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John Theodore Mueller
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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St. Paul's Usus Practicus of Holy Baptism

By JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

It may safely be said that the average Lutheran Christian does not think of his Baptism often enough and that the average Lutheran pastor does not remind his parishioners often enough of the great value and importance of Holy Baptism. There are, of course, exceptions, but these only establish the rule. If this appears as a rather severe indictment, let the reader bear in mind that due grateful appreciation of the meaning and blessing of Holy Baptism involves a most weighty point in Christian sanctification in which we never become perfect and that, because of our perverse Old Adam, we Christians, no matter whether we are laymen or clergymen, constantly stand in need of direct and unqualified Law preaching. We need the enlightening Law for progress and increase in holiness no less than we need for our sanctification the vivifying Gospel.

Whenever Luther treats the doctrine of Holy Baptism, he, on the one hand, consistently points out the high esteem in which Baptism should be held by us, and, on the other, he deplores the common regrettable disregard of its unique significance for our Christian life. In his Large Catechism he writes: "It is of greatest importance that we esteem Baptism excellent, glorious, and exalted, for which we contend and fight chiefly, because the world is now so full of sects clamoring that Baptism is an external thing and that external things are of no benefit."¹ Luther asks all Christians to regard Baptism as a most precious treasure of our Lord, which, as he says in his Small Catechism, "works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare." He laments the fact that Christians value Baptism so little, whereas "hitherto people could consider it a great thing when the Pope with his letters and bulls dispensed indulgences and confirmed altars and churches, solely because of the letters and seals."²

There may be a certain justification for Calvinists to ignore Holy Baptism as a potent factor in Christian sanc-

¹ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 733:6 ff. Cf. also 737:21; 739:26; 741:37 f.

² *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 733:9.

tification, for Calvinism does not recognize this Sacrament as a means of grace in the Lutheran sense. While Calvinistic dogmaticians retain the traditional ecclesiastical term "means of grace," they argue at the same time that Baptism is not a means of grace in the sense in which Lutherans use this term, for they emphatically deny its efficacy to work regeneration.³ Strong, a Calvinistic Baptist, perhaps contends most forcibly for the proposition "that Baptism cannot be the means of regeneration," but all Calvinists argue in favor of this denial with more or less vigor. Since Holy Baptism, according to their view, is only a symbol of what the Holy Spirit does inwardly without means, the Sacrament, after all, has little meaning for the Christian in his life of sanctification, as daily he stands in need of comfort and admonition. It is indeed a sign of grace, but, after all, only an empty and meaningless sign, since it does not at all convey grace to men.

Roman Catholics might be expected to contend very enthusiastically for Baptism as a meaningful and powerful factor toward Christian sanctification, for they stoutly affirm that Baptism is a means of grace. The Rev. F. X. Schouppe, S. J., for example (to quote a work not commonly known, but one which appeared in numerous editions in Europe), ascribes to Baptism, in the main, three effects, the second of which is *gratiae sanctificantis cum virtutibus et donis Spiritus Sancti infusio*, that is, "the infusion of sanctifying grace with the powers and gifts of the Holy Spirit."⁴ Yet also Schouppe does not apply the doctrine of Baptism directly to the sanctification of the faithful. This, no doubt, finds its explanation in the fact that Romanism assigns the Holy Spirit's operation toward sanctification, which properly belongs to Baptism, to the *gratia infusa* of the Mass and to the *virtutes* and *dona* of its additional Sacraments, as also to the powers of its Sacramentals. Baptism, while highly praised in Roman theology, is, nevertheless, limited in its efficacy to a rather circumscribed area.

For Lutherans, who regard Baptism as a means of grace in the fullest sense of the term and whose emphasis on its efficacy is both strong and consistent, there is no excuse whatever for neglecting its *usus practicus* for the Christian life of

³ Cf. Hodge, *Syst. Theol.*, Vol. III, pp. 591 ff.; Shedd, *Dogm. Theol.*, Vol. II, p. 574; Strong, *Syst. Theol.*, Vol. III, 946 ff., etc.

⁴ Cf. *Elementa Theologiae Dogmaticae*, Tom. II, p. 146. Delhomme et Brigue, Editeurs, Paris.

sanctification, especially not since Luther has so ably pointed out the way in which this should be done. Luther, for instance (to quote only a few of his many remarks on the point, selected quite at random), writes: "There is no greater comfort on earth than Baptism, by which we place ourselves within the verdict of grace and mercy, which does not condemn, but rather expels sin."⁵ Or: "If anyone has fallen into sin, he should most ardently think of his Baptism, how (in it) God has united Himself with him, to forgive him all sins, if he (the sinner) desires to struggle against them."⁶ Or: "Baptism is the beginning of repentance. As often as you fall into sin, have recourse to Baptism; there you again receive the Holy Ghost, who will stand by you."⁷ Again: "Baptism leads us into a new life on earth; the bread (the Holy Supper) leads us through death into eternal life."⁸

But let these quotations suffice. They show that Luther himself esteemed Baptism most highly and applied it diligently for comfort and admonition in the Christian life. Some of the most consoling words which Luther ever wrote pertain to Baptism, as, for example, the following: "Christ has instituted Baptism for this reason that He might put on you His righteousness, so that His holiness should be yours and likewise His righteousness be yours."⁹

But it is, above all, from Holy Scripture that we learn the most valuable *usus practicus* of Baptism for our Christian life. And here it is chiefly St. Paul who applies this Sacrament for that comfort and admonition which Christians in this life of sin so greatly need. Strange to say, even the strict Calvinist Dr. J. J. Van Oosterzee, in his *Christian Dogmatics*, takes cognizance of this fact when he writes: "The principal source of our knowledge of the most ancient Christian doctrine of Baptism is Paul, who plainly attached the highest importance to this institution of the Lord (italics our own), even though he did not consider baptizing his special calling (1 Cor. 1:17)."¹⁰

This certainly is in strange contrast with the verdict of modern rationalists, such as the German scholar Holtzmann,

⁵ St. Louis Ed., X:2119. ⁶ St. L. Ed., X:2121. ⁷ St. L. Ed., XI:2126.

