument of God to his hearers. So he let God speak of Christ and salvation at every

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<sup>1</sup>Gerhard Ebeling, "Die Anfänge von Luthers Hermeneutik," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, XLVIII (1951), 174, Anm. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Aug. Meissinger, Luthers Exegese in der Frühzeit (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachf., 1911), p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>Ebeling, p. 174, Anm. 3.



opportunity.

Luther has no special dissertation on regeneration in baptism, but on many occasions he refers to it, linking it always with the action of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. He identifies regeneration even with the faith created in our hearts by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit through the Word and baptism. In this study we will speak arbitrarily of the different concepts related to regeneration, since we really cannot separate them in Luther's understanding of it. We chose three headings which in Luther's mind seem to be synonymous: the gift of the Holy Spirit, faith, and regeneration.

We consider in this chapter the act of God in us, without taking into consideration the human reaction to this act of God. This immediately puts us, with Luther, on the side of those who know that our salvation is totally an act of God. The human reaction and use of baptism all through the life, which is one of the most important aspects of the doctrine of baptism in Luther, we will consider in the next chapter.

It is interesting to learn that Luther, even while he stresses Matt. 28:19 and Mark 16:16 as "the words upon which baptism is founded and to which everything is related that is to be said on the subject,"<sup>4</sup> does not use Matt. 28:19

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<sup>4</sup>Martin Luther, "Baptism," in "The Large Catechism,"



in relation to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. But Mark 16:16, Tit. 3:5, John 3:5 are the main sources of his doctrine of regeneration. He also uses some other passages to explain details of the act of regeneration, as we will see. Nearly always when Luther preaches on Matt. 3:13-17 he speaks of baptism, comparing the baptism of Jesus with our baptism.

### The Gift of the Holy Spirit

When in the Large Catechism Luther speaks about the baptism of infants he does not start the discussion with the exegesis of some Scripture passage, but he gives arguments from experience and church history. But behind these arguments lie the Scriptures, as he shows in other circumstances. He knows that God has sanctified many who have been baptized as infants and "has given them the Holy Spirit."<sup>5</sup> God is pleased with the baptism of infants, or he would not "give his grace and Spirit" through it.<sup>6</sup> What does it mean when Luther says that in baptism God gives us his Holy Spirit?

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The Book of Concord, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 437, par. 3. Hereafter The Book of Concord will be cited as BC, followed by page and paragraph numbers.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 443, par. 50.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.



Acts 8:17

Luther takes this passage of Acts 8:17 as speaking of baptism, and says that through it we are "born of the Holy Spirit," and that the "Holy Spirit is given to us in baptism."<sup>7</sup> This means that receiving the Holy Spirit in baptism is equivalent to regeneration. This renewal of man is possible only through the bath of regeneration, of the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> The bath of regeneration is also the bath of the Holy Spirit.

Tit. 3:5

Because God himself baptizes "this act must be so powerful that it makes a man altogether new."<sup>9</sup> The Holy Spirit is present in baptism, and through his power we are "born again and anew to righteousness and eternal

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<sup>7</sup>Martin Luther, "Weihnachtspostille. 1522," D. Martin Luthers Werke (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1910), X, 1, 1, 117, ll. 6-8: "denn er leret, der heylig geyst werd ynn der tawff geben, wie auch Christus leret, ia, ynn der tawff werden wyr auss dem heyligen geyst gepornn." Hereafter the Weimar edition will be cited as WA, followed by volume, part if shown, page, and line numbers.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 116, 13-15.

<sup>9</sup>Martin Luther, "Sermon at the Baptism of Bernard von Anhalt, Matt. 3:13-17. 1540," Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), LI, 324. Hereafter Luther's Works will be cited as LW, followed by volume and page numbers.



life."<sup>10</sup> It is completely the action of God the Holy Spirit who comes through baptism. "The Holy Spirit works faith in us and through this faith we regain the image of God which we lost in Paradise."<sup>11</sup> In the Small Catechism Luther comments on Tit. 3:5, using it as the main source for the doctrine of regeneration. This water of baptism is "a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit."<sup>12</sup> Through baptism the Holy Spirit gives us "eternal grace, purity or holiness, and eternal life." It takes us from sin to righteousness, from debt and condemnation to innocence and grace, from death into eternal life.<sup>13</sup> The presence of the Holy Spirit in us is identified with his grace, with all the blessed consequences for us. To have God's grace means for Luther to have God's good will and pleasure, to be accepted by God, to receive his favor and blessing. In all this statements about baptism in his comments on Tit. 3:5 Luther identifies the "washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit" completely with baptism. For Luther this passage speaks only of the baptism with water, not of the baptism of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>11</sup>Luther, "Sermons on the Gospel of Saint John, chapters 1-4. 1537-1540," LW, XXII, 285.

<sup>12</sup>Luther, "The Sacrament of Holy Baptism," in "The Small Catechism," BC, p. 349, par. 10.

<sup>13</sup>Luther, "Von der heiligen Taufe. Predigten. 1534," WA, XXXVII, 645, 12-18.



in general, as other exegetes want to take this passage.

John 3:5

It is clear for Luther that John 3 speaks of baptism. We are "born again as a new being by baptism and the Holy Spirit,"<sup>14</sup> "by the Word of God, baptism, and faith,"<sup>15</sup> "by water and the Holy Spirit."<sup>16</sup> Luther can identify all these concepts and use them interchangeably, because the Holy Spirit works through the Word and baptism, through the water, and gives faith. All this is finally the action of the Holy Spirit. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Luther comments on this also when he speaks of John's baptism in John 1:32. He says that Jesus "accepts John's baptism of water, but He adds the fire. That is, He imparts the Holy Spirit, who kindles virtues in us."<sup>17</sup> "The Holy Spirit works faith in us, and through this faith we regain the image of God."<sup>18</sup> This action of the Holy Spirit is intended to be permanent in us, continuing "from day to day" through all our life.<sup>19</sup> Through baptism the Holy Spirit

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<sup>14</sup>Luther, "Sermons on Gospel of John," LW, XXII, 289.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 285.



regenerates us for the kingdom of God, gives us forgiveness of sins and saves us. In this way Luther understands that the Holy Spirit gives us his grace and favor.

I John 5:6

Luther can be so sure that the Holy Spirit gives us all these gifts because in baptism Christ is also given us with all the blessings of his death and resurrection. Starting from John 19:34, where Luther sees in the flowing of water and blood from the open side of Jesus at the cross a reference to baptism, he uses I John 5:6 to support this understanding. He says that there John means that baptism is always mixed with blood, the blood of Christ. Christ secured baptism for us through his blood, and He put the blood and the power and blessings of the blood into baptism. The forgiveness acquired by Christ we receive in baptism. Therefore Luther understands that John "wanted to show . . . that baptism is such a glorious and powerful thing that it washes away sin, drowns and destroys death, and heals and cleanses all disease." The same exegesis he offers also on I Peter 1:2, where Peter speaks of the sprinkling with the blood of Christ.<sup>20</sup> Luther thinks that the water, the blood, and the Spirit are the parts of baptism, in the sense that

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<sup>20</sup>Luther, "Sermon at Baptism of Bernard," LW, LI, 326-327.



the water is mixed with the blood of Christ. That is to say that the water can only have the power of regeneration because it is the external means which God uses to give us the benefits of the blood of Christ. This is given by the Holy Spirit who comes through the Word in baptism.<sup>21</sup> This makes baptism so valuable, holy, and important. To be baptized in Christ through the water means really to be washed and cleansed with the blood of Christ.<sup>22</sup> This exegesis fits in also with his comment on Gal. 3:27, where he says that as Christ is holy so we too are holy, since through baptism "we are dressed with the holy garment, which is Christ."<sup>23</sup> The gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism is the grace of God which is ours through the blood of Christ. Christ is the garment which covers all our sins and makes us holy in the eyes of God.

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<sup>21</sup>Luther, "Vorlesung über den 1. Johannesbrief. 1527," WA, XX, 778, 10: "Venit per baptismum suum ad nos, et sanguinem."

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 781, 25: "In baptismo est sanguinis, est spiritus." Luther, "Crucigers Sommerpostille. 1544," WA, XXI, 286, 27-30: "Das machet die liebe Tauffe so tewr, heilig und werd, das sie in das Blut Christi gemenget und vereinigt ist, Das in Christo durchs Wasser getaufft werden heisst warhafftig mit dem Blut Christi gewasschen und gereinigt werden."

<sup>23</sup>Luther, "Epistel S. Petri gepredigt und ausgelegt. D. M. Luther. 1523," WA, XII, 287, 23-24: "Bistu getaufft, so hastu das heylig kleyd angetzogen, das Christus ist, wie Paulus sagt."



Mark 16:16

Luther regards Mark 16:16 as one of the main sources of the doctrine of baptism. He says that it is not only the command, but also "his promise." This promise is "so full of comfort and grace that heaven and earth cannot comprehend it," because baptism brings "victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts."<sup>24</sup> The blessings of baptism "are so boundless that if timid nature ponders them, it may well doubt whether they could all be true." It is a "priceless medicine which swallows up death and saves the lives of all men." Through it "we obtain perfect holiness and salvation."<sup>25</sup> In baptism we are given "the grace, Spirit, and power to suppress the old man so that the new may come forth and grow strong."<sup>26</sup> Again Luther identifies the Holy Spirit and his gifts with God's grace, with "the whole Christ," because it is all the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The presence of the Holy Spirit in us through baptism is already regeneration.

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<sup>24</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, pp. 441-442, pars. 39 and 41.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 442, pars. 44, 43, and 46.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 445-446, par. 76.



## The Gift of Faith

In Luther we have to distinguish between two aspects of faith. Faith is always "a gift of the Spirit." Purely considered as a gift we will call this faith "fides directa." This faith reveals itself also in a conscious response to God's gifts. This aspect we will call "fides reflexa." This distinction is very important to understand Luther's doctrine of infant baptism, and even of regeneration in general. In this part of the study we will bring his comments on the "fides directa" only, because we are dealing with the gifts of the Spirit in baptism. In the next chapter we will speak about the "fides reflexa."

This distinction comes through already in his treatise on baptism in the Large Catechism. He does not deal here with specific Scripture passages, but goes to the point in a dogmatic approach. He says that God is pleased with the baptism of infants, or he would not "give his grace and Spirit" in it. He thinks that faith can come later, understanding here faith as active in the response of the one baptized. But baptism for Luther is valid with or without "faith," because "my faith does not constitute baptism but receives it. Baptism does not become invalid even if it is wrongly received or used, for it is bound not to our faith but to the Word."<sup>27</sup> He speaks of "my faith," "our faith,"

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 443, pars. 50 and 53.



and according to the context it is clear that he thinks of the "fides reflexa." As he said, the main thing in baptism is the Word, the approach of God to the one who is baptized. Through the Word comes the Holy Spirit. So baptism is first of all the gift of the Holy Spirit. And he knows with certainty that infants have faith, for he says that "even if infants did not believe--which, however, is not the case, as we have proved--still their baptism would be valid. . . ."28

If Luther means that he proved in the Large Catechism that infants can believe, it becomes clear that he means that the faith of infants corresponds to the "gift of the Holy Spirit," which we call the "fides directa." In any case he makes a distinction between a faith that "receives" baptism and is active, and the faith that is in infants who cannot use their reason.

Luther clearly says that faith is a gift of God, a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is not an activity on our part. Faith is a living spiritual flame, through which the hearts are kindled by the Holy Spirit, are reborn and converted.<sup>29</sup> Faith is a divine work in us, which transforms us and gives

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 443, par. 55.

<sup>29</sup>Luther, "Vom Missbrauch der Messen. 1521," WA, VIII, 539, 17-19: "Seyn gesetz ist der glawb, das ist, eyn lebendige geystliche flam, domit die hertzen durch den heyligen geyst entzunt, new geborn und bekart werden. . . ."



us new birth from God.<sup>30</sup> Faith is infused by the Holy Spirit,<sup>31</sup> and where God creates faith there a man is newly born and turned into a new creature.<sup>32</sup> It is a gift of the Holy Spirit, given through the merit of Jesus.<sup>33</sup> It is given to us as an incomprehensible and hidden work of the Spirit.<sup>34</sup> The Holy Spirit creates faith in us through the Word of God. To be under the Word of God and be sprinkled with the blood of Christ is the same as to believe.<sup>35</sup> And that our faith is counted for righteousness is the same as

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<sup>30</sup>Luther, "Vorrede auff die Epistel S. Pauli an die Römer. 1546," WA, VII, 11, 6-7: "Aber Glaube ist ein gottlich werck in vns, das vns wandelt vnd new gebirt aus Gott."

<sup>31</sup>Luther, "Disputatio de iustificatione. 1536," WA, XXXIX, 1, 83, 26-27: "Sed fides, quae ex auditu Christi nobis per spiritum sanctum infunditur, ipsa comprehendit Christum."

<sup>32</sup>Luther, "Epistel S. Petri gepredigt," WA, XII, 270, 27-29: "Wyr aber sagen also, wie Petrus sagt, das der glaub ein krafft Gottis ist. Wo Got den glawben wirkt, da muss der mensch ander weyt geporen und eyn neue creatur werden. . . ."

<sup>33</sup>Luther, "In epistolam Pauli ad Galatas M. Lutheri commentarius. 1519," WA, II, 518, 21-22: "Fides etiam per spiritum sanctum donatur merito Christi in verbo et auditu euangelii."

<sup>34</sup>Luther, "Operationes in psalmos. Ps. 1-21(22). 1519-1521," WA, V, 550, 21-24: "Non enim nobis cogitantibus, sapientibus, volentibus oritur in nobis fides Christi, sed incomprehensibili et occulto opere spiritus praeventur, quisquis fide donatur in Christo ad solum verbi auditum citra omnem nostram aliam operam."

<sup>35</sup>Luther, "Epistel S. Petri gepredigt," WA, XII, 263, 18-20: "Darumb ist's gleych als viel, unter dem wortt Gottis und unter Christo seyn, und gesprengt werden durch seyn blutt, als glewben."



to receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup> So it becomes clear that Luther thinks faith is exclusively a gift from the Holy Spirit.

But this received faith Luther sees as a power that projects itself into our mind, our reason, our intellect, as soon as our reason can react to this faith. Christ is apprehended through reason or the intellect which is enlightened by faith.<sup>37</sup> A pious man has to have an intellect that is oriented by faith.<sup>38</sup> This is what we can call the "fides reflexa." Luther says that this is the normal faith, because this is supposed to be the normal condition of an adult Christian. When he says that the "unformed, acquired, and infused faith" has to be rejected,<sup>39</sup> he is thinking of the adult who can use his reason, and in whom faith can improve its transforming power. In such a condition

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<sup>36</sup>Luther, "In epistolam ad Galatas. 1519," WA, II, 511, 13-14: "Ergo ne fidem reputari ad iusticiam est spiritum accipere?"

<sup>37</sup>Luther, "In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas commentarius, ex praelectione D. M. Lutheri collectus. 1535," WA, XL, 1, 447, 15-16: "Apprehenditur autem Christus non lege, non operibus, sed ratione seu intellectu illuminato fide."

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., WA, XL, 11, 28, 9-10: "Quare primum omnium plus habere debet rectam opinionem et intellectum fide informatum, secundum quem in afflictionibus regatur animus, ut speret in malis optima, quae fides dictavit et docuit."

<sup>39</sup>Martin Luther, "Die Promotionsdisputation von Friedrich Bachofen. 24 Apr. 1543," WA, XXXIX, 11, 237, 28: "Explodenda est fides informis, tam acquisita quam infusa."



an "unformed" faith would be no faith at all. Therefore he says right after this rejection of the acquired faith, that it is at least "the voice of the Gospel in the heart, which constantly drives towards the true faith."<sup>40</sup> The "true faith" in this sense is the faith in its full activity, transforming and governing mind and reason and heart to accept Jesus and the salvation brought through his death and resurrection. Even in this activity faith remains purely a gift of God, because it is the "voice of the Gospel in the heart." The presence of the Holy Spirit in us through the Word makes all the difference in our life.

Tit. 3:5

As we said before Luther does not distinguish systematically between regeneration and renewal. Faith for him is regeneration, and faith is also renewal. This is his commentary on Tit. 3:5. On the basis of this passage Luther says that baptism gives us regeneration and renewal, and that faith is this renewal.<sup>41</sup> If regeneration is the

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 237, 30-31: "Fides acquisita, ut nihil sit aliud, certe vox Evangelii relicta in cordibus est, assidue monens ad vere credendum."

<sup>41</sup>Luther, "Weihnachtspostille," WA, X, 1,1, 113, 15-114, 5: "Vornewerung, das eyn new-mensch, new artt, new Creatur da werd, die da gantz anderss gesynnet, anderss liebt, anderss lebt, redt und wirckt denn vorhyn. . . . Wer nitt anderweytt gepornn wirt, der mag nit sehen das reych gottis. . . . die person muss selbs und gantz heran, sterben und ynn eyn ander wessen kummen, wilchs geschicht durch die tauff, sso wyr glewben; denn der glawb ist disse vornewrung."



presence of the Holy Spirit with his gifts in us, then regeneration is at the same time faith. The Holy Spirit creates faith in us through the washing of regeneration. This faith is a perfect gift of God, but even so we have to grow "from day to day in faith," so that the fruits of the Spirit may appear.<sup>42</sup> Faith has to act upon reason to develop our understanding of the work and blessings of Christ. Faith has to act upon our whole life to make us do the works of righteousness. Since Luther sees this intimate connection between faith and this renewal, he can simply identify both and say that faith is renewal, as well as he can say that faith is regeneration.

Mark 10:14

Since for Luther faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit he has no problems with the affirmation that the infants who are baptized believe. It is for him the most natural thing to speak about the infant's faith, and he is so convinced of the correctness of this affirmation that he even says that the surest baptism is infant baptism. Luther says that "we do know that our children believe; for regarding them we have a trustworthy declaration of Christ."<sup>43</sup> This declaration is Mark 10:14, where Jesus

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<sup>42</sup>Luther, "Sermons on Gospel of John," LW, XXII, 285, 287, 288, 295.

