

# Were the Reformers Heretics?

A Biblical, Baptist analysis

by

Thomas D. Ross, M. Div.

For

Reformation Church History, ThM credit

## I. Introduction

## II. Reformers' doctrine of baptism

- a.) Stated
  - i.) Luther
  - ii.) Calvin
  - iii.) Zwingli
  - iv.) English Reformers
  - v.) Later Reformed writers and confessional statements
- b.) Baptist doctrine of baptism in history, etc.
- c.) Bible doctrine of baptism

## III. Reformers' doctrine of the Lord's Supper

## IV. Other heresies among the Reformers

- a.) Rationalism (Luther's denial of the canon, etc; look at other reformers).

## V. Conclusion

- a.) Historiographical importance: Reformers unconverted and their followers largely unconverted.
- b.) Significance for today: Reformers are not the model for Baptists

-ADD IN THE MORAVIANS ADOPTED THE LUTHERN AUGSBURG CONFESSION (WITH ITS BAPTISMAL REGENERATION) AND JOHN + CHARLES WESLEY'S BAPTISMAL REGENERATION.

## I. Introduction

Modern Baptists generally share with Protestants a very high view of the doctrine and practice of the Protestant Reformation and its leaders. The movement is generally considered a great return to the fundamental truths of the gospel of Christ and a repudiation of the errors of Romanism. The infallible Bible, the sole and sufficient authority for the Christian's faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16-17), teaches that by means of the substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), God justifies or declares righteous all who in repentance (Luke 13:3) trust in the blood of the Redeemer (John 3:16; Romans 5:1). This is the gospel. Justification is received simply by faith in Christ, apart from good works (Ephesians 2:8-9) and religious rituals, including those ordained by God (Galatians 2:16; 5:4-6), such as believer's immersion (Romans 6:1-7) and the Lord's supper (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). All who have been justified are eternally secure (John 10:27-30). Those who believe or teach a false gospel will be eternally damned (Galatians 1:8-9), and heretics must be rejected (Titus 3:10). The Protestant Reformers and the movements they originated constitute no exception to this declaration. Their teachings must, therefore, be evaluated in light of the gospel and the other truths of the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A thorough refutation of salvation by baptism and a presentation of the true gospel is *Heaven Only for the Baptized? The Gospel of Christ vs. Pardon Through Baptism*, by Thomas Ross, available for free download at [www.pillarandground.org](http://www.pillarandground.org). Anyone who has believed a false gospel of salvation through baptism is heartily encouraged to acquire a copy of this work, read it, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and so pass from spiritual death to spiritual life. A excellent presentation of systematic theology in general is the four volume set *Landmarks of Baptist Doctrine* by Robert Sargent (Oak Harbor, WA: Bible Baptist Church Publications, n. d.). This set, and other sound books, are available at [www.lvbaptist.org](http://www.lvbaptist.org).

## II. The Reformers' Views of Baptism

Medieval Catholicism held that “the . . . merit of Jesus Christ is applied, both to adults and to infants, by the sacrament of baptism rightly administered in the form of the church . . . infants, newly born from their mothers' wombs . . . are to be baptized . . . for the remission of sins, that in them that may be cleansed away by regeneration, which they have contracted by generation. . . . If any one denies, that, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is conferred in baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted; or even asserts that the whole of that which has the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away; but says that it is only rased, or not imputed; let him be anathema.”<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther retained the Roman Catholic teaching of baptismal regeneration, including the regeneration of infants through the instrumentality of baptism. He called baptism “a new birth by which we are . . . loosed from sin, death, and hell, and become children of life, heirs of all the gifts of God, God’s own children, and brethren of Christ.”<sup>3</sup> The Lutheran *Small Catechism* affirms, “baptism 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.” (IV). The binding Lutheran symbol, the *Augsburg Confession*, states that “baptism . . . is necessary to salvation” and “condemn[s] the Anabaptists, who reject the baptism of children, and say that children are saved without baptism” (Article IX). Luther led Lutheranism to teach that all the unbaptized—including all unbaptized infants—are

---

<sup>2</sup> *The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent*, ed. and trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), Session V: Decree Concerning Original Sin.

<sup>3</sup> (Luther, *Works*, 53:103).

eternally lost, and to anathematize those, like the Anabaptists, who taught otherwise.<sup>4</sup> However, Luther made a number of adjustments to the Roman teaching. Rather than baptism actually cleansing the soul from sin, it brought about the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. It was also not necessary to baptize with water—beer would also serve the purpose.<sup>5</sup> One wonders if immersion in beer would have been preferred to sprinkling or pouring; at least when using water, Luther did prefer immersion.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the sacrament of baptism was the vehicle of conveying faith to infants, so that infants were actually saved by faith, indeed, by faith alone, at the point of baptism:

According to Luther, the soul is not actually cleansed from sin, either in baptism or at any time in this present life. It is rather that sin is not imputed. Negatively, the baptismal cleansing is a non-imputation of original and actual sin. Positively it is an imputation of the perfect and all-sufficient righteousness of Jesus Christ. For Luther baptism was still the sign of remission, and under the Holy Spirit it could still be the instrument of justifying faith, but his whole conception of the relationship had broadened and deepened [in comparison to medieval Catholicism]. It had broadened:

---

<sup>4</sup> Both the traditional Catholic and Lutheran doctrines of baptismal regeneration require the conclusion that all pre-born infants who die are also in hell, since they have not had water applied to their bodies in the proper manner—indeed, those who would dare to think otherwise are anathema. This would infinitely aggravate the modern horror of abortion. One wonders if this “Christian truth” of the damnation of all preborn infants is set forth when a minister devoted to Catholic or Lutheran orthodoxy tries to comfort a woman who has had a miscarriage. Happily, king David believed otherwise, knowing that he would be in heaven eternally with his dead infant, who had died without circumcision or any other ceremony, and thus comforted Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:18, 22-23; cf. Jonah 4:11).