⁸ St. L. Ed., XIX:443. ⁹ St. L. Ed., XIII:6.

¹⁰ *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 750. Scribner, Armstrong & Co., New York.

of whom Dr. F. Pieper in his *Christliche Dogmatik* says that "his enmity against Christianity misleads him from one logical absurdity to another."¹¹ Among such absurdities, Dr. Pieper mentions the assertion of Holtzmann that St. Paul did not know of any command of Christ to baptize, since he himself did not baptize many persons (1 Cor. 1:14).¹² Another German scholar, Dr. P. Feine, is of the same opinion.¹³

We shall not take time to confute this unfounded and unwarranted statement, for in 1 Cor. 1:14-17 the Apostle himself explains why at Corinth he had not baptized many and why he, under the prevailing circumstances, was grateful that he had baptized only the few whom he mentions.

But let us now pass on to the purpose of this article, which is, as stated before, to show how strikingly St. Paul employs the doctrine of Baptism for consolation and admonition in the Christian's life. We shall confine ourselves to such passages as are outstanding because of their particular scope and clarity.

1. ROM. 6:3-4

Or, do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death? We were buried, therefore, with Him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so also we should walk in newness of life.

This remarkable passage is a most important link in the Apostle's chain of arguments on behalf of sanctification. The argumentative "or" closely connects it with the two preceding verses, in which the Apostle puts forth the proposition: "We dare not sin, for we have died to sin." This thought again follows upon that in v. 20 of chapter 5: "Where sin increased, all the more was grace abundant," which might have suggested to some the ungodly idea: "Well, then, let us continue in sin, in order that grace may abound." "God forbid!" the Apostle cries out in horror at the very mention of it. "No, indeed," he argues, "we have died to sin, so that we cannot live in sin any longer." But now the question might be asked: "But have we actually died to sin?" This question St. Paul, by way of anticipation, prevents by pointing out to his readers that believers in Christ actually have died to sin when they were baptized. Of this the Christians at Rome were not

¹¹ *Christliche Dogmatik*, III, 298.

¹² *Neutest. Theo.*, I, 433 ff.

¹³ *REF* XIX, 397. *Christliche Dogmatik*, *ibid.*

ignorant, so that the Apostle could challenge them with his emphatic: "Do you not know?" They evidently had received information both with regard to the nature and the effect of Baptism and its significance for the Christian life. The Apostle here uses his favorite expression "buried into Christ," which denotes entering by Baptism into close union with Him, coming to belong to Him, so as to be in a sense identified with Him.¹⁴ So also in Matt. 28:19 "to baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" denotes intimate fellowship of the baptized with the Triune God. Baptism thus actually joins the baptized believer with the Lord. Christ becomes the Lord of the baptized because of the very fact that Baptism is an efficacious means of grace, which establishes this relation of lordship. It is, therefore, not a mere sign or empty ceremony.

But the Apostle has still more to say on this point, namely, [we] "were baptized into His death." That can mean but one thing: We were brought through our Baptism into the fellowship of His death (so Meyer). Meyer here quotes Theodore of Mopsuestia's statement: "Baptism makes us partakers of the death of Christ."¹⁵ The same thought is expressed by Ambrosiaster: "When we are baptized, we die together with Christ."¹⁶ The efficacy of Baptism as a means of grace is, therefore, clearly asserted in these words. Through Baptism we have fellowship with Christ's death, and so receive all the merits which Christ has procured for all mankind by His death and which He now offers freely to all men in the means of grace, and especially in Holy Baptism.

The Apostle continues: "We were buried, therefore, with Him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so also we should walk in newness of life." Those who stress the necessity of immersion as the only valid form of Baptism on the ground that they who are buried are "entirely put under," overlook the fact that the Apostle here merely repeats the thought just expressed: "We were baptized into His death." Only he does this in such a way as to give expression to

¹⁴ Cf. *Pulpit Commentary*; also *Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament*, sub Rom. 6:3.

¹⁵ *Meyer's Commentary*, translated from the fifth edition of the German. Funk & Wagnalls, New York, 1889, p. 230.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

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Christ's burial and resurrection in its special application and meaning for us as baptized Christians. The mode of applying the water remains an *adiaphoron*. What is important is the power and significance of Baptism here described. The Apostle's sequence of thought is this: We were baptized with Christ into death. Very well, then, we also were buried with Him and arose with Him through the burial of Baptism to glory, henceforth not to serve sin, from which we were freed by Baptism, but to "live an entirely new life."¹⁷

Baptism thus accomplishes in those who are baptized both the dying unto sin with Christ and their living unto Christ in newness of life. The *Pulpit Commentary* remarks very aptly: "The marked association here and elsewhere of union with Christ, so as to die and rise again with Him, with the rite of Baptism, supports the orthodox view of that Sacrament being not only a *signum significans*, but a *signum efficax*, as not only representing, but being a means whereby we receive regeneration. The beginning of the new life of believers with the power as well as the obligation (italics our own) to lead such a life is ever regarded as dating from their Baptism (cf. Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12)."¹⁸ It may be added that Weymouth very nicely paraphrases the expression "by the glory of the Father" with "by the Father's glorious power," which indeed is its meaning.