<sup>43</sup>Luther, "Sermons on Gospel of John," LW, XXII, 174.



says that to the children belongs the kingdom of God. Luther sustains that only faith can open for us the kingdom of God. If therefore the children have the kingdom of God they must believe. There is no doubt for Luther about this. In a commentary on Matt. 19:13-15 Luther continues to develop this position. Christ wants all that are to be saved to become like little children. If those who are to be saved have to become like little children, argues Luther, how much more will God save the little ones who already are as God wants us all to be. Luther knows that the infants can believe, even with their reason undeveloped. We cannot see their faith, but Christ sees it. Reason is not necessary as a prerequisite for faith. It is even easier to believe without reason than with reason, says Luther, because reason is by nature against faith. Reason cannot illuminate faith. Faith has to illuminate reason. Therefore we must be like little children and kill our reason, so that we may believe.<sup>44</sup> So we have to accept what

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<sup>44</sup>Luther, "Matthäus 18-24 in Predigten ausgelegt. 1537-1540," WA, XLVII, 328, 14-32: "Will den Christus niemandts selig machen, ehr werde dan zu einem kinde, wie viel mehr macht ehr die selig, so vorhin kinder sindt? . . . Es ist gnug, das es Christus siehet und weiss, das sie gleuben. . . . Eben darumb können sie es desto bass thun, und gleuben, das sie nicht vernunfftig sindt, dan die Vernunfft ist stracks wider den glauben. . . . Aber die Widderteuffer machen aus der Vernunfft ein Liecht des glaubens, das die Vernunfft dem glauben leuchten solle, wo ehr hin solle. Jha, ich meine, sie leuchtet gleich wie ein Dreck in einer Latern. . . . dan die Vernunfft ficht wider den glauben."



Tit. 3:5 says, even if our reason cannot understand it, that baptism has the power of regeneration and forgiveness of sins through the Word. This, Luther says, I will believe and be a fool and a child.<sup>45</sup> Luther stresses very much that faith does not depend on knowledge, but is regarded as the gift of the Spirit through the Word. He says that we dare not mix faith and reason. If we were to need our reason to be saved, then we would be saved only gradually as we learn to understand all things.<sup>46</sup> Even the adults cannot always believe consciously. Luther says that not even a seventh of our life do we spend thinking of God. Half of our life we pass sleeping. But even so we are Christians and believe.<sup>47</sup> Therefore we can be surer about the faith of infants than of the adults, because children do not have reason to oppose faith.<sup>48</sup> When children are baptized we can always be sure that they believe, because there is

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 329, 24-27: "Ich verstehe es nicht, ich sehe wohl nur wasser, und wie dasselbige uber ein kindlein gegossen wirdt, aber das ehr saget, die Tauffe hab die krafft und gewalt der widdergeburt und vergebung der Sunden durchs wort, doran will ich gleuben und will gerne ein Narr und kindt sein."

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 330, 8-10: "Wen wir nicht ehe solten selig sein, wir hettens den alles mit unser Vernunfft zuvorn begriffen, so wurden wir langsam selig werden, wir müssen Glauben und Vernunfft nicht in einander brauen."

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 330, 13-40.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 331, 42-332, 3: "Jha viel mehr, saget Christus, eben darumb, das die kindlein nicht vernunfftig sind, darumb so soll man sie teuffen, den der Glaube kan nicht hafften noch fussen, wo die Vernunfft regiret und herrsschet."



no reason to oppose their faith. Infant baptism is a valid baptism because children can believe.<sup>49</sup> Faith is given and supported by the promise given by the Word of God. Our confession or knowledge is not the foundation of faith, but it is the Word that gives and sustains faith. Luther says that concerning children there is a sure Word of God which says that they believe, even if they do not have knowledge.<sup>50</sup> As we already said this sure word is, as Luther means, Mark 10:14 and its parallels, Matt. 19:13-15; 18:3; Luke 18:15-17. In his letter of 1528 concerning rebaptism Luther cites a number of other Bible passages in connection with Mark 10:14 in which he sees a proof that children can believe. So he cites Psalm 106:37-38. This for him

describes how the Jews offered their sons and daughters to idols, shedding innocent blood. If, as the text says, it was innocent blood, then the children have to be considered pure and holy--this they could not be without spirit and faith.

He says the same of the children whom Herod murdered (Matt. 2:16). In Matt. 19:14 Christ himself says that "the kingdom of heaven belongs to children." Luther believes that John in his mother's womb believed (Luke 1:41).

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 336, 13-14: "Zum andern, so sehen wir alhier, das die kindlein glauben haben, drum so ist die Tauffe recht."

<sup>50</sup>Luther, "Ein Sermon D. M. Luthers am 11. Sonntag nach dem Pfingsttag. 1524. Luk. 19,41ff.," WA, XV, 670, 21-23: "Weytter so haben wir ayn gewiss wort und verhayssung gottes, das uns Christus der herr bezeügt, dass sy glauben, wie wol sy nit reden können. . . ."



Naturally he agrees that John was an exception. But "inasmuch as John had faith, though he could not speak or understand, your argument fails, that children are not able to believe."<sup>51</sup> In the same way Luther says that "his Word and baptism call forth Spirit and faith in the child."<sup>52</sup> Besides Matt. 19:14 Luther cites Matt. 18:10, arguing that since the children were appointed to be examples which we have to follow, they surely were holy. If these children were not holy, Jesus "would indeed have given us a poor ideal with which to compare us."<sup>53</sup> Concluding his remarks in this letter he says

I maintain as I have written in the Postil that the most certain form of baptism is child baptism. For an adult might deceive and come to Christ as a Judas and have himself baptized. But a child cannot deceive. He comes to Christ in baptism, as John came to him, and as the children were brought to him, that his word and work might be effective in them, move them, and make them holy, because his Word and work cannot be without fruit. Yet it has this effect alone in the child. Were it to fail here it would fail everywhere and be in vain, which is impossible.<sup>54</sup>

This again makes clear that Luther thinks of faith in the child as purely a gift of God through the Word. There is no prerequisite of knowledge, of reason, of intelligent recognition of the content of this faith.

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<sup>51</sup>Luther, "Concerning Rebaptism. 1528," LW, XL, 242.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 244.



Faith therefore is no psychological modification as such, but is identified with the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit in the subject. The Holy Spirit applies to the subject all the benefits offered in the Word through Jesus Christ. That this faith has a certain content Luther says in a commentary on I John 2:13, where John speaks of the fathers, the young men, and the children. Luther takes these "children" as being little ones, and says that they believe, because they "know the Father."<sup>55</sup> In which sense he thinks of this "knowledge" of the Father Luther does not say, but it seems to be clear that he understands that the realization of this content comes later, when the developing reason is transformed by faith. What is more important to Luther is the certainty that God gave baptism to the world so that those who are baptized may belong to Him. We only have to speak the Word, and God will find the faith by himself, that is, God will give faith even if we cannot understand how he does it. Our obligation in the Church is to teach them to pray, to teach them the Word so that they may come to the true understanding of the promise and work of God.<sup>56</sup> Luther sometimes speaks of faith only as a

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<sup>55</sup>Luther, "Fastenpostille. 1525," WA, XVII, 11, 84, 14-24: "Daraus folget yhe, das die Aposteln haben auch die kinder getaufft und dafur gehalten, sie gleuben und kennen den vater, gerad, als weren sie zur vernunft komen und kundten lesen."

<sup>56</sup>Luther, "Matthäus 18-24 in Predigten," WA, XLVII, 271, 4-17: "Und sihet der Herr alhier auff die Tauffe und



certain knowledge because for him this is the normal situation of an adult Christian.

In connection with Mark 10:14 and parallels Luther speaks also of the problem of the faith of others in connection with infant baptism. He starts with an analysis of Matt. 8:1-13 where he speaks of the faith of the centurion and its relation to the healing of his servant. He uses this picture to speak about the relation of the faith of the sponsors and the congregation to the infant who is baptized. He directs his arguments against the Roman Catholics who say that the infants are baptized without faith of their own, but on account of the faith of the sponsors and the Church.<sup>57</sup> But he also addresses himself to the Waldensians who teach that children are baptized in view of future faith, since they cannot believe as infants.<sup>58</sup> On the basis of Matt. 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16, and Luke 18:15-17 Luther affirms that infants can believe, and that they are not baptized in the faith of the sponsors and the Church, but that the faith of the sponsors and the Church help the

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preiset sie, das durch dieselbige die kinder gleubig werden. . . . Und Gott hat drumb die Tauffe in die Welt gegossen, das die jhenigen, so getaufft wurden, sein eigen sein sollten. . . . Uns ist befohn, das wir das wortt sprechen sollen, unser herrgott wirdt den glauben wohl finden. Lerne du sie beten. . . . Nemet ihrer wohl wahr, das sie recht unterweiset und zu Gottes warem Erkendtniss gebracht werden."

<sup>57</sup>Luther, "Fastenpostille," WA, XVII, 11, 79, 25-26.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 81, 15-17.



infants through their prayer on behalf of the infants to receive their own faith.<sup>59</sup> Only in this sense is the faith of others helpful to the infants. The faith of others brought the little children to Jesus, but the children believed for themselves. So the sponsors and the Church by their faith bring the children to baptism, but Christ in baptism gives the children their own faith and the kingdom of heaven.<sup>60</sup>

Matt. 18:3

That the lack of reason is no hardship for children Luther deduces also from Matt. 18:3, where it is said that we all have to become like children to enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>61</sup> He concedes that we can have no certainty of

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 83, 9-12: "Also sagen wyr auch hie, das die kinder nicht werden ym glauben der paten odder der kirchen getauffet. Sondern der paten und der Christenheytt glaube bittet und erwirbet yhnen den eygen glauben, ynn wilchem sie getaufft werden und für sich selbs glauben." Luther, "Von dem Tauben und Stummen Mark. 9 (31-37) am zwölften Sonntag nach Pfingsten. 1522," WA, X, 111, 310, 16-20: "Die kindlein steen do bloss und nackend an leib und seel, haben keinen glauben, kein werck. Do tritt her die christlich kirch und bitt, gott wöll jn den glauben yngiesszen. Nit das unser glaub oder werck das kindt helfen soll, sonder das das kindt einen eygen glauben gewinn." Luther, "Sermon am 11. Sonntag nach Pfingsttag," WA, XV, 710, 37-39.

<sup>60</sup>Luther, "Fastenpostille," WA, XVII, 11, 84, 10-13: "so segenet er sie und gibt yhn den glauben und das hymelreich."

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 85, 2-3.



the faith of children, in the same way as we cannot have certainty of the faith of adults, because we cannot see into their hearts. Theoretically it might happen that a child does not receive faith through baptism, as often happens with adults. The adults receive the Word with their ears and reason, often without faith. The children, says Luther, hear it with their ears without reason and with faith. For Luther this is the normal situation in the case of children. He says that a person believes more easily when there is less reason in his way to interfere. Luther also gives much attention to the ones who bring the child to baptism, because Luther believes that their prayer on behalf of the child is an important factor.<sup>62</sup> Faith is entirely a gift of God to the one baptized, but the prayers of the sponsors and the Church are to ask for the gift of God upon the one who is baptized. In the following comparison Luther makes clear again that faith is something completely different from the knowledge and understanding that we may have through our reason. Faith is something different and more profound than that which reason makes of the Word of God, because faith is solely God's work and above all reason. The child is as close to

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 87, 4-7: "Die allten fassens mit oren und vernunftt oft on glauben. Sie aber hörens mit oren on vernunftt und mit glauben. Und der glaube ist so viel neher, so vil weniger der vernunftt ist und stercker der ist, der sie erzu bringt."



faith as is the adult, yes even closer, and the adult is as far from it as the child, yes, even farther. Therefore, if any baptism is sure, then the children's baptism is the surest of all, because they cannot pretend as can the adults.<sup>63</sup> To Luther baptism is the same Gospel as that which is preached in the church. God does not command the preaching of the Word for the purpose of rational hearing, but for the sake of spiritual hearing, which is better in children than in the adults. They hear it better, because Christ receives them, and orders them to be brought to him.<sup>64</sup> And again he stresses that the children's baptism and comfort is written in the words of Matt. 19:14. To bring little children to Jesus can only happen by means of baptism.<sup>65</sup>

Mark 16:16

This passage of Scripture forms the background for the Mark 10:14 and parallel sayings. Luther reads in Mark 10:14

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 87, 13-24: "Aber darauff sehen sie nicht, das glaub an Gottes wort gar viel eyn ander und tieffer ding ist, denn das, das die vernunfft mit Gottis wort thut, Denn ihenes ist alleyn Gottes werck uber alle vernunfft, wilchem das kind so nahe ist alls der alte, ia viel neher und der alte so ferne alls das kind, ia viel ferner. . . . soll eyne tauffe gewiss seyn, so sey der kinder tauffe die aller gewissest. . . ."

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 87, 28-31: "Sondern umb des geystlichen hörens willen, wilchs, wie gesagt ist, auch die kinder haben so wol und besser denn die allten."

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 88, 1-6.



that to the children belongs the kingdom of heaven. He concludes from this that children have faith through baptism, because in Mark 16:16 it is said that without faith there is no salvation. Without faith the benefits of baptism cannot be received. "For it is certain that whatever is not faith contributes nothing toward salvation, and receives nothing." Luther insists on "faith alone as so necessary that without it nothing can be received or enjoyed."<sup>66</sup> Baptism is not effective simply by application, but it is essential for the one who is baptized to believe. The promise of God through the Word makes baptism effective, but we receive the benefits through faith. Therefore says Luther in the Small Catechism: "It effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare."<sup>67</sup> This is his exegesis of Mark 16:16. That we receive the benefits of baptism through faith Luther repeats again and again. In the same Catechism he repeats that it is not the water that produces the effects, but the Word of God "and our faith which relies on the Word of God." This Word of God is connected with the water. This he emphasizes especially against the Roman Catholic

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<sup>66</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 441, pars. 34 and 37.

<sup>67</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Small Catechism," BC, pp. 348-349, par. 6.



doctrine, as he understood it, that is, that the effectiveness lies in the sacramental element, as he comments in the Smalcald Articles. It is directed also against the "opus operatum" doctrine. What Luther rejects is the doctrine that the sacrament is effective through application by the church, even without faith. In a certain sense he agrees that it is effective "ex opere operato," since its effectiveness is based on the application of the Word and sacrament to the one who is baptized. Luther says that we bring our children to baptism so that God may perform his work in them and regenerate them.<sup>68</sup> Even when he says that we have to approach baptism in our faith and "the faith of others," he insists that we cannot build on the fact that we believe or that others are praying for us. We have to build exclusively on the Word and command of God.<sup>69</sup> The Word and command of God speak of the gift of God, and this is given through baptism to the one who is baptized. In his letter concerning rebaptism Luther gives an exegesis of Mark 16:16, and compares it with the exegesis of the Anabaptists. There he says again that "whoever bases baptism on the faith of the one to be baptized can never baptize anyone. Even if you baptized a person a hundred

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<sup>68</sup>Luther, "Hauspostille D. M. Luthers. 1544," WA, LII, 103, 9-13.

<sup>69</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, pp. 443-444, par. 56.



times a day you would not at all know if he believes."<sup>70</sup> God acts in the one who is baptized, without any other presupposition, since faith, especially in infants, is the gift conveyed through baptism. That faith is not the presupposition for baptism Luther says again when he comments on Matt. 18:10. He says that even if somebody does not believe at the time of baptism, the sacrament is still correct and valuable. He shall not be rebaptized, but he shall believe and come back to baptism, because it is God's work.<sup>71</sup> This possibility Luther allows normally only in the baptism of adults, since he is sure that in a normal situation baptism creates faith in the infants who are baptized. Faith is the presupposition in receiving the benefits of baptism, but faith is given through baptism in the infants without any other presupposition. In this sense we have to agree that Luther accepts a certain type of "opus operatum."

#### Regeneration

Luther identifies regeneration with the beginning of a

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<sup>70</sup>Luther, "Concerning Rebaptism," LW, XL, 240.

<sup>71</sup>Luther, "Matthäus 18-24 in Predigten," WA, XLVII, 336, 15-19: "Drumb, so sol man die erste Tauffe nicht verdammen, ob einer gleich nicht itzt gleubete, so kan ehr hernach gleubig werden, und bleibe einer bej der ersten Tauffe und lestere dieselbige nicht, den sie ist Gottes werck. . . ." Luther, "Sermons on Gospel of John," LW, XXII, 179.



new life in us, given by the Holy Spirit through faith, and with it all the gifts of God secured for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to wit, the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. Through baptism the Holy Spirit brought us back to a life in hope, or rather to the hope of life, because the real life is that which we live in the presence of God.<sup>72</sup> Baptism is "so full of comfort and grace that heaven and earth cannot comprehend it."<sup>73</sup> The blessings of baptism "are so boundless that if timid nature considers them, it may well doubt whether they could all be true."<sup>74</sup> Therefore Luther says that we receive in baptism the whole Trinity, "God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts."<sup>75</sup> As Christ is holy so we too are holy, since in baptism "we are dressed in the holy garment, which is Christ," as Paul says in Gal. 3: 27.<sup>76</sup> The main sources on which Luther builds the doctrine of regeneration are again Mark 16:16, Tit. 3:5, and John 3:5. He also uses I John 5:6, I Peter 1:2, Matt. 3:16,

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<sup>72</sup>Luther, "Genesis-Vorlesung. 3 Juni 1535--17 Nov. 1545," WA, XLII, 146, 27-28: "Per baptismum autem ad vitam spei, seu potius ad spem vitae restituimur. Nam haec demum vera vita est, qua coram Deo vivitur."

<sup>73</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 441, par. 39.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 442, par. 42.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 442, par. 41.

<sup>76</sup>Luther, "Epistel S. Petri gepredigt," WA, XII, 287, 23-24.



John 1:32-33, Rom. 6:4, Gal. 3:27, I Cor. 6:11, I Pet. 3:21, Psalm 29:10, and Eph. 5:26. We will consider some of his comments on these passages, organizing them according to the following subdivisions: new spiritual life, forgiveness of sins, and eternal salvation.

### The New Spiritual Life

The divine majesty which was present at Jesus' baptism is also present at our baptism in a way "that now there is no more wrath but only grace unalloyed."<sup>77</sup> In baptism we "surely find and meet with his grace."<sup>78</sup> This is the guarantee and basis for the regeneration that happens in our baptism.