We forego other exegetical and doctrinal remarks to point out both the blessed comfort and the earnest admonition that lie in the fact that we are baptized Christians. Baptism has placed us into fellowship with the Christ who died for us and was buried; so it has made us partakers of all merits which our precious Lord secured for us by His vicarious death. We should, therefore, daily remember our Baptism as the source of all our spiritual blessings. This is not said to deny the efficacy of the Gospel as such, for Baptism, after all, is nothing else than the application of the Gospel to us, the "visible Gospel," which in that form is just as effective as if it were preached or read or pondered in the heart. We emphasize this here to stress what St. Paul says about Baptism so impressively in this remarkable passage.

But for that very reason Baptism also has a most im-

¹⁷ Cf. Weymouth's *New Testament in Modern Speech*, sub Rom. 6:4.

¹⁸ Sub Rom. 6:4.

portant hortatory significance for us who are baptized. Luther describes this very well when he writes: "It signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever." May God ever keep us mindful of this important meaning of Baptism for our Christian life.

2. 1 COR. 6:11

And such some (of you) used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Spirit of our God.

St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans may be called his "Christian Dogmatics." His First Epistle to the Corinthians has been fitly called his "Pastoral Theology." In Romans, St. Paul speaks, at least in the first eleven chapters, as a systematician; in First Corinthians he speaks as a pastor, that is, as one in charge of souls to be saved. But as in Romans, so also in First Corinthians the Apostle uses Holy Baptism both for the comfort and the admonition of his readers.

Our passage appears in a strange context. A member of the congregation at Corinth had committed incest. Instead of going into mourning because of this heinous offense, the church apparently prided itself on its exemplary moral condition. St. Paul insists both upon public repentance on the part of the church and the excommunication of the manifest wicked sinner. Nor was this all. In the same breath with the offense of incest he mentions that of gross injustice perpetrated upon church members by other church members and the offensive litigations which were the consequence of this sin. To this he adds the warning that such gross offenders as the unrighteous, licentious, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, avaricious, drunkards, revilers, and robbers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Then very directly and with a terrific force he makes the application to his readers: "And such some of you used to be."

There is no doubt that the pronoun "such" (ταῦτα) here, as elsewhere in such connections, implies undisguised contempt. We might fittingly translate it with "such abominations," or as Meyer puts it "such trash."¹⁹

¹⁹ *Commentary, sub v. 11.*

Not all, of course, at Corinth were "such" (cf. *τινές*), for some members of the church were of Jewish descent, and the Jews, on the whole, abhorred the gross vices of the heathen. The imperfect *ἦτε* deserves a stronger translation than the simple "you were"; it expresses a state of long duration. That, of course, was now a thing of the past, for a great moral change had taken place in those who constituted the Christian congregation.²⁰ This change is expressed by the thrice-repeated triumphant "but" (*ἀλλά*), which more fittingly might be translated with the stronger "however." The spiritual change of the Corinthians is described by three verbs, each of which is emphatic. The first is in the middle voice, the other two are in the passive. There has been some discussion about the question whether or not the Apostle here follows a definite *ordo salutis*, or whether his emphasis is merely on the change or cleansing. We believe the order need not be questioned, as the interpretation will show.

The Apostle first says: "You washed yourselves" (*ἀπελούσασθε*). The middle should not disturb us, since also in other places it is used in connection with Holy Baptism (1 Cor. 10:2; Acts 22:16). The *Commentary* of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown suggests the acceptable translation: "You have had yourselves washed." We, of course, wash ourselves in Holy Baptism when God Himself there washes us, just as we "convert ourselves" (in English "turn") when God converts us. This has been illustrated by the analog: "A ship turns itself when the pilot turns it." The middle, therefore, involves no synergism of any kind. The verb, of course, refers to Holy Baptism, as also commentaries written by Calvinists declare (e. g., Meyer, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, etc.). The *Expositor's Greek Testament* refers in substantiation of its reference of the verb to Baptism to such passages as Acts 22:16; Col. 3:11 f.; Eph. 5:26 f.; 1 Pet. 3:21. St. Paul here speaks of the Baptism of adults (such baptized persons at least being in the majority), and yet he declares that also in their case Holy Baptism was an efficacious means of grace, a spiritual washing of regeneration.

The next verb, to describe the change in the Corinthians, is: "You were sanctified," which Meyer here renders: "*You became holy*, from being unholy, as you were, before Baptism."

²⁰ Cf. *Expositor's Greek Testament*, sub v. 11.

This is a logical sequence, since regeneration, which is by faith in the Gospel of Holy Baptism, also sanctifies. The divine act of *conversio* is followed at once by that of *sanctificatio*. The translation of Weymouth: "You have been consecrated," as also of other older and modern versions, misses the point which the Apostle here is trying to make when he contrasts the present holiness with the former unholiness of the Corinthians.²¹

The last verb is: "You were justified," that is: "You were declared righteous," or as Weymouth well renders it: "You have been acquitted." The three divine acts of regeneration, sanctification, and justification, of course, are simultaneous and therefore coincide. But by mentioning all three of them, and that in the emphatic order of the text: "God washed you, God made you holy, God declared you righteous," the Apostle shames the Corinthians for their deficit in sanctification after the Lord had done such great things for them. The three acts here mentioned are *opera Dei ad extra*, in which all three Persons of the Trinity concur. This again demonstrates how great was the work which God had wrought in the Corinthians. Their spiritual and moral change had taken place in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church, through the Holy Spirit, as the acting agent of man's conversion, whose operation, however, is always with the Father and the Son. This solemn reference to the Triune God thus emphasizes the greatness of God's saving work at Corinth, who in Holy Baptism had sanctified and justified them.

But let us now study the Apostle's *usus practicus* of Holy Baptism in this passage. There is comfort here, of course, for St. Paul shows the matchless grace of God, active in the marvelous transformation of the Corinthian heathen. The God of love who wrought this spiritual renovation would certainly not forsake them now, even after they had sinned so greatly. But the focal point here is the *admonition* of the Apostle. The Corinthians, in their toleration of impurity and of unrighteousness, which resulted in litigation and public offense, were certainly doing things which were not in agreement with their lofty status as Christians. St. Paul, therefore, desires them to think of their Baptism, with its regeneration,

²¹ Cf. also the R. S. V., which often follows Weymouth's misleading translations.

sanctification, and justification, in short, with its gracious remission of sins. After having been cleansed, could they yet walk in sin, offend God, and imperil their salvation and that of others, by their ungodly conduct? Here indeed is much also for us to consider at this time when many regard sin so very lightly.

3. 1 COR. 12:13

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or freemen.

As the Corinthians misused many other privileges which were theirs as Christian converts, so also the *charismata* which the Holy Ghost poured out upon them in a unique and abundant manner. Of no other church of that early time do we read of such a truly Pentecostal outpouring of Spirit-granted gifts as here at Corinth. These Spirit-given gifts, which were a part of the Pentecostal miracle and lasted as long as the Apostles were alive (though in the majority of churches they were not granted), did much to disrupt the church, since they caused envy among the vainglorious members, who desired especially those gifts that were outstanding and enhanced their personal prestige. In the chapter before us the Apostle shows the Corinthians, first, that true spiritual gifts are found only in genuine Christian converts; secondly, that they, despite their diversity, were all granted by the one Triune God; and thirdly, that just because of their very diversity they were to benefit the one body of Christ, His holy Church. The Apostle introduces this last point by showing that through Holy Baptism the Corinthian church members were baptized by the Holy Ghost into that one body, no matter of what nationality or what social standing they were. This is the *punctum saliens* in the passage, a very simple truth, but as so many other simple points, one of the greatest importance.

There is no reason to translate the Greek words ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι with "in one Spirit," as does the Roman Catholic New Testament and as do others, e. g., the *Expositor's Greek Testament*.²² Meyer's stronger rendering "by means of one Spirit," or Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's "through," express the sense very well, for what the Apostle means to show is that the Holy Spirit, the Giver of all spiritual gifts, in a special

²² Cf. *sub* v. 13.

sense (cf. the preceding verses), had united the Corinthians by Baptism into the one body of Christ, His holy Church. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's *Commentary* adds the words: "The designed effect of Baptism, which is realized when not frustrated by the unfaithfulness of man," which deserve consideration, since the grace of God, offered in and through the means of grace can be resisted.

When the Apostle says: "We all were baptized," he, of course, has in mind only the true believers and not the *mali* or *hypocritae* in the congregation, just as we today, when addressing our churches in sermons, do this in words which pertain only to true believers, e. g., "Dearly Beloved in Christ Jesus," in Christian love putting the whole for the part. Weymouth's translation: "In fact, in one Spirit all of us — whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free men — were baptized to form one body," is a helpful paraphrase of the words. However, the *zai yáq* here does not mean "in fact," but is better translated with "for indeed," as the *Expositor's Greek Testament* has it. That the verb "we were baptized" here refers to Holy Baptism, is clear from its juxtaposition with Holy Communion, of which the Apostle speaks immediately. Meyer is right when he says that the verb here should not be taken *tropically*, as many, whom he mentions, actually do, but that it means *actual Baptism*. The "one body," of course, is not the local congregation, but the *Una Sancta*, made up of all true believers in Christ, or of God's elect saints, who are called from Jews and Greeks, slaves and free men, as God chooses them according to His *voluntas beneplaciti*.

Here, then, the Apostle once more professes the efficacy of Holy Baptism as a means of grace. Baptism does something. It makes us members of the one body of Christ, the *congregatio sanctorum*. This it does through the Holy Ghost, who by the Gospel in Baptism works or strengthens faith in the baptized and thus makes us members of the *Una Sancta*. All this it does to the glory of God and the good of the Church of Christ. Through Baptism we have faith, and with faith, remission of sins; but through faith we also have spiritual gifts for service. While Holy Baptism thus comforts us, it also admonishes us; for, first, it reminds us of the one body into which we have been baptized, so that there should not be any schism or division in the *ecclesia visibilis*, but all members should work

with all their might toward keeping or preserving the outward union of all baptized Christians by bringing the erring into the true unity of faith.

In the second place, our Baptism reminds us of the valuable service which we must render to God and His Church with the gifts which we have received, be they great or small, conspicuous or obscure. The one Baptism calls for unitedness in confession and in ministering, the one-talent Christian doing what he can; the two-talent believer doing more; the five-talent and the ten-talent Christians working still harder, keeping in mind that the more there is given them, the more also there will be asked of them. We certainly have every reason in the world to consider this important lesson in connection with our Baptism and to keep in mind this holy Sacrament to the end that we may become more truly one in faith and confession and serve one another with the gifts which God has given us.