### John 3:5

In his commentary on this passage Luther asks, What is the new birth? It is that "man becomes something that he was not before."<sup>79</sup> Christ speaks here of baptism, a natural water which has God's Word with it, and which the Holy Spirit or the whole Trinity turns into a spiritual bath. The presence of the Holy Spirit makes it "a spiritual, yes, a Spirit-filled water. . . . And thus the person who

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<sup>77</sup>Luther, "Sermon at Baptism of Bernard," LW, LI, 319.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>79</sup>Luther, "Sermons on Gospel of John," LW, XXII, 281.



has been baptized is said to be born anew."<sup>80</sup> It becomes a veritable bath of rejuvenation, a living bath which washes and purges man of sin and death, which cleanses him of all sin."<sup>81</sup> It "transforms you into a new person,"<sup>82</sup> causes "a renewal of being,"<sup>83</sup> and restores the image of God,<sup>84</sup> because the Holy Spirit works faith in us. In this way Luther identifies the new birth, the new life, with faith.<sup>85</sup> Faith, which is given in baptism, gives us back the image of God. This is the new man, the new creature, the new Spirit-life or spiritual life. It is even a new creation, because it gives us what we did not have before. It is completely God-given, by the whole Trinity or the Holy Spirit through baptism. Regeneration is first of all a new situation in the sight of God, because it is the forgiveness of sins through the merit of Christ, but it is also a change in us, since through baptism we receive the new nature, the new man, the restoration of the image of God in us. In this sense Luther can speak also of regeneration as rejuvenation, or renewal, although "renewal" is used in the "ordo

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., pp. 283-284.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., pp. 284-285.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 285.



salutis" of the later dogmaticians as a term to describe the new nature in action. Luther does not isolate this second meaning of renewal from his considerations about the benefits of baptism, but we will consider this aspect of renewal in the last part of this study. Luther touches on this aspect in a consideration of John 1:32, where he says that God not only gives his Holy Spirit to start a new life in us, but sends him to continue the work in us, so that we may "live under the forgiveness of sin, repenting daily."<sup>86</sup> Repentance starts already with baptism, because Luther sees repentance as the turning to God. This turning to God is identified with the new life, the new man, the new nature, the faith created in us by the Holy Spirit. Since it is a "soul bath" it is also a "bath of rejuvenation" or renewal.<sup>87</sup> On the basis of I John 5:6 Luther says that through the Gospel that comes to us in baptism we are born sons of God.<sup>88</sup> By nature we all are born in sin. Therefore it is necessary to be regenerated, to receive a new life, a new nature through the water of baptism. This is received by faith in the promise of God which the Spirit kindles in baptism.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>88</sup>Luther, "Vorlesung über 1. Johannes," WA, XX, 779, 4-7: "Isto verbo audito nascimur filii dei et victrix fides acquiritur. Ergo fides per Euangelium acquiritur."

<sup>89</sup>Luther, "Genesis-Vorlesung," WA, XLII, 616, 10-12:



Tit. 3:5

Luther says that in baptism God wants to make a bath, a regeneration, a renewal, not only of the works, but of the whole man.<sup>90</sup> To renew man and to change the person is not possible except through the bath of regeneration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>91</sup> This Holy Spirit is given to us in baptism, since Christ says that in baptism we are born by the Holy Spirit.<sup>92</sup> This renewal which is necessary we have through faith. Luther even says that "faith is this renewal."<sup>93</sup> God expects man to do good works. But to do good works man has to be good. And man becomes good only through this bath of regeneration.<sup>94</sup> Here Luther says again that in baptism there is not only a change in God, that He approaches us and gives us forgiveness, but that the regeneration is at the same time a renewal, a change in man.

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"R nasci igitur oportet salvandos per aquam, id est, per Baptismum, . . . et per spiritum, qui fidem in promissionem accendit, et sic a peccatis liberat et salvat."

<sup>90</sup>Luther, "Weihnachtspostille," WA, X, 1,1, 115, 13-14: "Sie will eyn badt, eyn widdergepurtt, eyn vornewrung machen, nitt alleynn der werck, ssondernn des gantzen menschenn."

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 116, 13-15.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 117, 6-8.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 114, 5: "Denn der glawb ist disse vornewrung."

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 119, 15-17: "so wirt er nit durch gutte werck gutt, ssondern werck die werden durch yhn gutt. Er wirt aber gutt durch diss badt der widdergepurtt unnd sonst ynn keynen weg."



But this change in man implies no merit on the part of man, it is still pure grace and gift of God. Luther compares the new spiritual life, the regeneration, with the life which we received at our natural birth. As we come by our natural birth, without our work, into sin, as Paul says in Rom. 5:18, so we come into grace and salvation by regeneration without our merit and own works, through Christ.<sup>95</sup> In the view of this comparison it is natural for Luther to identify renewal and faith. He does not care about systematic nuances and patterns of thinking in this connection. What he wants to stress is the free gift of God through the Holy Spirit, which is faith and at the same time renewal, because it is regeneration. The new spiritual life is given in baptism, and this corresponds for Luther exactly to faith. Luther develops the implications of this fact for the Christian life when he explains what baptism signifies (bedeutet) in our life. Luther considers Tit. 3:5 as the main source for the doctrine of regeneration. Therefore he cites it in the Small Catechism. He says that the water of baptism, when connected with the Word of God, "is a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 123, 20-124, 4: "Szonderenn, als S. Paulus Ro. 5. leret: Gleych wie wyr durch Adam ynn der naturalichen gepurt on unsser vordienst und eygen vorwirckung ynn die sund kummen, die unss angeporn wirt, Also widderumb ynn der widdergepurt on unsser vordienst und eygen wircken durch Christum ynn die gnade und selickeyt kummen."



in the Holy Spirit."<sup>96</sup> Baptism is the beginning of a new life, it is regeneration, as he says in the Large Catechism: "through baptism we are first born anew."<sup>97</sup> Even if our reason cannot understand it we have to believe what Paul says in Tit. 3:5, that baptism has the power of regeneration and forgiveness of sins through the Word.<sup>98</sup> Luther does not entertain any doubts about the exegesis of this text. He does not even think that this may refer to a "spiritual baptism" as some Calvinists are inclined to take it. He is completely convinced that here Paul speaks of the water of baptism as the washing of regeneration. Again and again he states that the text says that we are "born again and anew to righteousness and eternal life,"<sup>99</sup> that, because God himself baptizes, "this act must be so powerful that it makes a man altogether new."<sup>100</sup>

Mark 16:16

For Luther this text is the basis for the doctrine of

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<sup>96</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Small Catechism," BC, p. 349, par. 10.

<sup>97</sup>Luther, "The Sacrament of the Altar," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 449, par. 23. Luther, "Sermons on Gospel of John," LW, XXII, 177.

<sup>98</sup>Luther, "Matthaus 18-24 in Predigten," WA, XLVII, 329, 25-27.

<sup>99</sup>Luther, "Sermon at Baptism of Bernard," LW, LI, 323.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 324.



the "benefits, gifts, and effects it brings."<sup>101</sup> Luther does not know about the modern doubts concerning the authenticity of this text. Had he known of this, he surely would have based the doctrine on other texts, since there are more texts that speak about the benefits of baptism. Luther loves this text. He says that since it is said that "he who believes and is baptized shall be saved," "the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of baptism is to save." And "to be saved, we know, is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil and to enter into the kingdom of Christ and live with him forever."<sup>102</sup> Luther can say this because the Word has the power, because "God's name is in it," and "where God's name is, there must also be life and salvation." These benefits Luther identifies completely with the term "regeneration," because after having described baptism in the terms cited above, he continues to say in the Large Catechism: "Hence it is well described as a divine, blessed, fruitful, and gracious water, for through the Word baptism receives the power to become the 'washing of regeneration,' as St. Paul calls it in Titus 3:5."<sup>103</sup> For Luther Mark 16:16 is not only God's command, but also

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<sup>101</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 439, par. 23.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 439, pars. 23-25.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 440, pars. 26-27.



his promise. Being his promise it is the active Word of God which in baptism brings the "victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts."<sup>104</sup> Therefore baptism is "a priceless medicine which swallows up death and saves the lives of all men."<sup>105</sup> In baptism we are given "the grace, Spirit, and power to suppress the old man so that the new man may come forth and grow strong."<sup>106</sup> Luther finds in the word "baptizein" a deeper meaning. To be baptized consists of "being dipped into the water, which covers us completely, and being drawn out again. These two parts, being dipped under the water and emerging from it, indicate the power and effect of baptism, which is simply the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man. . . ." <sup>107</sup> Our life which we have through our natural birth is dominated by death, devil, and sin, because we have "the old Adam" in us. It is a life that leads only to death. In baptism we are washed with the blood of Christ (I John 5:6), which cleanses us from sin and all impurities, "and destroys both sin and death in an instant."<sup>108</sup> This is

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., pp. 441-442, par. 41.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 442, par. 43.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., pp. 445-446, par. 76.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., pp. 444-445, par. 65.

<sup>108</sup>Luther, "Sermon at Baptism of Bernard," LW, LI, 325.



also Luther's interpretation of Rom. 6:4 in the Small Catechism, where it says that we are buried with Christ by baptism into death.<sup>109</sup> Through baptism Christ's death is our death. And so we are free from death, sin, and the devil. Through Christ's resurrection is our resurrection. And so we receive a new life, a new nature, we are renewed and regenerated. Luther thinks very often of our baptism in terms of dying and rising, of death and resurrection. We will develop this thought in the next chapter. As said before, Luther identifies this renewal with faith. Therefore he can say in the Small Catechism that all depends on faith. There is no regeneration without faith. Baptism is not effective simply by application, automatically, but the important thing is that the one who is baptized has to believe. For Luther it is clear that baptism itself creates faith in us through the Word and the Holy Spirit. But the Word and the Holy Spirit can be rejected by the one who is baptized. In children this statement is valid only theoretically, since Luther believes that in children baptism always creates faith because there is not the opposition of reason. Luther knows only one baptism, which is the same for infants and adults. Therefore he says that faith is that which makes baptism effective for us. Baptism "effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death

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<sup>109</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Small Catechism," BC, p. 349, pars. 12-14.



and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare."<sup>110</sup> The same he says again when he states that it is not the water that produces the effects, but the Word of God "and our faith which relies on the Word of God" which is connected with the water. Without faith the benefits of baptism cannot be received. "For it is certain that whatever is not faith contributes nothing toward salvation, and receives nothing." Luther insists "on faith alone as so necessary that without it nothing can be received or enjoyed."<sup>111</sup> Since faith is the renewal, the regeneration, we could paraphrase Luther and say that without regeneration nothing can be received or enjoyed.

In a commentary on Matt. 3:13-17 Luther speaks of baptism, using Mark 16:16 and Tit. 3:5 to say that we receive regeneration in baptism through faith. Here he understands regeneration as the birth "from this fleshly, sinful birth and being, to new spiritual life," in which "we become righteous before God and heirs of heaven."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., pp. 348-349, par. 6.

<sup>111</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 441, par. 37.

<sup>112</sup>Luther, "Predigten von der Taufe," WA, XXXVII, 644, 31-35: "Das es sol sein ein bad der seelen oder (wie es S. Paulus nennet) 'ein bad der newen geburt,' dadurch wir aus dieser fleischlichen, sündlichen geburt und wesen zum newen geistlichen leben geborn werden, darin wir fur Gott gerecht und erben des himels werden. . . ."



God created us, and since we fell into sin he takes us again into his hands, gives us his Word and baptism, and cleanses us with it from our sins.<sup>113</sup> He who takes a bath in baptism is being born young and new.<sup>114</sup> It is such a "potent fountain of youth that it causes a man to be born again, washes away and drowns every sin within him."<sup>115</sup> In a commentary on Gen. 17:1 Luther uses the example of Abraham and Isaac to show that there is no privilege by birth, but that all depend on God's promise. We all are born in sins, and if we want to be saved we have to be "reborn through the water, i.e. through baptism and through the Spirit, who creates faith in the promise, and so saves from sins and gives us salvation."<sup>116</sup> According to I Peter 3:20-22 Luther sees the flood as a type of baptism, which he calls a "spiritual flood." In baptism our flesh and blood are drowned, and we come out of it without sin. In baptism everything worldly and carnal has

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 662, 4-7: "Denn nach dem wir sind durch die sünde gefallen und verdorben, nimpt er uns noch ein mal jnn seine Gottliche hende, gibt uns sein wort und die Tauffe, wesschet und reiniget uns damit von sunden. . . ."

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 645, 14-16: "Wer darin badet, wird wider jung und new geboren. . . ."

<sup>115</sup>Luther, "Sermon at Baptism of Bernard," LW, LI, 328.

<sup>116</sup>Luther, "Genesis-Vorlesung," WA, XLIII, 616, 7-12: "Renasci igitur oportet salvandos per aquam, id est, per Baptismum, non per circumcisionem: et per spiritum, qui fidem in promissionem accendit, et sic a peccatis liberat et salvat."



to be drowned, so that the spirit alone may live.<sup>117</sup>  
 This is also his application of Rom. 6:3,4 and Psalm  
 29:10. Since Peter uses the flood as a type of baptism  
 Luther has no doubts in using also Ps. 29:10 as speaking of  
 baptism in a prophetic sense.

### The Forgiveness of Sins

Luther does not follow a systematic exposition. The  
 later dogmaticians certainly would prefer the following  
 sequence: first, the forgiveness of sins, second, the new  
 life, and third, the eternal salvation. They might want  
 to express that first of all God changes his judgment about  
 man, forgiving sins. Thereby man would become a new  
 creation, who finally would enter eternal life and salvation.  
 Luther understands all these different aspects as simul-  
 taneous, and therefore it does not matter for him whether  
 he starts with one or the other consideration. In this  
 study we follow Luther's orientation, bringing his sayings  
 about the forgiveness of sins not in the first, but in the  
 second place.

It is clear for Luther that forgiveness is exclusively  
 an act of God in behalf of man. But for him this is true

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<sup>117</sup>Luther, "Über das 1. Buch Mose. Predigten M. Luthers  
 samt einem Unterricht, wie Moses zu lehren ist. 22 März 1523-  
 18 Sept. 1524," WA, XXIV, 176, 11-14: "Also das ynn der  
 Tauffe untergehen mus alles was weltlich und fleischlich  
 ist, auff das alleine der geist lebe."



also of faith, regeneration, renewal, and eternal salvation. It is all God's gift given through baptism by the Holy Spirit. We have already quoted Luther's statements about the forgiveness of sins through baptism. But for the sake of clarity we must look again at some of these statements and add some others.

Mark 16:16

In the word "saved" in this text Luther sees the summary of all the benefits, gifts and effects of baptism. To be saved means that we are delivered from sin, death, and the devil, and that we enter into the kingdom of Christ and live with him forever, as Luther says in the Large Catechism.<sup>118</sup> Baptism brings victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sins, and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>119</sup> This is the same as what he says also in the Small Catechism. "It effects forgiveness of sins."<sup>120</sup> Through baptism we become righteous before God and heirs of heaven.<sup>121</sup> It takes us from sin to righteousness, from

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<sup>118</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 439, par. 25.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., pp. 441-442, par. 41.

<sup>120</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Small Catechism," BC, pp. 348-349, par. 6.

<sup>121</sup>Luther, "Predigten von der Taufe," WA, XXXVII, 644, 31-35.



debt and condemnation to innocence and grace, from death into eternal life.<sup>122</sup> Through his Word and baptism God cleanses us from our sins.<sup>123</sup> In his treatise on the holy and blessed sacrament of baptism Luther says that through the spiritual birth accomplished in baptism the one who is baptized "is a child of grace and a justified person. Therefore sins are drowned in baptism, and in place of sin, righteousness comes forth."<sup>124</sup> Luther makes the priest to say at the time of baptism: "Lo, you are sinful flesh. Therefore I drown you in God's name and in his name condemn you to death, so that with you all your sins may die and be destroyed."<sup>125</sup> For Luther the sponsors say after baptism: "Lo, your sins are now drowned, and we receive you in God's name into an eternal life of innocence."<sup>126</sup> In this connection he again uses the picture of the flood and says that the fact that

the people of the world were drowned signifies that in baptism sins are drowned. But that the eight in the ark, with animals of every sort, were preserved, signifies--as St. Peter explains in his second epistle (II Pet. 2:5; cf. I Pet. 3:20-21)--that through baptism man is saved.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 645, 14-16.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 662, 4-7.

<sup>124</sup>Luther, "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism. 1519," LW, XXXV, 30.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-31.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., pp. 31-32.



From this it follows, as Luther says, "that when some-one comes forth out of baptism, he is truly pure, without sin, and wholly guiltless."<sup>128</sup> Luther means that sin is pardoned, but "that our flesh, so long as it lives here, is by nature wicked and sinful." Therefore he stresses that this is only a beginning of forgiveness of sins, which has to continue through all our life.

So far as the sacrament and its significance are concerned, sins and the man are both already dead, and he has risen again; and so the sacrament has taken place. But the work of the sacrament has not yet been fully done.<sup>129</sup>

So Luther can say that

a baptized person is therefore sacramentally altogether pure and guiltless. This means nothing else than that he has the sign of God; that is to say, he has the baptism by which it is shown that his sins are all to be dead, and that he too is to die in grace and at the last day is to rise again to everlasting life, pure, sinless, and guiltless. With respect to the sacrament, then, it is true that he is without sin and guilt. Yet because all is not yet completed and he still lives in sinful flesh, he is not without sin. But although not pure in all things, he has begun to grow into purity and innocence.<sup>130</sup>

When Luther says that baptism makes us holy he understands this in the sense that God considers us holy, forgiving us all our sins. But since at the same time baptism is regeneration and renewal, God gives us also a beginning towards becoming holy. Since this belongs to the

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<sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-33.



consequences of baptism which involve our activity, we will defer this discussion to the next chapter of this study. Only in the continuation of the power of baptism throughout our life Luther understands

how in baptism a person becomes guiltless, pure, and sinless, while at the same time continuing full of evil inclinations. He can be called pure only in the sense that he has started to become pure . . . because . . . God will not count against him his former impurity. A person is thus pure by the gracious imputation of God, rather than by virtue of his own nature. As the prophet says in Psalm 32 (:1-2), "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity." . . . So, then, we understand that the innocence which is ours by baptism is so called simply and solely because of the mercy of God. For he has begun this work in us, he bears patiently with our sin, and he regards us as if we were sinless. This also explains why Christians are called in the Scriptures the children of mercy, a people of grace, and men of God's good will. It is because through baptism they have begun to become pure. . . . Therefore those people err greatly who think that through baptism they have become wholly pure.<sup>131</sup>

This treatise on baptism is really a systematic work of Luther, but at the beginning he mentions the texts upon which he bases these considerations. It starts with the "baptizein" of Matt. 28:19 and Mark 16:16, and continues with Tit. 3:5, John 3:5, Romans 6:4, and other texts.

In a commentary on Matt. 3:13-17 Luther repeats the doctrine of Holy Baptism. He says that the same divine majesty that appeared at Jesus' baptism is also present at our baptism, and that in this way God's grace comes to us.

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-36.



In heaven "there is pure delight, pleasure, and joy" at baptism, "over the fact that sin is forgiven, the heavens opened forever, and that now there is no more wrath but only grace unalloyed."<sup>132</sup> Baptism is a most certain sign, given by God, "in which we surely find and meet with his grace."<sup>133</sup> Baptism destroys death and cleanses us from sin, because the blood of Christ is mixed with the water and the Spirit, according to Luther's exegesis of I John 5:6.<sup>134</sup> When Luther reads in John 3:5 that we have to be reborn by the water and the Spirit he says that this regeneration means having the forgiveness of sins and being saved.<sup>135</sup> Also Tit. 3:5 tells Luther that baptism has the power of regeneration and forgiveness of sins through the Word.<sup>136</sup> Through baptism we are reborn to righteousness.<sup>137</sup> The Word and the faith tell me that God himself is in baptism and does this work. "Therefore it is such a potent fountain of youth that it causes a man to be born again,

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<sup>132</sup>Luther, "Sermon at Baptism of Bernard," LW, LI, 319.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p. 325. Luther, "Crucigers Sommerpostille," WA, XXI, 286, 27-30. Supra, p. 26, n. 22.