4. GAL. 3:26-27

For you all are children of God through faith in Christ Jesus; for all of you who were baptized into Christ clothed yourselves with Christ.²³

While expounding the Apostle's meaningful passages in which he so masterfully applies Holy Baptism to all sorts of conditions of the Christian life by way of comfort and admonition, the exegete's fingers fairly itch to dig down more deeply into all the problems of context and text for the full elucidation of the sacred Scripture words. But this article is to interest our readers in the great subject which it treats, and not to depict to them all the details of isagogics and exegesis. Let us, therefore, consider St. Paul's *usus practicus* of Holy Baptism also of this passage.

The Galatian problem was not like that of the Corinthian church. It was rather that of the antithesis between salvation by works or by faith, between salvation by the Law or by the Gospel. St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians may fitly be called his "great Polemic" on behalf of salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus without the deeds of the Law. In the chapter from which our passage was taken, he shows his readers that the Law cannot save, for it only demands and

²³ This translation follows partly the Roman Catholic, partly Weymouth's New Testament.

condemns. Abraham was saved by faith without the deeds of the Law, and all who with the patriarch believe in Christ as their Savior are his true children. The Law of Moses was indeed given to Israel four hundred and thirty years after the promise was made to Abraham concerning Christ, not, however, to annul that promise, but to emphasize sin, until Christ should come. It was to serve as Israel's schoolmaster to bring it unto Christ that it might be justified by faith. But now since Christ has come, as the Apostle argues triumphantly, we are no longer under the schoolmaster, the Law, "for [now] you all are children of God through faith in Christ Jesus; for all of you who were baptized into Christ, clothed yourselves with Christ." Such is this glorious text, considered in its context.

The sudden change from the "we" in v. 25 to the abrupt "you" in v. 26 gives the Apostle's statement in vv. 22-25 a "more trenchant force" as applying to those whose spiritual difficulties he is now dealing with (cf. 1 Thess. 5:5).²⁴ The "all" (πάντες) gives expression to the all-inclusive dynamic of faith: it saves all who believe, Jews as well as Greeks. All are children of God, as Abraham was a child of God by faith, who believe in Christ. And now comes the motivation: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ clothed yourselves with Christ." We need not repeat what we said before about the meaning of "to baptize into Christ," that is, into fellowship with Him, so that the baptized have participation in His righteousness. Goodspeed very nicely translates the phrase "into Christ" with "into union with Christ," which indeed is the sense of the phrase.²⁵

To those who deny that Baptism is an efficacious means of grace it must sound very strange indeed that the Apostle now argues: "All of you who were baptized into Christ clothed yourselves with Christ." The meaning of the verb ἐνεδύσασθε is "to clothe oneself," or, more simply, "to put on," sc., as a garment. Luther in his *Commentary on Galatians*, says very aptly: "To put on Christ may be understood in two ways, according to the Law and according to the Gospel. According to the Law, as in Rom. 13:14: 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus

²⁴ So the *Pulpit Commentary*.

²⁵ Cf. *The Complete Bible*, Smith-Goodspeed. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1939.

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Christ,' . . . means to follow the example of Christ. To put on Christ according to the Gospel means to clothe oneself with the righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and spirit of Christ. By nature we are clad in the garb of Adam. This garb Paul likes to call 'the old man.' Before we can become the children of God, this old man must be put off. . . . But God makes it simple. He clothes us with the righteousness of Christ by means of Baptism. . . . With this change of garments a new birth, a new life stirs in us. New affections toward God spring up in the heart. New determinations affect our will. All this is to put on Christ according to the Gospel."²⁶

Baptism thus is a means of grace by which we put on the garments of Christ's merits for our justification and salvation. Nor can it be in doubt as to how this is done, for when the Apostle says in the preceding verse: "You are children through faith in Christ Jesus" and brings this into close connection with Baptism, his meaning cannot be otherwise than that Baptism itself engenders such faith. It has been argued that while Scripture says: "We are born again of water and the Spirit"; and: "Baptism is a washing of regeneration," and the like, it never ascribes the creation of faith to Baptism. But certainly St. Paul does so here. In addition, when he says that through Baptism we put on Christ, that includes also faith as the means by which we put Him on.²⁷

What a wonderful practical use of the Holy Baptism we, then, have in this passage! Baptism comforts us. In Baptism we put on Christ and all His merits. We are children of God through the very faith which Baptism engenders. But here also we find earnest admonitions, for if what the Apostle has said is true, then we must not go back to the Ceremonial Laws of Moses to seek in them salvation. Nor must we trust in the works of the Moral Law to have salvation. The Law has nothing to do with our salvation. It cannot save us. We are saved by faith alone, as this faith is engendered or strengthened in us through Baptism. How greatly, therefore, St. Paul values Baptism, yet, not simply St. Paul, but the Holy Spirit who speaks through the inspired Apostle.

²⁶ *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians by Martin Luther.* A new and abridged translation by Dr. Theodore Graebner. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Mich.

²⁷ For ἐνδύεσθαι cf. the *International Critical Commentary*. Scribner's, New York, 1920. The Epistle to the Galatians, sub 3:27.

5. EPH. 4:5

One Lord, one faith, one Baptism. . . .

St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians contains, in its first part, the glorious doctrine of God's redemption through Christ Jesus and, in its second part, earnest admonitions to steadfastness, prayerfulness, and vigilance in the Christian life.²⁸

The special admonition of the Apostle which precedes our brief text aims at the preservation of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (v. 3). Moffatt paraphrases the verse as follows: ". . . zealous in love to preserve the unity of the Spirit by binding peace upon yourselves."²⁹ That makes good sense. The *New Testament with Notes* gives this simple, but comprehensive meaning of the verse: "Be united in affection and live in peace according to the leading of the Holy Spirit."³⁰

But the verse really says more than that. In the first place, the Authorized Version reading "endeavoring" only weakly translates the Greek σπουδάζοντες, which properly means "to give diligence to," "earnestly to strive." Luther's: "Seid fleissig" is better than the rendering of the King James Version. St. Paul does not say: "Exert yourselves to establish the unity of the Spirit," but: "Exert yourselves to preserve with watchful care what the Holy Spirit has already established. The genitive "of the Spirit (τοῦ πνεύματος) is that of the originating cause."³¹ The unity which the Spirit has created, should be preserved by means of the bond of peace. Bengel pithily says: "That is love, for it is this by which peace is preserved (Col. 3:14-15)."³²

Stoeckhardt writes: "Peace should be the bond which unites the members of the Church. Christians preserve among themselves peace only then when they exercise toward one another humility, kindness, long-suffering, patience. These are virtues of love and peace."³³

²⁸ Cf. *New Testament with Notes*. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo., sub Introduction to St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians.

²⁹ The Bible. A New Translation by James Moffatt. Harper and Bros., New York, 1934.

³⁰ Sub v. 4.

³¹ So the *Expositor's Greek Testament*.

³² Dr. J. A. Bengel's *Gnomon oder Zeiger des Neuen Testaments*. Verlag von W. Paulus, 1854; sub v. 3.

³³ G. Stoeckhardt, *Kommentar ueber den Brief Pauli an die Epheser*. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo., 1910, p. 176.

Very beautifully the *Pulpit Commentary* writes: "The unity of the Spirit is equivalent to the unity of which the Spirit is the Author. In all in whom He works savingly (sic?), the Spirit produces a certain oneness in faith, in repentance, in knowledge, in their views of sin, grace, Christ, the world, etc. This oneness exists, and cannot but exist, even when Christians are not careful of it, but the manifestation of it is lost; it seems to the world as if there is no such oneness. 'Many men, many minds,' says the world, when believers differ much and contend much and are at no pains to preserve and manifest the unity wrought by the Spirit. It is due to the Spirit as well as to the interests of the kingdom of God that the unity of the Spirit be maintained in the bond of peace."³⁴ The *Pulpit Commentary* is right when it includes in the unity of the Spirit also the unity of doctrine and confession, for that is the foremost fruit of the Holy Spirit, without which there can be no true unity among Christians.

The interesting point about the Apostle's discussion of the Spirit is its motivation and unfolding in vv. 4 and 5. We are concerned in this present article merely with the "one Baptism," of which the Apostle speaks in v. 5. There is but one Christian Baptism, by which the unity of the Spirit, of which the Apostle speaks, is both established and preserved. All true believers are one because of the unity of faith, by which they are members of the *Una Sancta*. By faith, engendered in Baptism, they are one body, one spiritual union in Christ, and have but one hope, namely, that of salvation in Christ, even as they serve only one Lord in the one true faith. This remarkable emphasis on the oneness of all believers in Christ by the Apostle is glorious, and it should so be understood and remembered by all Christians at all times. Christians should not depart from the one Lord and the one faith, but keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, because they have been regenerated and implanted into the one body of the *Una Sancta* by Holy Baptism. Baptism admonishes them to be true to the one Lord and one faith, but it exhorts them also to be eager to preserve the oneness which the Holy Ghost has established through the washing of regeneration. Holy Baptism thus has a far-reaching significance. It is of sublime importance; for as Christians have been made one in Christ

³⁴ Sub Eph. 4:3.

by Holy Baptism, so also they should remain one in Him by always applying the power of their Baptism. If they do this, then all false doctrine, all wrangling, all envy and strife must cease. There will be peace and love. May God grant that we today may so use our Baptism to His glory and the good of His Church.

6. EPH. 5:25-28

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it with the washing of water by the Word; that He might present to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

There is such sweet winsomeness in this often-quoted passage that it easily becomes a part of the Christian's daily spiritual nurture. The hortatory purpose of the passage is clear. The Apostle admonishes Christian husbands to love their wives; and the pattern of their love toward their wives is the supreme, perfect love of Christ, who so loved the Church that He gave Himself for it. There was nothing in the elect that made them worthy of this love. They were filthy and polluted by sin. But Christ died for them out of His great love, that He might sanctify His Church, after having cleansed it with the washing of water by the Word, so that on His glorious wedding day in eternity He might present to Himself a perfect Church without spot or wrinkle or any other imperfection, but a Church holy and without blemish. Just so, the Apostle says, should men love their wives.

The question remains what does the Apostle mean by the phrase "with the washing of water by the Word"? The *Pulpit Commentary* writes: "There is no express allusion to Baptism, τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος is explained by ἐν ῥήματι, 'the Word' being the great sanctifying medium and Baptism a figure (1 Pet. 3:21)." Thus commentaries, written by different authors, often contradict themselves, as we perceive when we study the *Pulpit Commentary* on the exposition of other texts treating Baptism. Meyer is correct when he writes: "τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος (genitive *materiae*, of material) denotes the well-known bath of water κατ' ἐξοχήν, 'preeminently,' which is administered by Baptism. We thus have here not simply an allusion to Baptism (so Grotius and others), but a designation of the same (cf. Tit. 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:11) and an allusion to

the bath of the bride before the wedding day." He is right also when he says that ὅημα here is the Gospel, τὸ ὅημα τῆς πίστεως, Rom. 10:8; cf. v. 17; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 6:5, and that it here stands without an article, because, denoting the word κατ' ἐξοχήν "preeminently," it could be treated as a proper noun, such as νόμος, χάρις and the like."³⁵