<sup>135</sup>Luther, "Hauspostille," WA, LII, 349, 35-38: "da hastu ein solches wasser, da der heylig Geist bey sein und durch das selbe dich zum Reich Gottes widergebenen will, das ist: sünden vergeben und selig machen."

<sup>136</sup>Luther, "Matthäus 18-24 in Predigten," WA, XLVII, 329, 25-27.

<sup>137</sup>Luther, "Sermon at Baptism of Bernard," LW, LI, 323.



washes away and drowns every sin within him."<sup>138</sup> Commenting on Matt. 18:1 Luther compares the baptism of a child with the baptism of an adult, and says that there is only one baptism with the same effects in the child as in the adult. The infant that lies in the cradle is in the same way cleansed from sin as I am, says Luther, and it is sometimes even more pious than I, old fool, am, because it does not know of the malice in which I am myself.<sup>139</sup> In a comment on John 1:32 Luther cites Eph. 5:26 as telling us that baptism is "the washing of water with the Word" with which "we are cleansed, leaving neither spot nor wrinkle" on us.<sup>140</sup> Commenting again on Matt. 3:13-17 Luther says that we must not separate our baptism from the baptism of Christ. It is one and the same baptism, and therefore as glorious as the baptism of Christ. We confess in the Nicene Creed that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, because baptism is a bath through which our sins are

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<sup>138</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>139</sup>Luther, "Matthäus 18-24 in Predigten," WA, XLVII, 233, 25-31: "Ich alter Narr hab keine bessere Tauffe den das junge kind, so in der wiegen ligt und getaufft ist. Den solch kind . . . , das ist so wohl abgewasschen von den Sunden durch das bluth Christi in der Tauffe als ich, ja dasselbige ist offt fromer den ich alder narr. den es weiss nichts von der bossheit, darinnen ich alder stecke. . . . Den wir heissen alle zu gleich Christen."

<sup>140</sup>Luther, "Sermons on Gospel of John," LW, XXII, 176.



washed from us.<sup>141</sup> Luther reads the same also in Rom. 6:3 and Gal. 3:27. For him also I Cor. 6:11 says that we are washed from our sins through baptism. Baptism is a holy water, even the blood of Christ shed for our sins, which washes away ours and the whole world's sin. The one who believes this is already saved.<sup>142</sup> Baptism is a wonderful bath that washes us clean from sins, and what it does not wash, but remains in us, is forgiven.<sup>143</sup> In baptism our flesh and blood are drowned, and we come out of it without sin.<sup>144</sup> Because of our baptism we have to look

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<sup>141</sup>Luther, "Zwo schöne und tröstliche Predigten D. M. Luthers, die erste von der Taufe Christi Matthäus 3 (13-17), die andere von der Bekehrung S. Pauli aus dem 9. Kap. Act. (Apg. 9, 1-19). 6. u. 26. Jan. 1546," WA, LI, 111, 27-33: "Sondern solt deine Tauffe von der Tauffe Christi nicht absondern. . . . Also das Christi Tauffe dein Tauff und deine Tauff Christi Tauff und aller ding eine Tauffe sey. Denn die Tauffe ist ein solch bad, durch welches uns unsere sünde abgewaschen werden, Wie wir denn inn dem Symbolo Niceno singen: Ich bekenne ein einige Tauffe zur vergebung der sünden."

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 114, 21-23: "Daraus folget, das die Tauffe ein Heilig Wasser, Ja das Blut Christi für unser sünde vergossen sein mus, das unsere und der gantzen Welt sünde abwasche. O wer das gleuben kond, der wer schon selig."

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 116, 30-32: "Darumb ist die Tauff ein herrlich bad, das von Sünden rein abweschet, Was aber nicht abweschet, . . . das ist vergeben."

<sup>144</sup>Luther, "Predigten über 1. Mose," WA, XXIV, 176, 10-12: "Das gleich soviel ist, . . . das wenn ich spreche: Ich erseuffe und wurge an dir alles was fleisch und blut ist, das wenn mans heraus zeucht, ist es on alle sünde und unglück."



at ourselves as newly made saints.<sup>145</sup> Baptism is such a water that it takes away sin, death and all misfortune, helps us into heaven and to eternal life.<sup>146</sup> Luther's references to baptism and its power to forgive sins can be found in many of his writings. Sometimes they are given in a direct exegesis of a text that speaks of baptism, and often where there are mere allusions to it. Since baptism is so important for Luther he speaks of it wherever there is an occasion for it, whether the text speaks specifically of baptism or not. The whole doctrine of baptism is tied up with his doctrine of justification by faith through Christ alone. Since this is the central doctrine of the Christian Church, baptism plays an important role in connection with it. This is one of the reasons that we find his allusions to baptism in so many writings. Forgiveness of sins can be received only by faith. Since he identifies faith with renewal and regeneration, we can say that forgiveness of sins is immediately related to regeneration and is one of the essential aspects of it.

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<sup>145</sup>Luther, "Hauspostille," WA, LII, 101, 35-36: "und weyl wir getaufft sind, uns anders nit ansehen noch urteylen denn als gemachte, ja new geschaffene heiligen."

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 102, 27-28: "Darumb ist die Tauff ein solches wasser, das die sünde, den tod unnd alles unglück weg nimbt unnd hilfft uns in hymel und züm ewigen leben."



## The Eternal Salvation

For Luther baptism has eschatological significance. We are regenerated for eternal life. With regeneration we even have eternal life now. Naturally this is not to be taken in a sense that we already enjoy all the blessings of eternal life, but that we have eternal life guaranteed. Eternal life is ours in hope. The final destiny of the regenerated is eternal life. This is the presupposition for the understanding of baptism as a beginning which extends its influence and validity through the whole life of the one who is baptized, and even into eternity. Luther sees the complete fulfillment of baptism only in the light of eternity.

In the preceding analyses of the indicated texts we have already touched on this problem, citing Luther's statements in this direction. In his comment on Mark 16:16 he cites as gifts and effects of baptism also the entrance "into the kingdom of Christ" and the life "with him forever."<sup>147</sup> This is the final salvation that baptism gives us. It "saves the lives of all men," and "we obtain perfect holiness and salvation."<sup>148</sup> The Small Catechism

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<sup>147</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 439, par. 25.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 442, pars. 43 and 46.



spells it out directly, saying that it "grants eternal salvation" to all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare.<sup>149</sup> Through baptism we become "heirs of heaven,"<sup>150</sup> we receive "eternal grace, purity or holiness, and eternal life."<sup>151</sup> "Heavens are opened forever" for us through baptism,<sup>152</sup> we are "born again and anew to righteousness and eternal life,"<sup>153</sup> it helps into heaven and to eternal life,<sup>154</sup> it is the seal and guarantee of forgiveness of sins and eternal life.<sup>155</sup> Through baptism we now live a life in the presence of God, a life that is the real life, since the former was death and leading to death. Baptism brings us back to a life in hope, or rather to the hope of life, because the real life is that which we live in the presence of God.<sup>156</sup>

Regeneration is therefore the beginning of the life with

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<sup>149</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Small Catechism," BC, pp. 348-349, par. 6.

<sup>150</sup>Luther, "Predigten von der Taufe," WA, XXXVII, 644, 31-35.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., p. 645, 14-16.

<sup>152</sup>Luther, "Sermon at Baptism of Bernard," IW, LI, 319.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>154</sup>Luther, "Hauspostille," WA, LII, 102, 27-28.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., p. 103, 14-17.

<sup>156</sup>Luther, "Genesis-Vorlesung," WA, XLII, 146, 27-28.  
Supra, p. 46, n. 72.



God, in the presence of God. Since it is a beginning, it follows for Luther that it has to continue to reach its goal. This is what he calls the "significance" of baptism, this is what baptism claims as being its continuation and final fulfillment. This continuation of the work of baptism throughout our life will be the subject of the next chapter of this study. But it is clear from this analysis that Luther thinks of baptism as an act of God which has significance and power in itself, since it regenerates the one who is baptized, because it creates faith through the action of the Holy Spirit.

#### Conclusion

In modern times there is one significant attack <sup>upon</sup> on Luther's doctrine of baptism. As one could expect because of Luther's emphasis on the sacramental character of baptism, this criticism comes from the Reformed tradition, as expressed in Karl Barth's "Die kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe."<sup>157</sup> For him baptism is not a means of grace, but a confession of faith,<sup>158</sup> because he reads in Luther that one can be saved without being baptized. Luther eventually

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<sup>157</sup>Karl Barth, "Die kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe," Theologische Existenz Heute (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1947), Neue Folge, Nr. 4.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., p. 34.



says that

Baptism is no more than an external sign, which is to remind us of the divine promises. If one can obtain it, that is good, then one may do so, because nobody should despise it. If one cannot receive baptism or if it should be denied to someone, he is not condemned even so, when he believes the Gospel, because where the Gospel is there is also baptism and everything that a Christian needs.<sup>159</sup>

This statement is taken from a sermon delivered by Luther in 1522. It tells Barth that

The power of Jesus Christ, which is the only power of baptism, is not bound to the performance of baptism. Baptism has the necessity of a command that cannot be overlooked (*necessitas praecepti*), but not the necessity of an indispensable means (*necessitas medi*). The free Word and work of Jesus Christ can make use also of other means.<sup>160</sup>

Luther would agree with this in speaking of adult baptism, where someone has the possibility of being reached by the Gospel in other ways than through baptism. But since, for Luther, baptism is the only means to bring the Gospel to the infant, it has not only the necessitas praecepti, but also the necessitas medi. And for Luther the normal baptism is infant baptism. Luther does not deny

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<sup>159</sup>Luther, "Ein Sermon am Auffahrtstage über das Evangelium Mark. (16, 14-20) am Letzten. 29. Mai 1522," WA, X, 111, 142, 18-24: "Es kan auch ainer glauben, wenn er gldich nit getaufft ist, dann der tauff ist nit meer dann ain eüsserlich zaichen, Das unns der götlichen verhayssunng ermanen soll: Kan man sy haben so ists gut, so näm mann sy, Dann niemandts soll es verachtten. Wenn man sy aber nit haben künd oder ainem versagt wurde, ist er dannocht nit verdampft, wann er nun das Euangelium glaubt, dann wa das Euangelium ist, da ist auch tauff und alles was ain Cristen mensch bedarff. . . ."

<sup>160</sup>Barth, p. 14.



that one could be saved also without baptism, but since baptism is the means ordered by God it is necessary for salvation. The exceptions do not deny the necessitas medi. When Luther says that baptism is "no more than an external sign," he says this in connection with the context, where he says that God gave signs in the past to which he connected his promise, through which God wanted to make the promise more powerful and sure, as circumcision, and the rainbow. To make his promise sure for us he gave us two signs, the water and the bread, as he calls it. In this sense he speaks of baptism as "not more than an external sign." He has in mind the water used in baptism. This is not more than an external sign. But since it is connected with the Word it gives us the Spirit, the same way as the Gospel preached gives us the Spirit. It is not a statement against the value of baptism, as Barth wants to take it. There are enough words of Luther to show his high esteem and respect for baptism as a means that gives us faith. It is not the only means, but it is one of the means.

Karl Barth, following the Reformed tradition, is against the baptism of infants also because he thinks of baptism as a confession of faith, not as a means of faith. He does not think much of the faith of infants, because he thinks of faith not in the sense of a gift of the Holy Spirit as such, but as something active through the



intellect and reason. He says that

In connection with the doctrine of baptism it is very difficult to preserve infant baptism without exegetical and material artificialities and sophisms-- the proof to the contrary would first have to be brought!<sup>161</sup>

This is exactly the type of argument that Luther had to fight at the time of the Anabaptists and enthusiasts. It is strange to see that it still is alive. This forced Luther to develop his doctrine of infant faith which he based chiefly on the affirmation of Jesus, where He says that the little ones believe in Him (Matt. 18: 6), and that to them belongs the kingdom of God (Mark 10:14). For Luther there is no "exegetical and material artificiality and sophism" in the analysis of these texts. For him "to believe," "to have the kingdom of God," and "to be saved" (Mark 16:16) are sayings of Jesus that speak about the same truth, namely that children believe through the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, because there we have in the Word the One who applies to the one baptized all the promises of God, all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the benefits of the death and resurrection of Christ. The gift of the Holy Spirit is faith with all its consequences. This faith is something completely different from the contents of reason and intellect. This faith has to give orientation and direction to reason and intellect, but cannot be

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<sup>161</sup>Ibid., p. 36.



identified with its contents, since faith is purely the gift of God. Since faith has to be separated from reason and intellect Luther has no difficulty in accepting the sayings of Jesus that the little ones "believe" in Him. As soon as reason and intellect develop, faith directs them, so that in the adult faith has to be seen in this activity. Therefore Luther can also speak of the "true faith" as of the knowledge of Christ and his work, the understanding of the Gospel, to which we cling in confidence, being assured that it is for us. But he knows that this is faith in action, and not faith as such, which is purely the gift of God.

Karl Barth wants a "responsible baptism,"<sup>162</sup> because he envisages faith as only preceding baptism, and baptism as only the confession of faith. Here we are again back at the arguments of the Anabaptists at the time of Luther. Luther says that nobody can be baptized on account of his faith, because we never know whether he believes or not. We have to build our baptism on the Word and the promise of God, which is the only thing sure. The idea of a "responsible baptism" comes very close to the medieval Roman Catholic doctrine of baptism, in which it is presupposed that the one to be baptized "should have a general intention of

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<sup>162</sup>Barth, p. 40.



receiving baptism,"<sup>163</sup> so that "if an adult lacks the intention of receiving the sacrament, he must be rebaptized."<sup>164</sup> Thomas Aquinas really goes a little farther and says that the church "does not intend to give baptism save to those who have right faith,"<sup>165</sup> because for him "baptism is a sort of protestation of faith; whence it is called the Sacrament of Faith."<sup>166</sup> This is the language of Barth also. But Luther, while agreeing that in case of adult baptism faith may come before baptism is sure that baptism is the sacrament of faith because it creates faith in the one who is baptized. Luther goes so far as to say that baptism is valid even without faith, because it is God's action on us. But the benefits of baptism can only be received by faith. So if someone did not believe at his baptism he may come back to it and believe later. But baptism should never be repeated. The first one is completely valid, because it is God acting through his Word in baptism. Barth therefore accuses

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<sup>163</sup>Thomas Aquinas, The "Summa Theologiae" of St. Thomas Aquinas, literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd., 1923), Part III, Third Number (QQ. LX-LXXXIII), Qu. 68, art. 8 ad 3.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., Qu. 68, art. 7 ad 2.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., Qu. 68, art. 8, ad 2.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., Qu. 66, art. 1, ad 1.



Luther of teaching an "irresistible baptism."<sup>167</sup> This is not true, because Luther agrees that baptism can be received without faith. So it can be resisted. But when he speaks of a kind of irresistible baptism Luther thinks of infant baptism, because they do not have a developed reason and intellect, and therefore do not resist like the adult. In infants the Holy Spirit does not meet the resistance of the adult, and therefore He surely will do His work that He promised to do in the one baptized. Luther argues in the following pattern of thought: if the Holy Spirit will not do His work in infants who cannot consciously resist, where will he do it then? Luther believes firmly that the Holy Spirit is doing the work in the infants, giving them the gift of faith, forgiveness of sins, and eternal salvation.

In his criticism of Barth's position Paul Althaus<sup>168</sup> attacks especially the affirmation of Barth's in which he says that baptism does not "effect forgiveness of sins, etc.," as Luther says in the Small Catechism, but only witnesses to it.<sup>169</sup> Baptism for Barth has therefore only cognitive value, as a sign, a witness of the Word, through which the Word is guaranteed. For Luther it is this, but

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<sup>167</sup>Barth, p. 43 (Cf. WA, VI, 538; XXXVII, 665-666).

<sup>168</sup>Paul Althaus, "Was ist die Taufe?: Zur Antwort an Karl Barth," Theologische Literaturzeitung, LXXIV (Dec. 1949), 705-714.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid., col. 710. Barth, p. 93.



more than this. It really effects all the benefits promised, because it has the Word and the Holy Spirit in it. Luther holds with Augustine that the grace given in baptism acts in all three directions, in the negative, the positive, and the ecclesiastical direction, effecting the forgiveness of sins, regeneration, and incorporation into the Church.<sup>170</sup> This is achieved only because the one baptized received the gift of faith. In his analysis of Luther's doctrine of faith in baptism Werner Jetter says that Luther understands faith as the

Sacramental conformity of the hearer with the witnessed fact of salvation (Heilsgeschehen) "secundum spiritum," a "cognitio efficax" out of which then follows naturally an exemplary conformity "secundum corpus."<sup>171</sup>

It is difficult to say what he means by a "sacramental conformity" and an "exemplary conformity," but we can guess that it means the same as what we call the "fides directa" and the "fides reflexa." "Fides directa," understood in Luther's terms, is the gift of the Holy Spirit without any verifiable psychological activity, while the "fides reflexa" is the gift of the Holy Spirit in action, first

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<sup>170</sup>Werner Jetter, Die Taufe beim jungen Luther. Eine Untersuchung über das Werden der reformatorischen Sakraments- und Taufanschauung (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1954), p. 8.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., pp. 154-155: "So ist der Glaube die sakramentale Konformität des Hörers mit dem bezeugten Heilsgeschehen secundum spiritum; eine cognitio efficax, aus der dann eine exemplarische Konformität secundum corpus von selber folgt."



of all upon reason and intellect, by which we have an understanding with confidence of the fact of salvation for us. As a result the "fides reflexa" involves the whole Christian activity in life.

For some it is difficult to accept a description of faith without knowledge. Some say even that Luther always thought of faith as based on the understanding of the Word.<sup>172</sup> Gustav L. Ljunggren says that Luther was not able to make it psychologically clear that infants may have a justifying faith. He says that Luther came very close to Catholicism and at the same time to the enthusiasts when he said that faith in infants at baptism comes into existence through an "inner Word."<sup>173</sup> But Ruben Josefson, of the same Scandinavian school, while saying that faith in the infant is a presupposition of Luther's, tries to understand this doctrine by saying that

The faith of the child is not its own possibility, but the possibility of God or Christ. This possibility is incarnate in baptism, and Luther's conviction concerning the faith of the child is based on his belief in the real presence of Christ in baptism.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup>Gustav L. Ljunggren, "Luther och barndopet" (Luther und die Kindertaufe), in a book-review by H. H. Schrey, Theologische Literaturzeitung, Nr. 9 (1949), col. 525-526.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid.

<sup>174</sup>Ruben Josefson, "Luthers lara om dopet," in a book-review by H. H. Schrey, Theologische Literaturzeitung, Nr. 9 (1949), col. 525: "Der Glaube des Kindes ist indes nicht dessen eigene Möglichkeit, sondern Gottes oder Christi Möglichkeit. Diese ist inkarniert in der Taufe und Luthers Überzeugung von dem Glauben des Kindes baut auf den Glauben an die reale Christusgegenwart in der Taufe."



Ragnar Bring has a similar explanation. He says that the process of conversion

has for Luther something in a certain sense more concrete, while it is not thought of by him primarily as a psychological process in man. But through the Holy Spirit Christ himself comes to man. . . . Christ is in the faith, faith carries Christ in it. To believe means to have the Holy Spirit, and this means at the same time that Christ himself is present in the faith. . . . The decisive thing is the objective fact: God's Word has reached man, Christ has really made a dwelling in him.<sup>175</sup>

Therefore Bring uses the expression that when God comes in Word and sacrament, he comes in a completely concrete manner.<sup>176</sup> This might be the way Philip Watson understands Luther when he calls the Word "res viventes."<sup>177</sup> Because God comes through his Word in baptism to the one baptized, God himself speaks to man and establishes the personal

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<sup>175</sup>Ragnar Bring, "Gesetz und Evangelium und der dritte Gebrauch des Gesetzes in der lutherischen Theologie," Zur Theologie Luthers, Aus der Arbeit der Luther-Agricola Gesellschaft in Finnland (Helsinki: Akademische Buchhandlung, 1943), I, 51-52: "(Der Prozess der Bekehrung) enthält für Luther etwas in einer Weise mehr Konkretes, während er gleichzeitig bei ihm nicht primär als ein psychologischer Prozess im Menschen gedacht ist. Sondern: durch den Heiligen Geist kommt Christus selber zum Menschen. . . . (Christus) ist im Glauben, der Glaube trägt Christus in sich. Glauben bedeutet, den Heiligen Geist haben; und dies ist damit gleichbedeutend, dass Christus selber im Glauben gegenwärtig ist. . . . das Entscheidende ist das Objektive: Gottes Wort hat ihn erreicht, Christus hat wirklich in ihm Wohnung genommen."

<sup>176</sup>Ibid., p. 79: "Luther sieht Gott im Gesetz und Evangelium wirken, aber in beiden Fällen wirkt er vollkommen konkret. . . . Wenn Gott im Wort und im Sakrament kommt, so kommt er voll konkret."

<sup>177</sup>Philip S. Watson, Let God be God!, An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther (London: The Epworth Press, 1947), p. 162.



sonship.<sup>178</sup> The one baptized has only a receptive position,<sup>179</sup> and the gift of God does not depend on the dignity of the receiver, but includes his indigence, as Werner Elert sees it.<sup>180</sup> Therefore we baptize children not "quia credunt" but "ut credant."<sup>181</sup> Elert is not sure about the "unconscious" faith, as he calls it, but this faith is the "receiving organ,"<sup>182</sup> which receives in baptism the first, the totality, and the last: "aeternam sanctitatem."<sup>183</sup> Elert does not separate faith and reason, as Luther does. Therefore he speaks of infant faith as something that Luther and others tried to prove and could not, by appealing to the creative power of God and the substitutive faith of the Church. He even says that Luther thought of faith only in relation to psychological effects, as Melancthon did.<sup>184</sup> So Elert identifies himself with Jetter who is not sure about the faith of infants, but makes some remarks about the substitutive faith of the

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<sup>178</sup>Werner Elert, Morphologie des Luthertums (Munchen: C. H. Beck, 1931-1932), I, 258.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid., p. 261.



sponsors.<sup>185</sup> They do not go as far as Johannes Gottschick, who laments that Luther did not progress enough to throw off the doctrine of infant baptism of the Middle Ages. He even calls it a fiction.<sup>186</sup>

Luther is very strong in emphasizing that nobody can believe for another.<sup>187</sup> Erich Seeberg says that Luther learned from Augustine to emphasize the need of faith to receive the benefits of baptism.<sup>188</sup> But Luther's approach is deeply rooted in his understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith, which for Luther is the basis for the understanding of all other doctrines, and so also for baptism. But his approach is not only dogmatical, but exegetical. He finds enough certainty in passages like Mark 10:14, Matt. 18:6, and Mark 16:16, to believe that infants have faith, even without the development of reason, because they are reached by the Word and the Holy Spirit in baptism. Karl Brinkel has a good study on Luther in which he discusses the "fides infantium" in Luther's doctrine of baptism. He points to Luther's view that the child believes

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<sup>185</sup>Jetter, p. 325.

<sup>186</sup>Johannes Gottschick, Die Lehre der Reformation von der Taufe; ein theologisches Gutachten zum Bremer Taufstreit. Hefte zur Christlichen Welt, LVI (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1906), 38, 42.

<sup>187</sup>Luther, "Fastenpostille," WA, XVII, 11, 83, 9-10.

<sup>188</sup>Erich Seeberg, Luthers Theologie in ihren Grundzügen (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, c.1940; 2nd edition, 1950), p. 150.



because it is addressed by God, and faith is not understood as the relation from man to the Word, but the relation from the Word to man.<sup>189</sup> He points out also that there is in fact no difference between the faith of a child and the faith of an adult, because in both situations it is only a gift from God.<sup>190</sup>

Luther grounds his understanding of regeneration especially on Mark 16:16, Tit. 3:5, and John 3:5. He finds the term regeneration in Tit. 3:5, which teaches that in baptism we are reborn, that we receive a new nature, that we become a new creation of God. This is achieved by the Holy Spirit who comes to the one baptized through the Word and promise of God which is connected with the water. Luther interprets John 3:5 in the same way. The Holy Spirit comes with his gifts, which are faith and salvation, according to Mark 16:16. Applying I John 5:6 to baptism Luther says with certainty that through baptism we receive all the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection, therefore forgiveness of sins, regeneration, and life eternal. Luther easily identifies all these concepts under faith, salvation, regeneration, and renewal. For him there is only the difference of looking at one and the same process in

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<sup>189</sup>Karl Brinkel, Die Lehre Luthers von der fides infantium bei der Kindertaufe (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1958), p. 94.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid., p. 95.



different ways. From the point of view of God it is the negative side of forgiveness of sins, and the positive side of eternal salvation. From the point of view of man it is faith and regeneration, or renewal. From the point of view of the Church it is incorporation into the body of Christ. From the point of view of Christ it is participation in the work of Christ with all its benefits, it is to be dressed in the garment of Christ, it is to die and to rise with Christ. From the point of view of eschatology it is the beginning of eternal life, and from the point of view of the sacrament it is the total sanctity of the one baptized. Luther, being a preacher, a dogmatician, and an exegete, looked at baptismal regeneration in possibly all the points of view. Separated from their context some of the affirmations might even look contradictory, but in the total view of Luther's theology they complement each other. Luther was sure that through baptism infants or adults are regenerated, that is, that they receive faith, have forgiveness of sins, are reborn into a new nature where they receive the image of God, and therefore have new spiritual life which enables them to serve God, although they remain still sinners. Since regeneration is given to a sinful being, and in this way the Holy Spirit turns man to God, regeneration is also the beginning of repentance, because for Luther repentance is the turn to God. The term "regeneration"



implies that baptism cannot be an act final in itself, but that baptism is a beginning--but a definite, changing, creating beginning. Regeneration is a fact in the act of baptism. But its existence is possible only in its continuation through the life of the one baptized. Therefore we have to look briefly also at this aspect of regeneration in the next chapter.

1. Luther, "Concerning Rebaptism, 1529. A Letter originally written to Two Pastors," *Luther's Works*, edited by Charles F. Johnson and Helmut G. Lohmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), 36, 244. Hereafter *Luther's Works* will be cited as LW, followed by volume and page numbers.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE CONTINUAL REGENERATION

When we consider the importance of faith in the life of a Christian we understand why Luther is so emphatic to say that "I maintain as I have written in the Postil that the most certain form of baptism is child baptism."<sup>1</sup> Luther understands baptism to be the means to give us faith, which he identifies with regeneration and renewal. Since in the case of adults faith normally precedes baptism, the question arises: What does baptism effect in the adult? Is it also the means of regeneration? Is not the faith which precedes baptism already the regeneration of the adult? What does baptism add to the faith of the adult? Luther is not very much concerned about these questions. He knows that there is only one baptism, the same one for children and adults. When he speaks of baptism he usually points to no distinction between the two, but we can find that sometimes he speaks only of the baptism of children, and in other occasions he speaks only of the baptism of adults. The normal situation in his times was the baptism of children, but with the war against the Turks it happened that also

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther, "Concerning Rebaptism. 1528. A Letter of Martin Luther to Two Pastors," Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), XL, 244. Hereafter Luther's Works will be cited as LW, followed by volume and page numbers.



some adults came to be baptized. He speaks also of baptism given to Jews, who then would mostly be adults. We will see in this chapter some of Luther's answers to the question of the baptism of adults.

In a commentary on John 3:3,4 Luther expressly says that for the adult regeneration is identified with faith. As long as God gives man the gift of faith through the promise of the Word, he is regenerated. If baptism follows, then the sacrament is a sort of confirmation of God's promises already given with the previous faith.

Whoever believes in Christ, whoever believes that Christ was born, that He died for us, was buried for us, and was raised from the dead--is born anew, or reborn. This rebirth makes a person a new man. . . . And if you remain constant in this faith, then the Holy Spirit is there to baptize you, to strengthen and increase your faith, and to implant a new understanding in your heart. He also awakens in you holy and new thoughts and impulses, so that you begin to love God, refrain from all ungodly conduct, gladly do God's will, love your neighbor, and shun anger, hatred, and envy. Such works are performed by those who have been born anew, namely, born anew through baptism, in which the Holy Spirit is active, making new persons of them. . . . This I know, by the power of the Holy Spirit, from the divine Word, and also from baptism.<sup>2</sup>

This shows that Luther thinks of the baptism of adults not as an absolute regeneration, but as a continuation of regeneration. The one reborn by faith is baptized to receive strength and increase of faith, to have a new understanding implanted in the heart. Holy and new

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<sup>2</sup>Luther, "Sermons on the Gospel of St. John. Chapters 1-4. 1537-1540," LW, XXII, 286.



thoughts and impulses are awakened. Baptism therefore in this situation improves the regeneration, continues it, strengthens it.

This understanding of the effect of baptism in the believing adult leads Luther to transcend the original picture of a biological birth, and speak of a continual regeneration, which begins at baptism or with the gift of faith, and comes to a conclusion only with our resurrection at the Last Day.<sup>3</sup> The whole life of a Christian is in a process of rebirth, and we are born anew completely only when our hope is changed into seeing in heaven. Werner Jetter pointed out that Luther in his earlier writings speaks even of a "generatio sempiterna,"<sup>4</sup> compared to the eternal generation of the Son of God by the Father. Luther uses this language in his "Dictata super psalterium" of 1513-1516. He bases it on I John 3:9, which says that "no one born of God commits sin." Since we commit sins during our whole life, argues Luther, we are not yet completely born of God, but our regeneration has to go on until we are completely without sin. We always have to be born, to be renewed, to be generated. Therefore, says

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<sup>3</sup>Luther, "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism. 1519," LW, XXXV, 31.

<sup>4</sup>Werner Jetter, Die Taufe beim jungen Luther. Eine Untersuchung über das Werden der reformatorischen Sakraments- und Taufanschauung (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1954), p. 233.



Luther, we are always like newborn babes (I Peter 2:2).<sup>5</sup>

Jetter also points out that from this understanding of regeneration there is only a short way to the formula of the "simul iustus et peccator."<sup>6</sup> Even being reborn at baptism through the gift of the Holy Spirit, man is not yet reborn completely, because he continues to be a sinner. Therefore baptism is not only a gift, but also a task (Aufgabe).<sup>7</sup> The past tense of the regeneration in baptism is at the same time changed into a present tense: regeneration is continual.<sup>8</sup>

Luther discusses this view of baptism thoroughly in his treatise of "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism" of 1519. The main discussion centers around the idea of a continual regeneration. Luther explains in what sense baptism has a double dimension for him. It is a perfect act in the view of the sacrament, because "the sacrament has taken place," and the person is "sacramentally alto-

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<sup>5</sup>Martin Luther, "Dictata super psalterium. 1513-1516," D. Martin Luthers Werke (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1886), IV, 365, ll. 14-20: "Si enim filii dei sumus, semper oportet esse in generatione. Unde dicitur: 'Qui natus est ex deo, non peccat,' sed generatio dei conservat eum. Sicut enim in deo filius semper et abeterno et ineternum nascitur: ita et nos semper oportet nasci, novari, generari. . . . Sic in scriptura dicitur de nobis, quod sumus infantes quasi modo geniti semper." Hereafter the Weimar edition will be cited as WA, followed by volume, part if shown, page, and line numbers.

<sup>6</sup>Jetter, p. 233.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 235.



gether pure and guiltless." But at the same time the regeneration has to go on, we need a daily renewal, because "the work of the sacrament has not yet been fully done."<sup>9</sup> The "work" is the use or "significance" of baptism, as he says in the Small Catechism. There he points out in a few words what he really means by the continual regeneration. It means that what happened at baptism must be repeated continually through our whole life:

The old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God's presence.<sup>10</sup>

As he says in the Catechism, he finds this in Rom. 6:4. The effect of baptism therefore is found for Luther almost completely in the daily use of baptism and the gifts provided there. Therefore he says that we always have to go back to our baptism, that is to say, that we always need the continual gift of the Holy Spirit, faith, renewal, regeneration, to fight the evil in us and grow into a life according to the holy will of God. In this sense Luther can still speak of regeneration when he speaks of the effect of baptism in the one who already believes. Baptism in this

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<sup>9</sup>Luther, "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," LW, XXXV, 32.

<sup>10</sup>Martin Luther, "The Sacrament of Holy Baptism," in "The Small Catechism," The Book of Concord, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 349, par. 12. Hereafter The Book of Concord will be cited as BC, followed by page and paragraph numbers.



situation will not be the beginning of regeneration, but the continuation of regeneration, a strengthening of faith, by which the Holy Spirit increases his gifts in the one baptized.

In the following considerations we will try to develop Luther's concept of continual regeneration, speaking about "faith in action" and the "new life in action." This is the area of the "fides reflexa" and its relation to the covenant in baptism. When Luther speaks about the new life in action he thinks mostly about our daily repentance, which leads to a daily death and resurrection throughout our life.

#### Faith in Action

Faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Faith is identified by Luther as the renewal which is given in baptism. Commenting on Gal. 3:27 Luther says that the new creation and new birth given to us in baptism is the same as putting on Christ. In baptism we are changed from sons of Adam into sons of God (Eph. 4:22, Col. 3:9). And on the basis of Tit. 3:5 Luther explains that "in those who have been baptized a new light and flame arise; new and devout emotions come into being, such as fear and trust in God and hope; and a new will emerges."<sup>11</sup> He believes therefore that the gift

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<sup>11</sup>Luther, "Lectures on Galatians. 1535," LW, XXVI, 352-353.



of faith is not something passive, but it changes our "emotions" and "will," it creates a "new light and flame," it provides "fear, trust and hope in God." As soon as reason and intellect arise they are modified by the gift of faith, and psychological reactions become different, because they are oriented by faith. In this sense faith becomes verifiable, because it governs the contents of our knowledge, affection, and will. Luther even uses the concept of faith for the intellectual response of the regenerated towards the contents of the gracious revelation of God.

#### Faith as Response

We cannot examine all the pronouncements of Luther about faith, which one can find in nearly all his writings, because this is not the object of this study. But we will see from his writings on baptism that he understands faith very often in the sense of the intellectual response oriented by faith. This is even his normal use of the concept of faith. In this sense faith "perceives," "grasps," "holds" a certain truth, which is no other than Jesus Christ and his work for us.

#### Mark 16:16

When Luther examines this text in the Large Catechism he says that faith is the all-important thing to receive the benefits of baptism. But it is interesting to see how



Luther here speaks of faith. It has as its content not, as one would expect, the work of Christ, but the promise of God given in the water, finally the water itself. He says

Our know-it-alls, the new spirits, assert that faith alone saves and that works and external things contribute nothing to this end. We answer: It is true, nothing that is in us does it but faith, as we shall hear later on. But these leaders of the blind are unwilling to see that faith must have something to believe--something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand. Thus faith clings to the water and believes it to be baptism in which there is sheer salvation and life, not through the water, as we have sufficiently stated, but through its incorporation with God's Word and ordinance and the joining of his name to it. When I believe this, what else is it but believing in God as the one who has implanted his Word in this external ordinance and offered it to us so that we may grasp the treasure it contains?<sup>12</sup>

When he says that our faith has to cling to the water it does not mean that one has to believe that the water must be the object of faith. He adds that it is the water with which the Word of God is connected. So he believes that the content of faith has to be the revelation of God, given in his Word. This revelation comes through external means, because we always need "something external" which can be "perceived and grasped by the senses and thus brought into the heart." In the case of baptism it is the water, connected with the Word of God, which impresses our senses. In the case of preaching it is the "external and oral proclamation" which impresses our senses, and brings us the

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<sup>12</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "The Large Catechism," BC, p. 440, pars. 28 and 29.



revelation to form the content of our faith. This is God's normal way of dealing with us. "Whatever God effects in us he does through such external ordinances." Faith must look to these external ordinances and hold to them.<sup>13</sup> In this discussion of faith in the Large Catechism Luther sees faith as the response of man. He must have in mind an adult person who is able to understand and believe wholeheartedly the "words which accompany the water." He speaks of faith as response when he says:

Just by allowing the water to be poured over you, you do not receive baptism in such a manner that it does you any good. But it becomes beneficial to you if you accept it as God's command and ordinance, so that, baptized in the name of God, you may receive in the water the promised salvation. This the hand cannot do, nor the body, but the heart must believe it.<sup>14</sup>

That Luther thinks of faith in this connection especially as the reaction on the part of man, comes through again when he says that we have to grasp and hold firmly the promise of God in baptism. He speaks even of the "study and practice" of baptism through our whole life. He says:

Here we have not only God's commandment and injunction, but also his promise. Therefore, it is far more glorious than anything else God has commanded and ordained: in short, it is so full of comfort and grace that heaven and earth cannot comprehend it. It takes special understanding to believe this, for it is not the treasure that is lacking; rather, what is lacking

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<sup>13</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 440, par. 30.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 441, par. 36.



is that it should be grasped and held firmly. In baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and to practice all his life. He always has enough to do to believe firmly what baptism promises and brings. . . .<sup>15</sup>

In another commentary on Mark 16:16 Luther says that God gave us baptism so that our faith may grasp it more firmly and hold it.<sup>16</sup> This holding and grasping he may understand as developing in the child as soon as reason develops, or he may think of an adult person who is being baptized. In this situation faith would actively hold and grasp the promise given in baptism. In this sense he can also say that baptism is a public testimony of the doctrine of the Gospel and of our faith before all the world, through which one can see where and with whom the Lord reigns.<sup>17</sup> Luther implies that in this way the one baptized may strengthen and comfort himself in all his life, and that he may confess it before all the world.<sup>18</sup> This of course is faith

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 441, pars. 39-41.