About the meaning of ὅημα in the sense of the Gospel there can be no doubt, not only because of the references which Meyer quotes, but chiefly because it is not the nature of the Law to wash away sins. The Law only condemns; it does not forgive sins, while the Gospel properly is the glad tidings of God's gracious forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, which both announces forgiveness and works forgiveness of sins. We have, then, in this remarkable passage, in clear, unmistakable language, the sublime truth that Baptism is the means of grace by which Christ in His matchless love sanctifies and cleanses His Church through the Gospel promise which is connected with Holy Baptism. The appeal to Baptism at this place, where the Apostle desires to move the Christian husbands at Ephesus to love their wives, is as meaningful as it is weighty. Out of pure love Christ gave Himself for us, and out of pure love He cleansed us in Holy Baptism by His precious Gospel promise of remission of sins in the Sacrament. Should this love not move us to love others, especially those who are of our own household? If it is said that the Apostle's motivation for a love so plain as that between husband and wife is too lofty and therefore not fitting, let the objector remember that Christ uses the very relation of husband and wife, or that of marriage, to symbolize the intimate union between Himself and His Church. The *usus practicus* of Baptism, therefore, is most fitting, and should be remembered by us whose hearts are so easily filled with envy, hatred, suspicion, and other sins, in consequence of which homes are broken up, to the great harm of Church and State. Let Christian husbands and wives bear in mind that they have been sanctified and cleansed by the Spirit of Christ in Holy Baptism and that, therefore, they are equally heirs of eternal life in their Savior. If this *usus practicus* of Baptism would be heeded more than it actually is, there would be no unhappy homes in Christendom.

³⁵ *Commentary*, sub 5:26.

7. COL. 2:11-12

In whom also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made by hand, by the putting off of the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ, you having been buried with him in Baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through the faith of the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

The Christians at Colosse were in danger of falling away from Christ as their divine Redeemer. Heretical teachers had appeared in their midst with teachings that were opposed to those which St. Paul had proclaimed in Asia Minor. We cannot here discuss the nature of the heresies that troubled the church at Colosse, but it was such as rendered it necessary for the Apostle to restate in very definite and emphatic terms the glorious doctrine of Christ's person and work. To this he devoted chapters 1:1—2:3. With ch. 2:4 ff. follows a polemical part, in which the Apostle glorifies Christ and warns the Colossians against the false prophets that troubled them.

In vv. 11 and 12 the Apostle shows his readers the blessed work of sanctification which Christ had performed in them. In Christ they were circumcised with a new circumcision, which was not made by priests, as was that of the Old Testament. But Christ's circumcision was, nevertheless, a putting off of flesh, not indeed of the physical foreskin, but of their sins; for in Baptism, which is the true circumcision of Christ, they were buried with their Lord and in it they also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Christ from the dead. This, in a few simple words, is what the Apostle tells the Colossians in vv. 11 and 12. It is in part a repetition of what he says in Rom. 6:3-4.

There are a number of important things, which the Apostle here says of Baptism. In the first place, Baptism has followed the Old Testament Sacrament of circumcision. That is important for arguing the validity of Paedobaptism. In the second place, Baptism, the true circumcision of Christ, does something very valuable to the baptized: it puts off the body of his flesh, that is, it cleanses him from sin. While the reading of the Authorized Version "*of the sins*" of the flesh is not warranted on the basis of the best texts, just that is what the words "by the putting off of the body of the flesh" mean. In the third place, the Apostle shows his readers how in Baptism the body of the flesh is put off; for in it the baptized person is buried with Christ and raised again with Him. That

is accomplished through faith, which, as is implied, is engendered in Baptism. In the fourth place, the saving faith of Holy Baptism has for its object the working of God, who raised Christ from the dead. It implicitly trusts in all that God has done for our salvation by giving His beloved Son into death for our sins and by raising Him from the dead in glory. The foundation of the saving faith that is created in Baptism is thus the crucified and risen Christ, or the Gospel of Christ's vicarious death and resurrection.

The discussion of the details of the Greek text would require so much time that we forego it, leaving this very pleasant and attractive task to the reader. What we are chiefly interested in is the great value which St. Paul here places on Baptism in connection with his defense of the person and work of Christ. Holy Baptism is Christ's ordained spiritual circumcision of the New Testament. It removes sin. It creates faith in us. It makes us able to walk in newness of life. Hence it is of the utmost importance for our salvation. If anyone surrenders the doctrine of Christ's person and work, there can be no true Baptism, and so there can be no cleansing from sin by Baptism. Holy Baptism, therefore, because of its very salvation value prompts us to be true to Christ and His Word. If we give up Baptism, we give up Christ; and if we give up Christ, we give up Baptism and all that it gives and profits. The doctrines of the Gospel form a chain in which each is a link. If one link breaks, then the whole chain is damaged. True faithfulness to the doctrines of Holy Scripture is, therefore, a most important thing. It is of interest, then, that here the Apostle makes practical use of Holy Baptism as a most valuable point in his polemics against heretics, in particular, as a powerful argument for Christians to remain steadfast in the Christian faith.

8. TIT. 3:4-8

But when the goodness and kindness of God, our Savior, appeared, He saved us, not because of deeds which we did in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Ghost, which He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, in order that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Dependable is the Word.