<sup>16</sup>Luther, "Crucigers Sommerpostille. 1544," WA, XXI, 398, 23-26: "Und auff das der Glaube solchs dest fester fasse und halte, gibt er uns die Tauffe, Mit solchem sichtbarn Zeichen zu bezeugen, das uns Gott annimpt und gewislich solches gibt, was uns durch das Euangelium verkündigt und angeboten ist."

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 403, 32-34: "Und ist also die Tauffe ein öffentlich zeugnis der Lere des Euangelij und unsers Glaubens fur aller Welt, dabey man sehen könne, wo und bey welchem dieser Herr regieret."

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 405, 6-10: "Denn wer ein Christen wird und gleubet, der wird gewislich auch solch Zeichen gerne annemen, auff das er beide, solch Göttlich Zeugnis und



in action, it is faith as our response to the work of God in us. The content of this faith is the Word, as he says again in the Large Catechism: "the Word is spoken so that the soul may grasp it." Water and Word together constitute baptism which is applied to body and soul. So body and soul shall be saved and live forever: "the soul through the Word in which it believes," while the body is saved because it is united with the soul and apprehends baptism in the only way it can.<sup>19</sup> The content of the faith is therefore the Word. When in his treatise of "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" Luther speaks about baptism he mainly uses Mark 16:16 to speak about the effects of baptism. Again he says that baptism creates faith, and that the effects of baptism can only be received by faith. Luther has a careful formulation about the faith that baptism creates in the infants: the infants are initiated and sanctified "in the most simple faith of his Word" (*simplicissima fide verbi sui*).<sup>20</sup> He does not pretend to say that they have a faith "in the Word," or that they believe "the Word," since this would imply the knowledge

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bestetigung seiner seligkeit bey jm habe und sich des stercken und trösten möge in seinem gantzen leben, Und das er auch solches fur aller Welt öffentlich bekenne. . . ."

<sup>19</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 442, pars. 45 and 46.

<sup>20</sup>Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," LW, XXXVI, 57.



of the content of the Word of God. There is no way to explain an "unconscious knowledge," and Luther does not use these artificialities. For Luther it is that simple faith which the Word speaks about, which the Word provides through the action of the Holy Spirit. That this is his meaning is clear from what he says a little later, namely that

The Word of God is powerful enough, when uttered, to change even a godless heart, which is no less unresponsive and helpless than any infant. So through the prayer of the believing church which presents it, a prayer to which all things are possible (Mark 9:23), the infant is changed, cleansed, and renewed by inpoured faith.<sup>21</sup>

But when Luther goes on to speak about the meaning of this faith in life, he implies that this faith has a content, that it is active in the one baptized. He says that this faith "is truly a death and resurrection,"<sup>22</sup> a concept which we have to develop later in this study. At the same time he says that "this death and resurrection we call the new creation, regeneration, and spiritual birth." This death and resurrection which he later identifies also with repentance is in one sense our active fighting of sin and living for God. Therefore he says that

You need continually to be baptized by faith, continually to die and continually to live . . . Indeed,

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 68.



we need continually to be baptized more and more, until we fulfil the sign perfectly at the last day.<sup>23</sup>

This makes it clear that Luther thinks of a development of the "simplicissima fide verbi sui" into a powerful faith in action which has to realize itself more and more in the constant "death and resurrection," in the continual regeneration, in the new life in action. Faith has therefore not only a certain content, which is the Word of God through which the Holy Spirit constantly renews and develops faith, but it also has a power, given by the Holy Spirit, to renew the whole life of the Christian. It is of such a faith that Luther speaks when he says that it can even save without the sacrament. He says it in this paradoxical way: "Faith is such a necessary part of the sacrament that it can save even without the sacrament."<sup>24</sup>

Matt. 3:13-17

Since Luther considers Jesus' baptism the material institution of our baptism he very often uses this text to speak about the benefits of baptism. In a sermon on this text preached in 1534 he clearly makes the distinction between the "power and benefit" of baptism and the "use" or "the ones that receive it." In this sense he differentiates

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 67.



between the initial regeneration and the continual regeneration or new spiritual life in action.<sup>25</sup> In the second line of thought Luther says that one can receive baptism with or without faith. For those who do not believe baptism becomes ineffective, while to those who believe baptism gives everything that it promises. The one who believes that God gives him in baptism a "bath of the new birth," through which he is washed from sin and becomes God's child, he receives and gets as he believes, because there the heart is open, and it enters with full power, illuminates and warms and makes of the old dead man a new living and holy one.<sup>26</sup> This shows that Luther distinguishes between the "faith" and beginning regeneration in baptism, and the "faith" and use of baptism. But one is the continuation of the other, and both are God's gift.

Afterwards, when you have received it, you are due to see how you believe and use baptism correctly. This is what it means to speak about our doing. Summing up:

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<sup>25</sup>Luther, "Von der heiligen Taufe. Predigten. 1534," WA, XXXVII, 662, 34-36.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 663, 19-24: "Also widerumb wer da gleubet, das jm Gott jnn der Tauffe bestellet hat ein bad der newen geburt, dadurch er von sunden gewasschen und Gottes kind werde etc., der empfehets und empfindets also, wie er gleubet, Denn da stehet das hertz offen, und gehet hinein mit gantzer krafft, erleuchtet und erwermet und macht aus dem alten, toden menschen einen newen, lebendigen, heiligen."



These two, I say, baptism and faith have to be differentiated as far as heaven and earth, and God and man are differentiated from each other.<sup>27</sup>

First of all faith is a gift, but in its action faith becomes part of our doing, of our works, since faith has to be active in the Christian behaviour. Here Luther really makes a "tour de force" in his concept of faith, but it is perfectly fitted to make the point that we are stressing in this study. To understand the last part of the above cited quotation from Luther one has to read the previous arguments.<sup>28</sup> He is speaking against the Catholic dogma and the teachings of the Anabaptists. On the one hand he wants to say that baptism is meaningful beyond the act of baptism, through the whole life. On the other hand he wants to point out that baptism is really meaningful, because it provides the gifts of the Holy Spirit. To receive baptism is to receive faith. Therefore in the last analysis Luther identifies baptism with the beginning faith, the "fides directa." But faith in action is a different thing, because it involves not only the gift of God but also our work. And so he finally identifies this "faith" with our

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 665-2-6: "Darnach aber, wenn du sie also empfangen hast, gehöret dir darauff zusehen, wie du gleubest und der Tauffe brauchest, Das heisst denn von unserm thun geredet. Summa: Diese zwey (sage ich), Tauffe und Glaube sol man scheiden, so weit als himel und erden, Gott und mensch von einander gescheiden sind."

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 664, 29-p. 665, 2.



works. Since the "baptismal faith" is purely a gift of God, whereas the "faith in action" is our work also, Luther has to insist that we have to differentiate faith and baptism "as far as heaven and earth, as God and man are differentiated." One is gift, the other work. What strikes the reader is that Luther identifies baptism with faith, and on the other hand calls "faith" a work. "Faith" therefore does not always have the same meaning for Luther. Therefore we are able to make the distinction between the "fides directa" and the "fides reflexa." The "fides reflexa" is the faith in action, including therefore not only the knowledge of the object of faith, but also the works performed through the power of this faith.

In another sermon on Matt. 3:13-17 Luther speaks again of this faith in action, stressing the power of faith to grasp the content of the promise of God in baptism. He thinks of an adult person who can have faith before baptism, when he says that we receive the forgiveness because Christ suffered and died for us, and "we take hold of this by faith and let ourselves be baptized according to his command."<sup>29</sup>

We have seen that Luther first of all sees faith purely as gift of God, and secondly in action. This action Luther

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<sup>29</sup>Luther, "Sermon at the Baptism of Bernard von Anhalt, Matt. 3:13-17. 1540," LW, LI, 317.



sees in two ways: first he sees faith as the power behind our knowledge and understanding to make us grasp and hold firmly the promise and revelation of God, which finally leads to the formal "confession of faith"; and secondly as the power behind the behaviour of the Christian, which leads to the completion of regeneration at the Last Day.

### Faith and Covenant

As late as 1535 Luther says in the "Lectures on Genesis" that Scotus was right, defining baptism as "a divine covenant given with the element."<sup>30</sup> Accepting baptism as a covenant Luther develops an aspect which is foreign to biblical language. At first sight it looks foreign even to Luther's previous insights concerning baptism developed on the basis of scriptural texts. But in the light of his understanding of "faith," as treated in the previous section of this study, one can well understand the point that Luther wants to make. In a commentary on Mark 16:16 Luther developed the concept of faith in action, saying that God gave us baptism "so that our faith may grasp it more firmly and hold it. With this visible sign God testifies that he accepts us, and that he gives us what he

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<sup>30</sup>Luther, "Genesis-Vorlesung. 1535-1545," WA, XLII, 170, 18-19: "Scotus rectius dixit, cum definit Baptismum esse pactum divinum assistens elemento."

*Standing by  
Speaks more correctly*



proclaims and offers in the Gospel."<sup>31</sup> When he speaks of faith as holding baptism firmly, he thinks of faith in action on the part of an adult. That he is really speaking of the faith of an adult person is clear from a comment a few lines farther on. He says that the one who is a Christian and believes certainly will gladly receive this sign of baptism, so that he may have this divine testimony and confirmation of his salvation, and that he may strengthen and comfort himself all his life, and that he may confess it before all the world.<sup>32</sup> The presupposition is that someone is a Christian before baptism. Such a man receives in baptism the sign, the testimony, the confirmation of his salvation. Luther changes the language when he speaks of adult baptism, although he believes that regeneration is still going on even in the baptism of an adult who believes, because for him regeneration is continual. Baptism is a sign also for an infant who is baptized. But Luther speaks of sign more fully in connection with adult baptism. Since the adult is already regenerated and has faith, baptism for him is more the guarantee, the seal of God, which brings him an increase of certainty and comfort, renewing in him the power of faith, and in this way granting him

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<sup>31</sup>Luther, "Crucigers Sommerpostille," WA, XXI, 398, 23-26. Supra, p. 93, n. 16.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 405, 6-10. Supra, p. 93, n. 18.



continual regeneration. Only in the light of this view of baptism of an adult whose faith is already active can one understand Luther's emphasis on the idea of covenant which he develops in his treatise of "The holy and blessed Sacrament of Baptism" of 1519. It is surely a strange language, which would very much please Karl Barth, who insists on a "responsible baptism."<sup>33</sup> We have to keep in mind that Luther is speaking of baptism preceded by faith. He says

This is the place for a right understanding of the sacrament of baptism. This blessed sacrament of baptism helps you because in it God allies himself with you and becomes one with you in a gracious covenant of comfort.<sup>34</sup>

One could think that this is a one-sided covenant in which only God acts, and therefore it could be applied also to infant baptism. But here Luther speaks differently. He continues to say

In the first place you give yourself up to the sacrament of baptism and to what it signifies. That is, you desire to die, together with your sins, and to be made new at the Last Day. . . . God accepts this desire at your hands and grants you baptism. From that hour he begins to make you a new person. He pours into you his grace and Holy Spirit, who begins to slay nature and sin, and to prepare you for death and the resurrection at the Last Day.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Karl Barth, "Die kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe," Theologische Existenz Heute (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1947), Neue Folge, Nr. 4, p. 40.

<sup>34</sup>Luther, "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," LW, XXXV, 33.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.



One could fall into despair reading such statements of Luther after all that has been said about regeneration, faith, and baptism in this study, if one did not know about continual regeneration. But seeing it in the light of the faith in action, and of the concept of continual regeneration, it fits perfectly in Luther's general doctrine of baptism and regeneration. We may take it from the point of view of the believing adult who asks for baptism, and we will find that his statement is true: he makes a covenant with God by faith. One may look at it from the view of the continual regeneration and one will find that again it is true: we are reborn every day, and the regeneration will be completed only at the Last Day.

In the second place you pledge yourself to continue in this desire, and to slay your sin more and more as long as you live, even until your dying day. This too God accepts. He trains and tests you all your life long, with many good works and with all kinds of sufferings. Thereby he accomplishes what you in baptism have desired, namely, that you may become free from sin, die, and rise again at the Last Day, and so fulfill your baptism.<sup>36</sup>

Here it becomes clear that Luther is speaking of the faith in action, since he speaks of our fulfilling our baptism through our Christian behavior. On the other hand it shows that he again thinks of baptism as still going on in its effects, and that it will be fulfilled only at the Last Day. What kind of covenant is this which starts with

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 33-34.



the faith given by God and ends with the acceptance by God? It is nothing else than a covenant of pure grace and comfort, since everything comes from God and is purely his gracious gift. The idea of covenant is therefore a development of the idea of sign, guarantee, and seal, based on the visible, tangible element, which puts the fact of our regeneration more concretely into our consciousness, so that we may be assured personally that God is dealing graciously with us.

#### The New Life in Action

Although Luther deals carefully with the exegetical basis of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, and stresses the value of the act of baptism, he is more concerned with the use of the gifts received in baptism, since he always thinks in practical terms. The act of baptism is past: what now? Does it have any significance for the life of the Christian? This is his major concern which comes through in nearly all of his writings about baptism. The whole treatise of "The holy and blessed Sacrament of Baptism" is concerned with this problem. Werner Jetter already observed that the central thought for Luther on baptism is that the "effect of baptism" turns into the "use of baptism" during the whole life.<sup>37</sup> The

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<sup>37</sup>Jetter, p. 243.



gifts received through the Holy Spirit in baptism are gifts without which we cannot live a life before God. They started a new life in us. The effects which are produced in baptism have to spread through our whole life. Without these continuing effects we could not live before God. The regeneration which started at our baptism is still in development and will be completed only at the Last Day. We will consider the new life in action under the aspects of "repentance" and of "death and resurrection."

#### Repentance

Luther believes that baptism is the beginning of repentance. He knows that we cannot get rid of sin during our whole life, but in baptism the "sweeping out" of sin begins. Harry G. Coiner already said this in his short study about baptism. He says that

The ongoing nature of baptism consists in a long series of fresh acts of repentance and faith in the hope and assurance that the perfect righteousness of Christ (though present and real here and now) and its sovereign rule over us may be established and that sin and flesh will hold sway no longer.<sup>38</sup>

This is also the first thesis of Edmund Schlink in his considerations on baptism in his "Theology of the Lutheran

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<sup>38</sup>Harry G. Coiner, "The Inclusive Nature of Holy Baptism in Luther's Writings," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXIII, No. 11 (Nov. 1962), 649.



Confessions." He says that

Daily repentance through contrition under the law and and through faith in the Gospel is a daily "return" to baptism and a daily approach to the Lord's Supper.<sup>39</sup>

Luther says that first of all God forgives us our sin in baptism, but at the same time he gives us faith and regeneration so that we become able to get away from sin and always turn again to God, that we "sweep out" sin and hold to the forgiveness given by God. Repentance is therefore a constant return to baptism and its effects.

In a commentary on John 1:32 Luther speaks about the baptism of Jesus. Jesus accepts the baptism of John, which according to Matt. 3:11 was a baptism of repentance, but Jesus puts the fire in it, that is, "He imparts the Holy Spirit, who kindles His virtues in us."<sup>40</sup> God gives the Holy Spirit to continue the work in us, so that we may live in daily repentance.

Christ wants to say: I baptize and call you to repentance. But at the same time I confer on you the spiritual fire, that is, the Holy Spirit, so that you may live under the forgiveness of sins, repenting daily and purging and cleansing the evil flesh, which strives against the spirit.<sup>41</sup>

The same Luther says again in connection with Matt.

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<sup>39</sup>Edmund Schlink, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, translated by Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 141.

<sup>40</sup>Luther, "Sermons on the Gospel of Saint John, chapters 1-4. 1537-1540," LW, XXII, 179.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 180.



3:13-17. "Baptism is a beginning of repentance."<sup>42</sup> "This is baptism, which is a beginning of the penitence, dissatisfaction of one self and one's sinful life, and renewal of a new life in Christ."<sup>43</sup> Repentance is therefore an aspect of the new life in action, by which we always turn again to God, away from sin and the sinfulness of the old life, the old Adam. Luther understands repentance as an integral part of baptism, because he develops this idea in the view of the word "will be saved" in Mark 16:16. That we are saved does not mean that we are holy after baptism, but that we become able to repent. In this connection repentance for Luther is "an earnest attack on the old man, and an entering upon a new life."<sup>44</sup> This is in the last analysis the power to turn to God, as he says: "In baptism we are given the grace, Spirit, and power to suppress the old man so that the new may come forth and grow strong."<sup>45</sup> We have the power to repent only through the Spirit. We must always turn back to this power in baptism, turn to God, so that we may

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<sup>42</sup>Luther, "Fastenpostille. 1525," WA, XVII, 11, 379, 3-4: "Die Tauff ist ain anfang der busse. . . ."

<sup>43</sup>Luther, "Ein guter nützlicher Sermon D. M. Luthers, gepredigt am Obersten (Dreikonigstag). Matth. 2, lff. 6 Jan. 1521," WA, VII, 257, 10-12: "Das ist den tauf, der ain anfang ist der penitentz, missfallen über sich selbs und sein sündtlich leben, und erneüwerung aines neüwen leben in Christo. . . ."

<sup>44</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 445, par. 75.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 445-446, par. 76.



be able to fight the old man and live the new life created through the regeneration in baptism. "Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to baptism, to resume and practice what had earlier been begun but abandoned."<sup>46</sup> This is the same as what he says also in the Small Catechism, when he speaks about the "significance" of baptism:

It signifies that the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God's presence.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore Luther is so greatly opposed to the saying of St. Jerome who wrote that "repentance is the second plank on which we must swim ashore after the ship founders."<sup>48</sup> The first ship is meant to be baptism. Luther says that this first ship does not founder. It happens that we slip and fall out of the ship. "If anybody does fall out, he should immediately head for the ship and cling to it until he can climb aboard again and sail on in it as he had done before."<sup>49</sup> In his treatise on "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" Luther says also:

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 446, par. 79.

<sup>47</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Small Catechism," BC, p. 349, par. 12.

<sup>48</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, p. 446, par. 81.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 446, par. 82.



The sacrament of penance, which I added . . . , lacks the divinely instituted visible sign, and is, as I have said, nothing but a way and a return to baptism.<sup>50</sup>

The new life of a Christian, created in baptism, is nothing else than a constant repentance. This was also Luther's first of the "95 Theses" of 1517: "Dominus et magister noster Iesus Christus dicendo 'Penitentiam agite etc.' omnem vitam fidelium penitentiam esse voluit."<sup>51</sup>

#### Death and Resurrection

This is the place where Luther's formula "simul iustus et peccator,"<sup>52</sup> or "simul ergo iustus, simul peccator"<sup>53</sup> fits right into the scheme. The regenerate man is at the same time holy and sinner. He is holy because he is regenerated, believes, is a new creature, has new life given by God. He is sinner, because he is still the old man born in sin and cannot cease to commit sin. Luther knows that according to the new man the regenerated man is completely holy, because he has the forgiveness of sins. Since he has

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<sup>50</sup>Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity," LW, XXXVI, 124.

<sup>51</sup>Luther, "Disputatio pro declaratione virtutibus indulgentiarum. 31 Okt. 1517," WA, I, 233, 10-11.

<sup>52</sup>Luther, "In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas commentarius, ex praelectione D. M. Lutheri collectus. 1535," WA, XL, 1, 368, 26. Cf. LW, XXVI, 232.

<sup>53</sup>Luther, "In epistolam Pauli ad Galatas M. Lutheri commentarius. 1519," WA, II, 497, 13. Cf. LW, XXVII, 231.



the old Adam in himself he is imperfect, unholy, a sinner. There is therefore a difference between the regenerated and the new man. The regenerated man is both holy and sinner, while the new man is completely holy. But Luther does not think of the Christian as having a double personality. He is still one and the same man. Therefore he understands the struggle within us in a peculiar way. The old man cannot be totally killed while we live, but even so we have to kill him. The new man does not die while we are Christians, but even so he has to rise by what Luther calls a daily resurrection. We can suppose that Luther thought that while we commit sins the old man has control over us and the new man is almost dead. And when we live the new life in action the old man in us is almost killed, because the new man has the control in us. This at least is the picture which he develops in his writings about the effect of baptism in our life. In some sense the new man is perfect in us, while he is identified with the faith given by the Holy Spirit through which we have the remission of sins. In another sense the new man is not yet perfect, because he can suffer the oppression of the old man in us. We have to keep these concepts in mind if we want to understand Luther's language about the death and resurrection in our life.



Rom. 6:4

This text provides Luther with the main source for the concepts of death and resurrection in our life. He thinks of these concepts in three different aspects. First of all he relates them to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The sinner does not so much need to be washed as he needs to die, in order to be wholly renewed and made another creature, and to be conformed to the death and resurrection of Christ, with whom he dies and rises again through baptism.<sup>54</sup>

This means that baptism gives us the "full and complete justification,"<sup>55</sup> because in baptism we receive all the benefits of the death and resurrection of Christ. This our death and resurrection in baptism "we call the new creation, regeneration, and spiritual birth."<sup>56</sup> This leads to the second aspect of death and resurrection in our life. "As soon as we begin to believe, we also begin to die to this world and live to God in the life to come."<sup>57</sup> In this view Luther sees again that baptism, even in respect to its sign, which is the complete drowning in water and the drawing out of it, is "not a matter of the moment, but

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<sup>54</sup>Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity," LW, XXXVI, 68.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.



something permanent,"<sup>58</sup> because it points to the death and resurrection in our life.

You have been once baptized in the sacrament, but you need continually to be baptized by faith, continually to die and continually to live. . . . Indeed, we need continually to be baptized more and more, until we fulfill the sign perfectly at the last day.<sup>59</sup>

In the treatise on "The holy and blessed Sacrament of Baptism" Luther develops this concept at length. The "significance" of baptism, that is, its deeper meaning and continual effect, is

a blessed dying unto sin and a resurrection in the grace of God, so that the old man, conceived and born in sin, is there drowned, and a new man, born in grace, comes forth and rises.<sup>60</sup>

This is his understanding also in the Small Catechism, where he says that Rom. 6:4 tells us that

The old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned. . . and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous. . . .<sup>61</sup>

Luther understands that we were baptized not only to be washed and cleansed according to the soul through the forgiveness of sins, but also to the end that our flesh and blood were to be condemned and sentenced to be drowned,

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Luther, "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," LW, XXXV, 30.

<sup>61</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Small Catechism," BC, p. 349, par. 12.



so that our life on earth may be a continual dying to sin, because our baptism is nothing else than a strangling by grace, or a gracious strangling, through which sin is being drowned, so that we may continue under grace and not be condemned through sin under the wrath of God. Through baptism we receive the power of the death of Christ.

Through his resurrection we have through faith the victory over sin and death, and have eternal justice and life.<sup>62</sup>

This leads to the third aspect, which is the natural death and the final resurrection.

As we can plainly see, the sacrament or sign of baptism is quickly over. But the spiritual baptism, the drowning of sin, which it signifies, lasts as long as we live and is completed only in death. Then it is that a person is completely sunk in baptism, and that which baptism signifies comes to pass . . . . Similarly the lifting up out of the baptismal water is quickly done, but the thing it signifies--the spiritual birth and the increase of grace and righteousness--even though it begins in baptism, lasts until death, indeed, until the Last Day. Only then will that be finished which the lifting up out of baptism signifies. Then shall we arise from death, from sins, and from all evil, pure in body and soul, and then shall we live eternally. Then shall we be truly lifted up out of baptism and be completely born, and we shall put on the true baptismal garment of immortal life in heaven.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Luther, "Crucigers Sommerpostille," WA, XXII, 94, 31-39: "sondern auch damit ewer fleisch und blut zum tode verurteilt und ubergeben ist, das es gar ersauffen sol, . . . Denn ewer Tauffe ist auch nichts anders denn ein würgen der Gnade (oder gnediges würgen), dadurch die Sünde an euch erseuffet. . . ."

<sup>63</sup>Luther, "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," LW, XXXV, 30-31.



Luther even says that baptism plainly signifies "death and resurrection at the Last Day."<sup>64</sup> The new life in action is therefore for Luther tied up with a continual death and resurrection which ends at the last day. Baptism is therefore the preparation for our "death and resurrection at the Last Day."<sup>65</sup>

On the basis of John 3:3 Luther develops the same idea of being regenerated and not yet being regenerated. We have to be reborn and then behave as reborn children. The state of being a newborn child remains in our life.<sup>66</sup> It is a regeneration but not yet completed. The actions of "being dipped into the water . . . and being drawn out again," which is "simply the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man," have to continue in us during our whole life.<sup>67</sup> In this connection Luther regards on the one hand the new man as already existing, because we are "reborn children," and on the other hand the new man in us has to arise every day as though he were dead again and again. It is naturally a figurative language which shows us the preoccupation of Luther to make clear that

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>66</sup>Luther, "Sermons on Gospel of John," LW, XXII, 280: "You must think of yourself as an infant. . . ."

<sup>67</sup>Luther, "Baptism," in "Large Catechism," BC, pp. 444-445, par. 65.



there is a struggle that we have to fight to keep the new man alive and growing, and to kill the old Adam more and more. This is perhaps the most important aspect of baptism for Luther, because he says that the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man

is the right use of baptism among Christians, signified by baptizing with water. Where this amendment of life does not take place but the old man is given free rein and continually grows stronger, baptism is not being used but resisted.<sup>68</sup>

In this sense baptism "always remains until we pass from this present misery to eternal glory."<sup>69</sup> We died to sin already in baptism and became new men, but since the old man comes up again and the new man grows weak "we must also live now as newborn men in a new life, as Peter and Paul tell us (I Pet. 2:1; Rom. 6:4), so that one can perceive in our life that we received baptism usefully and blissfully."<sup>70</sup> Baptism has therefore such an important meaning for Luther. In all attacks of the devil and his own flesh can Luther speak joyfully with confidence and faith. It is a hard fight that goes on after our baptism. Luther says: "When you are baptized then be sure that you

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 445, par. 68.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 446, par. 83.

<sup>70</sup>Luther, "Predigten von der Taufe," WA, XXXVII, 670, 9-15: "das wir auch hinfurt als new geborne menschen jnn einem newen leben wandeln, . . . damit man an unserm leben spüren könne, das wir die Tauffe nützlich und seliglich empfangen haben."



will not be safe from the devil and sin for one hour, and know that you then will not have any rest."<sup>71</sup> But we can rely on our baptism, since there we have received the power of the Holy Spirit, the victory of Christ, the assurance of the "God with us." In all attacks of the devil and his own flesh Luther can joyfully accept the fight, and with confidence and faith say: "Ego sum baptisatus,"<sup>72</sup> "I am baptized."<sup>73</sup> This is his confidence and faith until the final death and resurrection at the Last Day. The ultimate finality toward which we are baptized, says Luther, is that we become citizens of heaven.

As soon as one draws a child out of baptism and dresses it in the baptismal garment, it is initiated into eternal life. It will be from there on only a pilgrim and guest on this earth, so that it will prepare itself to leave this temporal life, and will hope for and always expect that imperishable life.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Luther, "Epistel S. Petri gepredigt und ausgelegt, D. M. Luther. 1523," WA, XII, 326, 17-19: "Also auch, wenn du getaufft bist, so sihe drauff, das du nu keyn stund sicher seyest fur dem teuffel und fur der sund, und ja denckest, du wirst nu keyn ruge haben."

<sup>72</sup>Luther, "Genesis-Vorlesung," WA, XLIV, 273, 15.

<sup>73</sup>Luther, "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," LW, XXXV, 36.

<sup>74</sup>Luther, "Von unserer seligen Hoffnung, aus der Epistel S. Pauli. Tit. 2, 13ff. Durch D. M. Luther gepredigt zu Kemberg. 19 Aug. 1531," WA, XXXIV, 11, 116, 24-28: "Als bald man ein Kind aus der Tauffe hebet und jm das Westerhembd anzeucht, So wirts von stund an eingeweihet zum ewigen Leben. Das es hinfurt die zeit seines Lebens nur ein Pilgerim und Gast sey in dieser Welt und sich also drein schicke, das es dis zeitlich Leben gedencke zu lassen und auff jenes unvergengliche Leben jmerdar hoffe und warte."



## CHAPTER V

### BAPTISMAL REGENERATION AS TAUGHT BY OTHER EARLY LUTHERAN THEOLOGIANs

Since we tried to understand on which exegetical basis the early Lutheran doctrine of baptismal regeneration was primarily developed, we followed the exegetical approaches of Luther, which we will compare briefly with some of the other Lutheran theologians of the time of Luther. It is clear that this cannot be considered a thorough treatise on the subject, since it was not possible in the scope of this study to analyse each writing of Luther, nor each Lutheran theologian of the time. It would be significant to continue this study, so that all the evidence available could be evaluated to give a complete picture of the understanding of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration in early Lutheran theology. As far as we were able to go we found that the theology of the other Lutheran theologians did not diverge in the essentials from Luther's position. But we noted that they do not speak with the emphasis of Luther about the faith of infants as the gift of the Holy Spirit through baptism. That children can believe is clear for all of them, but that it is given in baptism is not often spelled out very clearly. The main emphasis is directed towards the "significance" of baptism, the



importance of the sign and covenant, and the reception into the church through baptism.

Melanchthon says that the main reason why we baptize infants is that they may receive faith. Faith can only be obtained through the Word of God, and in baptism there is the Word of God.<sup>1</sup> Against the argument of the Anabaptists that the infants have no reason, and therefore cannot believe, Melanchthon answers that in spiritual matters reason is "nullus."<sup>2</sup> This puts him on the side of Luther in respect to the understanding of the faith of infants as "fides directa." He also says that even they cannot understand it, the Word of God is efficacious in them. He bases the arguments on the same texts as Luther, using Mark 10:14 to prove that the kingdom of God belongs to children. This can only happen when God is efficacious in them. This is regeneration, and it is possible only through the water and the Spirit, according to John 3:5. We cannot know how God works in them, but we have to be satisfied with the assurance that God works in them, and that the children

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<sup>1</sup>Philip Melanchthon, "Iudicium de Anabaptistis," Corpus Reformatorum, edited by Carolus Gottlieb Bretschneider (Halis Saxonum: C. A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1834), I, col. 932: "Atqui ob eam causam maxime sunt baptisandi pueri, ut fidem consequantur, quia fidem nemo consequitur nisi ex verbo Dei. In baptismo autem est verbum Dei." Hereafter the Corpus Reformatorum will be cited as CR, followed by volume and column numbers.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. "Nullus est enim rationis usus in rebus spiritualibus."



are saved.<sup>3</sup> Although from there on Melanchthon emphasizes baptism as the sign and guarantee of salvation he says nevertheless that "as the Word is perceived in our ears to arouse faith in our hearts, so a sign occurs to our eyes that it may also arouse faith in our hearts,"<sup>4</sup> and "just as the voice is perceived by our ears, so the sacrament confronts our eyes to move our hearts to believe."<sup>5</sup>

Johannes Bugenhagen argues with the Anabaptists and says that the infants cannot confess Christ with their mouth, but they confess Him with the sign, the sacrament of baptism, and say that they will live and die in Christ, and that they have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. This they cannot say, because they do not have reason, but Christ has reason enough and speaks seriously for them when he says "Let the children come to me!"<sup>6</sup> Bugenhagen

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<sup>3</sup>Philip Melanchthon, "Loci Theologici," Corpus Reformatorum, edited by Henricus Ernestus Bindseil (Brunsvigae: C. A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1854), XXI, cols. 475 and 471: "Praeterea etiamsi non intellegunt verbum, tamen ex superiore propositione fateri necesse est, quod Deus sit in eis efficax. Nam cum certum sit salutem et regnum Dei ad infantes pertinere, certum est etiam Deum in eis efficacem esse. . . ." Cf. CR, III, col. 33.

<sup>4</sup>Philip Melanchthon, Selected Writings, edited and translated by Charles Leander Hill (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), p. 106. Cf. CR, I, 968-969.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Johannes Bugenhagen, Der XXIX. Psalm ausgelegt durch Doctor Johan Bugenhagen, Pomern, Darinnen auch von der



does not say exactly that "the infants believe," but considering the implications of his arguments one can be convinced that he believes that. In another sermon he defends infant baptism saying that in Eph. 1 (13.17) Paul says that faith comes from the Lord. Since in baptism God provided the Word to be heard, there is an occasion to hear it, although we do not acquire faith through reason.<sup>7</sup> Indirectly Bugenhagen says that children receive faith through baptism, holding thus the doctrinal position of Luther about the "fides directa."

Johannes Brenz says very clearly that infants can believe, but unfortunately he does not express in clear words that this faith is given through baptism. Indirectly one

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Kinder Tauffe, item von den ungeboren Kindern, und von den Kindern die man nicht teuffen kan, ein trost D. Martini Luthers welchen es ungerat gegangen ist mit Kinder geben (Wittenberg: Joseph Klug, 1542). No pagination. In his commentary on Psalm 29:10 he says: "Gleich als du sihest ein gnaden Exempel in den Kindlein von Christo angenommen, die noch nicht lernen oder mit jrem mund bekennen, und bringen Christo anders nicht zu den sunde . . . . Haben die Kinder keinen verstand, können sie nicht reden, so hat Christus verstandts gnug und redet fur die Kinder mit rechtem ernst, Lasset die Kindlein zu mir kommen etc. Las den Man reden er hat eine gut sprach besser den alle Widderteuffer! . . . Und ob die Kindlein nicht mit dem munde Christum bekennen können, so bekennen sie doch Christum mit dem zeichen mit dem Sacrament oder Tauffe, das sie in Christo wollen leben und sterben, und in Christo habe Vergebung der sunden und das ewige leben."

<sup>7</sup>Georg Buchwald, Ungedruckte Predigten Johann Bugenhagens aus den Jahren 1524 bis 1529 (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1910), pp. 26, 32-33: "Ephe. I. Paulus dicit: fides est ex domino, sed non oportet ut ideo auditum obtures, et dominus dedit hanc occasionem, ut per auditum audiremus verbum, non ergo per rationem nos acquiremus fidem."



can always find this assertion. He speaks of a "twofold faith": one is the "hidden faith" of the infants, and the other the faith of an adult. God "bestows" upon the children of the church this "hidden faith," which only He knows and sees.<sup>8</sup> How God "bestows" this faith upon the children Brenz does not explain. Since he speaks of the "children of the church" one could suppose that this faith could also be given to the children through the fact that they are born in the church and that their Christian parents pray for them. This is, for example, the assumption of Bugenhagen in respect to the children that die without baptism, but who had parents who wanted to baptize them and prayed for them.<sup>9</sup> This aspect has to be explored in more detail, since Luther also has some references in this respect, but we will not have occasion to do it in this study.

But Brenz might have taken for granted that his readers would understand that this "hidden faith" is given only

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<sup>8</sup>Johann Brenz, Der Gross Deutsche Catechismus (Schwebisch Hall: Thoma Biber, 1554), p. 15v: "Also ist auch zweyerley Glauben. Dann ob schon der Glaub an Christum an sich selbs nicht getheilt ist, Dann es ist ein Glaub, spricht Paulus, so ist er doch nicht gleicherweiss jn den Kindlin, wie jhn den verstendigen. Darumb nennen wir den einen Glauben, den verborgenen Glauben, mit welchem Gott, nach seiner grossen guete, die jungen Kinder seiner Kirchen begabet, den er auch allein kennet vnd sihet." Julius Hartmann and Karl Jäger, Johann Brenz, Nach gedruckten und ungedruckten Quellen (Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1840), I, 291.

<sup>9</sup>Bugenhagen, no pagination. Commentary on Psalm 29:10.



through baptism. In this sense Brenz would be in the same line with Luther, since the "hidden faith" corresponds to Luther's understanding of the faith of infants which we called the "fides directa." Although Brenz speaks very much of baptism as the seal, covenant, sign of the grace of God, he also uses, without major emphasis, expressions which imply that we receive faith through baptism. He says that "we become members of Christ . . . through baptism,"<sup>10</sup> that "through baptism we become Christians,"<sup>11</sup> that we are baptized "so that we believe in Jesus Christ and in his Gospel,"<sup>12</sup> that "the Holy Spirit gives him (to the one baptized) his gifts, causes and confirms in him faith, . . . starts to renew."<sup>13</sup> These assertions lead us to believe that Brenz continued in the same doctrine of baptismal regeneration, even overstressing the aspect of baptism as a covenant.

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<sup>10</sup>Johann Brenz, Von der Kinder Heyl und Seligkeit und und ob auch der Juden und Tuercken ungetauffte Kinder selig werden. Article II in: Felix Bidembach, Consiliorum Theologicorum Decas I., Das ist Zehen Theologischer Bedencken, Bericht oder Antwort (Franckfurt am Meyn: Johann Berrner, 1608), p. 10: "Dann die Glieder Christi werden ihm zugethan vnd eigeleibt durch den Tauff, vnd durch die Mitwirckung dess H. Geists."