Here the doctrine of Holy Baptism appears among the fundamentals which St. Paul desires that His spiritual son, Titus, should teach over against the erring, groping heathen

among whom he labored on idolatrous Crete. The Apostle did not hold the Cretans in high esteem, as v. 3 shows. He describes the Christians in their former state while they still were heathen, as foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. Certainly, not a very attractive picture of heathen living in their unconverted state. But now a change had taken place. The friendliness and philanthropy of God, our Savior, had appeared. And the friendly, philanthropic Savior had saved us, not because of any good works which we sinners had done, but moved by His mercy toward us fallen and condemned creatures. And He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Ghost, that is, by the washing through which the Holy Ghost regenerates and renews us. This regenerating, renewing washing of the Holy Ghost was poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, who merited grace and forgiveness for us. The purpose of this rich outpouring of the cleansing, sanctifying washing was that we, the baptized, should be justified by grace and made heirs according to the hope (in the promise) of eternal life. And this precious Word, this great Gospel message, the Apostle adds, is certainly true.

This striking passage is so rich in content that it deserves an article of its own in which to discuss all its grammatical and theological elements. But for our purpose only one thing matters, namely: Does St. Paul here speak of Baptism, and does he intend to say that it is a washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Ghost? The words, clear as daylight, say just that. Those who deny it, must resort to all manner of distorting and perverting the text to make it say what they wish it to say. Meyer writes: "The means by which the saving is effected are set forth in the words: διὰ (τοῦ) λουτροῦ. . . . The expression τὸ λουτρὸν παλινγενεσίας has been very arbitrarily interpreted by some expositors, some taking λουτρὸν as a figurative name for the *regeneratio* itself, or for the *praedicatio evangelii*, or for the Holy Spirit, or for the abundant imparting of the Spirit. From Eph. 5:26 it is clear that it can mean nothing else than Baptism; compare, too, Heb. 10:23; 1 Cor. 6:11; Acts 22:16."³⁶

The *Commentary* of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown quotes

³⁶ *Commentary*, sub v. 5.

Calvin on the verse, who writes: "The Apostles are wont to draw an argument from the Sacraments to prove the thing therein signified, because it ought to be a recognized principle among the godly, that God does not mark us with empty signs, but by His power inwardly makes good what He demonstrates by the outward sign. Wherefore Baptism is congruously and truly called the laver of regeneration. We must connect the sign and the thing signified, so as not to make the sign empty and ineffectual; and yet not, for the sake of honoring the sign, to detract from the Holy Spirit what is peculiarly His." For one thing, that does not make sense; for another, it means: "I simply refuse to believe what the clear words of Scripture say." Charles Hodge, closely following John Calvin, fights with might and main against "baptismal regeneration" and reaches the following conclusion, which he endeavors to prove: "There are, however, strong reasons for denying that here is any reference to Baptism as an external rite in this passage."³⁷

The *Pulpit Commentary* very aptly writes: "Through the washing of regeneration.' . . . Here we have the means through or by which God's mercy saves us. The washing or rather laver of regeneration (λουτρόν) — found elsewhere in the New Testament only in Eph. 5:26 in exactly the same connection — is the laver or bath in which the washing takes place. The nature or quality of this bath is described by the words 'of regeneration' (τῆς παλινγενεσίας); elsewhere [found] in the New Testament only in Matt. 19:28, where it seems rather to mean the great restoration of humanity at the second advent . . . παλινγενεσία, therefore, very fitly describes the new birth in Holy Baptism, when the believer is put into possession of a new spiritual life, a new nature, and a new inheritance of glory. And the laver of Baptism is called 'the laver of regeneration,' because it is the ordained means by or through which regeneration is obtained. 'And renewing of the Holy Ghost.' . . . This renewal is the work of the Holy Ghost in the new birth, when men are 'born again' of the Spirit (John 3:5). It is evidently parallel with the παλινγενεσία."³⁸

This may suffice to establish the sense of the words in question. To us it is important in this article that here St. Paul describes Baptism as the means by which the Holy Ghost

³⁷ *Syst. Theol.*, III, p. 596.

³⁸ *Sub* v. 5.

regenerates and renews, and this in a connection in which He speaks in terms of purest Gospel grace. The passage is full of the sweetest Gospel terms, such as "kindness, love, Savior, mercy, saved, grace, heirs according to the hope of eternal life, faithful saying." Baptism, therefore, is itself the purest Gospel, in which not *we* do anything to please God and thus merit salvation, but in which God performs wonders of mercy in us. And again, there is admonition here, too, for as the Apostle tells Titus, among the fundamentals of the Christian faith the doctrine of the Holy Baptism must be held and defended against all heretics. Just as little as we may give up the *sola gratia*, just so little dare we give up the doctrine of regeneration by God's appointed means of grace, in particular, by Holy Baptism. The admonition that comes to us in this passage is, therefore, to hold to the precious Gospel message of salvation by grace through faith in the means of grace.

And so the Apostle's *usus practicus* of Holy Baptism is to give comfort to his readers and to apply to them the much needed admonition for holiness of life, as also for faithfulness in adhering to the pure doctrine of God's Word. In view of this it is to be regretted that Christians commonly think so little of their Baptism. Is not the carelessness, indifference, worldliness, formalism, and externalism, as well as the disgraceful neglect of God's Word, largely the consequence of such contempt for Baptism? The ancient rule reads: *Contemptus Baptismi damnat*. May God graciously keep us from contempt for this holy Sacrament.

St. Louis, Mo.

Contributors to this Issue

L. Fuerbringer (died May 6, 1947) was president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., and taught exegetical subjects.

G. V. Schick is professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Interpretation at the same school.

John Theodore Mueller is professor of systematic theology and exegesis at the same school.