<sup>11</sup>Brenz, Catechismus, p. 21v.: "Also verstehestu nun, wie wir durch den Tauff Christen werden. . . ."

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 22: "Darnach heist jm namen Christi Getaufft werden, darzu Getaufft werden, das wir Jesu Christo vnd seinem Euangelio Glauben. . . ."

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 24: "Der Heilig Geist gibt jm seine gaben, erwecket vnd bestetiget jn im den Glauben, erwecket in jm, vnn entzuendet ware anrueffung, fengt an jn zuernewern, auff das er das fleisch toedte, vnd jn Gottes beruff wandeln. . . ."



In chapter IV of this study we saw that Luther understands baptism as an ongoing regeneration. We are completely regenerated only at our death and resurrection. But our baptism prepares us for the continual struggle that is going on between the old Adam and the new man created in us through baptism. Since we never will be without our flesh in this life, the regeneration will not be completed until the Last Day. In baptism our faith was given by the Holy Spirit, or, if we were baptized as adults who already believed, baptism strengthened our faith and continued our regeneration. The given faith has to be developed through understanding of the object of our faith, and action upon the Christian life that we have to live. Therefore baptism is also the beginning of repentance, since it involves the constant killing of the old Adam, and the turning to God, and continual resurrection of the new man in us. The final goal of our baptism is eternal salvation. Through death and resurrection we will reach the final regeneration and so enter into the heritage prepared for us by Jesus Christ, our Lord. To reach this goal we must always turn back to the gifts and effects of baptism, and draw strength and power from the promise of God given in baptism. In this sense baptism is also the covenant that God made with us, the sure and effective seal that guarantees us that we have a gracious God, that we belong to the Church, that we can fight sin and the devil, that we are children of God.



This last aspect is the most commonly stressed by all the early Lutheran theologians, even to a certain extent Luther. They think that it is more important to live in the grace of baptism than to know exactly what happened at the one event of our baptism. Melanchthon says this very often. He says for example that "baptism is the sign of penitence and remission of sins,"<sup>14</sup> "baptism is principally a covenant of grace or of the divine promise to us, through which he forgives sins."<sup>15</sup> He even calls it the "sacrament of penitence."<sup>16</sup> The emphasis that he gives in this direction is at first sight a little oppressing, since he points out that baptism should be used to

terrify us and exhort us to repentance and reveal the wrath of God against sin. And since we are baptized into Christ, it entreats us to see in Christ the wrath of God against sin. . . . Therefore this is the use of baptism: to be frightened by the magnitude of divine wrath to follow the example of Christ. . . . We have received, as though condemned to death, a sign of our death and of God's judgment. Therefore we ought to be afraid and repent and feel that God by right should be angry with us and punish us. Nor is it enough to be thoroughly terrified by baptism, but in these terrors

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<sup>14</sup>Philip Melanchthon, "De Anabaptistis," Corpus Reformatorum edited by Carolus Gottlieb Bretschneider (Halis Saxonum: C. A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1834), vol. I, col. 959: "Baptismus est signum poenitentiae et remissionis peccatorum."

<sup>15</sup>Melanchthon, "Loci Theologici," CR, XXI, 476: "Baptismus enim principaliter est pactum gratiae seu promissionis divinae erga nos, qua nobis remittit peccata."

<sup>16</sup>Philip Melanchthon, The Loci Communes of Philip Melanchthon, translated by Charles Leander Hill (Boston: Meador Publishing Co., 1944), p. 245.



we must take hold of faith and consider baptism and feel that it is a sign of promised grace and of the remission of sins.<sup>17</sup>

This legalistic approach we found only in Melanchthon. It finally turns out right, but the emphasis on the "terrores conscientiae" in repentance is very strong. He also underlines the fact that not the sign as such can justify, as learned from the Roman Catholic dogma, but that it is only by faith that we are justified. "Indeed signs do not justify, but the faith of H. and that of G. likewise had to be supported, strengthened, and confirmed by such signs."<sup>18</sup> When Melanchthon speaks of the function of the sign, he says that it is given to

demonstrate that you pass from death unto life; to witness the fact that your mortification of the flesh is indeed salutary. . . . Wherefore, there is need of this sign so long as mortification lasts. However, mortification is not completed until the Old Adam has become extinct. Wherefore it happens that, in the meantime and forever throughout the entire life, there is need for a sign that will console the conscience in the process of this constant mortification. And it is clear from this that signs are nothing but "mnemosyna" of exercised faith.<sup>19</sup>

So he says also that baptism signifies "mortification and vivification,"<sup>20</sup> since it "certifies of grace already

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<sup>17</sup>Melanchthon, Selected Writings, p. 108. Cf. CR, I, 959-961.

<sup>18</sup>Melanchthon, Loci Communes, p. 241.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 245-246.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 247.



conferred."<sup>21</sup> Luther would agree with this in his exposition of the use of baptism, since he speaks in similar terms. It even seems likely that Melanchthon relied on Luther's treatise on "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" or other writings, since the figures used are similar. Melanchthon goes beyond Luther in his stress on penitence in the sense of the "terrores" which we have to feel when we are baptized.

Bugenhagen also uses the idea of covenant in his sermon about infant baptism. He understands this covenant as purely one-sided, since the infant has no active reason to make a decision. "Baptism is a covenant with Christ in which Christ says to the child: You are mine, I am yours."<sup>22</sup> In this sense the covenant is clearly described as pure grace, as Luther does it too. It is all gift of God, and in this sense not a mutual covenant. Bugenhagen does not speak in this sermon about the use of baptism, but we can suppose that he follows in the same line with Luther.

Brenz calls baptism the "sacrament of vivification and justification."<sup>23</sup> In his Catechism he defines baptism as

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>22</sup>Bugenhagen, no pagination. Commentary on Psalm 29:10: "Also ist auch die Tauffe ein Bund mit Christo, da Christo spricht zum Kinde, Du bist mein, Ich bin dein."

<sup>23</sup>Johann Brenz, Der Euangelist Johannes Ausgelegt



a sacrament and divine token, through which God the Father through his Son, and the Holy Spirit, promises to be a gracious God to the one baptized, to forgive him all sins, and to accept him as a child and heir of all heavenly blessings.

Even knowing that baptism is commanded by God and that therefore we have to apply it, Brenz says that baptism "is not 'morale preceptum,' but 'ceremoniale,' that is, that it is not essential (das leben antrifft), but only a ceremony,"<sup>25</sup> comparable to the circumcision which was suspended during the wanderings through the desert. He says this in order to emphasize that one can be saved also without baptism in special circumstances, as Luther also says, since the one believes and is regenerated through faith. But this emphasis on the "token" or sign of baptism is so strong that it overshadows the concept of baptism as a means of grace. Baptism is the token by which Christ confirms that he gives to the believer all the gifts promised through the Gospel. It strengthens our faith.

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durch D. Johnnem Brentium, translated by Hiob Gast (no publisher indicated, 1539), p. 30v.: "Derhalben ist auch der tauff Christi der lebendigmachung vnd rechtfertigung sacrament."

<sup>24</sup>Brenz, Catechismus, no pagination: "Der Tauff ist ein Sacrament vnd ein Göttliches warzeichen, darmit sich Gott der Vatter durch seinen Son Jesum Christum, sampt dem Heiligen Geist, verspricht, das er dem Getaufften ein Gnediger Gott wölle sein vnd verzeihe jm alle sünd, neme jhn auff an eines Kinds statt, vnd Erben aller Himlischen güter."

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 18v.: "Wiewol aber diss Gebot sich eusserlich Taufen zulassen, nicht Morale preceptum, sonder Ceremoniale ist, das ist, nicht das leben antrifft, sonder nur ein Cerimonien ist. . . ."



Therefore baptism is necessary.<sup>26</sup> Brenz sees in baptism both the giving of the things promised in the Gospel, as well as its confirmation as through a "public ceremony and ostentation (gebrenge=Geprang)."<sup>27</sup> He compares baptism to the anointing of a king,<sup>28</sup> the public marriage of Christ with the believer,<sup>29</sup> the investment with the possession of the heavenly blessings,<sup>30</sup> and an alliance.<sup>31</sup> "To be baptized in the name of Christ means to be introduced, accepted, and received into the communion of all the blessings of Christ."<sup>32</sup> But not in the sense that "man is only now received into the protection of God, since he already has been received by God through faith."<sup>33</sup> This last statement makes us doubt about his understanding of baptism as the

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 18v.: "Derhalben auch der Tauffe auff seine weiss von nöten ist."

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 19: "Darumb hat Christus den Tauff eingesetzt, als ein öffentliche Cerimoniam vnd gebrenge, damit er dem Glaubigen, die ding vbergibt vnd bestetiget, die jm Euangelio verheissen werden."

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 19v.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 21v.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 22v.: "Dann jn den namen Christi Getaufft werden, heist durch den Tauff jn die gemeinschaft aller güter Christi geweiht, zugelassen, vnd angenommen werden."

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 22v.: "Solchs aber nicht also, als wann der Mensch aller erst jetzt jn Gottes schutz vnd schirm auffgenommen werde, so er doch vorhin durch den Glauben von Gott angenommen ist worden."



means of grace, since he expects faith before baptism. He says that through baptism "God publicly testifies, confirms, and proclaims that he has accepted the believer."<sup>34</sup> This aspect of Brenz' doctrine would require another thorough study to understand the reason for this emphasis. It is true that Luther uses similar language when he speaks about the baptism of adults. This might be the background of the thought of Brenz also. Brenz in his Catechism uses many proof-texts to support his understanding of baptism. Gal. 3:27 tells him that God testifies in baptism that he receives the one who is baptized in grace, and as a child of God and heir of his Son Jesus Christ. Eph. 5:26 gives him the assurance that the one who believes is sanctified and cleansed from all his sins through the sign of baptism. According to Tit. 3:5 baptism is the bath of regeneration, that is, an instrument, means, and testimony through which we are made sure that we are saved for the sake of Christ. I Peter 3:21 says that baptism is a sign of the covenant through which God assures that he will accept us through grace for the sake of Christ who died and arose so that we may have a good conscience before God.<sup>35</sup> Baptism is also a letter sealed with the seal of God in which he states

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 22v.: "Sonder das Gott nun erst mit diesem eusserlichen Sacrament, öffentlich bezeuge, bestetige, vnd verkündige, das er den Glaubigen hab angenommen."

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 25v. and 26.



that through Jesus Christ He will be gracious to us, and has elected us and ordained us to eternal life in Christ.<sup>36</sup>

"Baptism is the washing through which the church is cleansed from sins, regenerated, and renewed in the Holy Spirit."<sup>37</sup>

Brenz can use the term "church," because baptism is for him also the sign of the entrance into the Church, the sign of acceptance as member of the Body of Christ. Baptism is for him also the "sign of the Gospel."<sup>38</sup> He does not have the emphasis of Luther on the use of baptism, but with the consolation that baptism is the sign of our acceptance by God he implies that baptism has its significance for the whole life, and since it is the sign of the Gospel it has the power to lead us on the way to eternal life.

These Lutheran theologians are following Luther's doctrine of baptismal regeneration, although with different emphases. If one would not find that they speak of the power of regeneration, of creating faith through baptism, one would have to doubt about their emphasis on baptism as

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 26v.

<sup>37</sup>Johann Brenz, Operum Reverendi et Clarissimi Theologi, D. Iohannis Brentii, Praepositi Stvtgardiani (Tvbingae: Georgius Gruppenbachius, 1594), Tomus V: in quo continentur Commentarij tres Euangelistas: Matthaeum, Marcum, Lucam, p. 645: "Baptismum, iuxta Paulum, esse lauacrum, per quod Ecclesia mundatur a peccatis, & regeneratur, ac renouatur in Spiritu sancto."

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 647: "In Baptismo autem non simpliciter est Euangelion de Iesu Christo, sed est Euangelion signaculo, stipulatione, foedere, adioque iuramento Dei Patris Filij & Spiritus sancti obsignatum & confirmatum."



a sign. Luther also speaks of baptism as a sign, but only in connection with the other aspect, that baptism regenerates, or in relation to adult baptism where faith precedes baptism. If we are allowed to understand the same point of view as background for the doctrine of baptism by the later theologians, we can summarize and say that there is unanimity among the early Lutheran theologians in respect to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

W. G. Brauer, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (London: Duckworth, 1947), p. 48.

Martin Luther, "Das Taufbüchlein verdeutschet und auß dem Latein in die Hochdeutschschrift der evangelisch-  
 lichen Kirche (4th edition: Göttingen: Vandenhoeck  
 & Ruprecht, 1725), p. 535, § 4, lines 20-24: "Und ich  
 bedauere, das durch die Leute nach der Taufe so ubel auch  
 die Taufe so kalt und lässig mit ihm abgangen  
 ist, das ich für sie gebeten hat in der Taufe."



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

We have to understand Luther's doctrine of baptismal regeneration in the light of justification by faith. The fundamental concept therefore, which has to be clearly understood, is faith. Kramm pointed out that Luther already knew the difference between the "fides qua creditur," or the "faith by which we believe," the "fides salvifica," and the "fides quae creditur," or "the things that are believed."<sup>1</sup> We can in this study point out that Luther also knew that the "fides qua creditur" can be seen under two view-points, the "fides directa," and the "fides reflexa." Luther is clear that the "fides directa" is given already to the infant in baptism, while the "fides reflexa" has to develop through our life, since it involves the use of reason and intellect. Therefore the teaching of the Word of God is so important in the life of the child, as well as the prayer of the parents, the sponsors, and the Church in behalf of the baptized child.<sup>2</sup> The theologians

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<sup>1</sup>H. H. Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther (London: James Clarke, 1947), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Luther, "Das Taufbüchlin verdeutschet und aufs neu zugericht," Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (4th edition; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1959), p. 536, # 4, lines 20-24: "Und ich besorge, dass darumb die Leute nach der Taufe so ubel auch geraten, dass man so kalt und lässig mit ihn umgangen und so gar ohn Ernst für sie gebeten hat in der Taufe."



have called this beginning faith in the infant really faith, as Luther and Brenz have done, or have simply said that God works in the infants, as Melanchthon and Bugenhagen have said. In more modern times the attempt was made to analyze it in the light of still other points of view, but it cannot be denied that there is a faith given already to the infant. One could say that the one baptized has become a property of the Triune God, since he is baptized "in the name of the Triune God."<sup>3</sup> One could say that the one baptized is "objectively accepted into the grace of God," and that he has to affirm and testify to this grace later in his life.<sup>4</sup> Kramm finds that Luther thinks of this faith as "an active thing, the main power in our lives," "a living power relating me to Christ, changing my whole personal life."<sup>5</sup> This power which begins in baptism has significance for the whole life, and changes our whole life. This is what is understood by regeneration. And because it continues until death and resurrection Luther can speak of a continual regeneration. Werner Elert sees it in this way too, when

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<sup>3</sup>Johannes H. Rottmann, "Exegetische Bemerkungen zu Matth. 28, 19.20a," Igreja Luterana, XIV (Jan. and Febr. 1953), 36: "Der Getaufte wird Eigentum dessen, auf dessen Namen er getauft wird, Eigentum also des dreieinigen Gottes."

<sup>4</sup>Otto A. Dilschneider, "Das Sakrament der Kindertaufe," Deutsches Pfarrerblatt (1950), p. 35; quoted in Igreja Luterana, XI (May and June 1950), 118: "O batizado está aceito objetivamente na graça de Deus e tem que afirmar e testificar esta graça."

<sup>5</sup>Kramm, p. 52.



he says that baptism has meaning for the whole life, not so much chronologically, as for the totality of life.<sup>6</sup> Regeneration is the "becoming" of the new man,<sup>7</sup> who finally "is" at the Last Day. Baptism is therefore an act of initiation. One is accepted into the community which has the promises of God. The attitude of the one baptized is always receptive, because no one can work his way into the Church. One is called into the Church.<sup>8</sup> Werner Jetter sees Luther's doctrine of regeneration from the point of view of our existence, and says that for him regeneration is first of all a new destination of our existence by God, then it becomes my own understanding of existence, and finally it turns into a modification of existence.<sup>9</sup> It is God's work without man, because God creates his believers.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore a new creation, which will be completed at the Last Day. While we are living we have the task of

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<sup>6</sup>Werner Elert, Morphologie des Luthertums (München: C. H. Beck, 1931-1932), I, 261.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>9</sup>Werner Jetter, Die Taufe beim jungen Luther. Eine Untersuchung über das Werden der reformatorischen Sakraments- und Taufanschauung. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1954), p. 225: "Wiedergeburt ist also in erster Linie meine neue Existenzbestimmung durch Gott, in zweiter Linie mein dementsprechendes neues Existenzverständnis und erst drittens meine daraus folgende, durchaus vorläufige und fast immer mehrdeutige Existenzveränderung."

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 226: "Er selbst, der allmächtige Schöpfer, schafft durch die Taufe alle seine Gläubigen."



killing the old Adam, to which corresponds the arising of the new man. To achieve this in our lives God

makes all sufferings, and especially death, profitable and helpful, so that they simply have to serve baptism in the doing of its work, that is, in the slaying of sin. It cannot be otherwise. For he who would fulfil the work and purpose of his baptism and be rid of sin, must die. Sin, however, does not like to die, and for this reason it makes death so bitter and so horrible. Such is the grace and power of God that sin, which has brought death, is driven out again by its very own work, namely, by death itself.<sup>11</sup>

In Luther's line of thought August Heine said:

But not only are we baptized for this mortal life, which we Christians and children of God live by faith in our Savior here in this world in battle with sin, world, and devil, but for the living hope of the eternal life. . . . We Christians should always keep this in mind, that we are baptized certainly to live in this world; but as having our citizenship in heaven, and being children of God, and heirs with Christ. Luther calls the right understanding of this the "Christian art and real masterpiece."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Martin Luther, "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism. 1519," Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), XXXV, 39.

<sup>12</sup>August Heinrich Hartwig Heine, "Die taufe als Gnadenmittel," Igreja Luterana, XI (March and April 1950), 58: "Aber nicht allein zu diesem irdischen Leben, welches wir Christen und Kinder Gottes im Glauben an unsern Heiland hier auf Erden zubringen im Kampf mit der Sünde, Welt und Teufel, sind wir getauft, sondern zu der lebendigen Hoffnung des ewigen Lebens." P. 59: "Das sollen wir Christen uns allezeit lebendig vor Augen halten, dass wir getauft sind, wohl in dieser Welt leben, aber unsre Bürgerschaft im Himmel haben, dass wir Gottes Kinder und Erben mit Christo sind. Luther nennt die rechte Erkenntnis hierüber die 'christliche Kunst und recht Meisterstück.'"



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