<sup>5</sup> “Luther gave a new turn to the debate when in his opposition to medieval legalism he made the rhetorical suggestion that beer would meet the case just as well as water [for baptism]: no doubt it would be equally available in his country” (Pg. 134, *Baptism*, Bromiley; cf. J. de la Servi re, *La Th ologie de Bellarmine*, pg. 356).

<sup>6</sup> “Luther preferred immersion, and prescribed it in his baptismal service” (Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907, 1910; 2:13:Footnotes; 7:1:7:102; 8:3:25). In Luther’s sermon on baptism in 1518, he stated that “baptism is . . . when we dip anything wholly in water, that it is completely covered over. . . it should be thus, and would be right . . . [for] the child or any one who is to be baptized, [to] be completely sunk down into the water, and dipt again and drawn out” (*Opera Lutheri*, I. 319, Folio ed., quoted on pg. 108, Christian, J. T., *A History of the Baptists*, vol. 1, Texarkana, TX: Bogard Press, 1922.) Calvin stated that “it is evident that the term *baptise* means to immerse, and that this was the form used by the primitive Church” (Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:15:19, trans. Henry Beveridge), although he held that it did not matter if we followed the example of the primitive church or not.

for the remission could now extend to the whole life of a Christian. And it had deepened: for it was a remission in spiritual rather than in quasi-material terms, in the terms of a righteousness of faith rather than a righteousness of sight and works. . . . The restoration of regeneration to much of its original meaning and honour as the chief grace of baptism was largely the work of Martin Luther. Luther did it by relating regeneration directly to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the entry of the Christian believer into that resurrection. . . . The traditional teaching [on baptism] was necessarily opposed by Luther, who denied an *ex opere operato* efficiency of the sacrament and insisted upon the need for faith. Yet Luther did not draw the conclusion that there are no effects of baptism in infants, for as we have seen he maintained boldly that infants do have faith, and he challenged his opponents to prove the contrary.<sup>7</sup> What this faith was for Luther it is difficult to say with any precision. Sometimes he spoke of it rather as the absence of a hostile disposition, or even as an infused gift.<sup>8</sup> Whatever it was it enabled infants to enjoy the baptismal benefits of remission and regeneration. The benefits themselves, however, were understood evangelically as remission by non-imputation and the regeneration of faith, so that no place was left for the familiar causal conception. The same was true in the case of Melancthon, who in reply to the Anabaptists claimed for infants a definite remission of original sin by virtue of the sacramental ministry. But again the remission was understood evangelically as non-imputation.<sup>9</sup> . . . Luther continued to use expressions which suggest an *ex opere operato* efficacy, for he had a strong sense of the objectivity of the divine grace and work.<sup>10</sup> But at three points he broke definitely with the traditional dogma. First, . . . he pointed out that the true work of baptism is a work of faith and promise, not of sight. Second, and as a necessary corollary, he claimed that faith is indispensable to the operation of the sacrament,<sup>11</sup> for faith is itself the fulfillment of baptism,<sup>12</sup> the response of the soul which enables the sacrament to have its effect.<sup>13</sup> Thus the baptismal remission and regeneration is not a naturalistic or mechanical process, but an intensely personal matter in which the divine promise is held out on the one hand, and faith is the appropriation and fulfillment of the promise on the other. Third, and finally, Luther did not find the power of baptism in the element, but in the baptismal word, which gives to the external sign its true signification, declaring the promises.<sup>14</sup> Baptism could achieve its

---

<sup>7</sup> Luther, *Werke*, Weimarer Ausgabe, VI, pg. 538. Infants do not have faith or know anything since they cannot even discern their right hands from their left, Jonah 4:11, nor know good and evil, Deuteronomy 1:39; cf. Romans 9:11. Consider also what must be considered, at the very least, the extreme vitiation required of the content and nature of saving faith, if an infant has it.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Luther, *Werke*, Weimarer Ausgabe, VI, pg. 537-538.

<sup>9</sup> *Corpus Reformatorum*, XXXIII, pg. 295, 859.

<sup>10</sup> Luther, *Werke*, Weimarer Ausgabe, XXX, I, pg. 218.

<sup>11</sup> Luther, *Werke*, Weimarer Ausgabe, XXX, I, pg. 216.

<sup>12</sup> Luther, *Werke*, Weimarer Ausgabe, VI, pg. 532.

<sup>13</sup> Luther, *Werke*, Weimarer Ausgabe, II, pg. 315.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Wernle, *Luther*, pg. 38.

effect only as the word of baptism was perceived and understood,<sup>15</sup> and the response of faith evoked. But to say that was to suspend the efficacy of the sacrament upon the free and sovereign Spirit of God who disposes of both word and sacrament. The work of baptism was not done through the water alone, nor was it done through the Spirit necessarily acting with the water. If it was done at all, it was done only in so far as the Spirit Himself worked in, with and under the water, and sign and grace came together in the one creative act by which faith is born and the soul renewed by promise.<sup>16</sup>

These adjustments to the Catholic view of baptismal regeneration were sufficient to bring upon Luther Rome's *anathema*, but they did not separate him from the idea that baptism was necessary for regeneration and eternal life. The Baptist doctrine of justification by faith apart from sacraments and their restriction of baptism to believers, as in the New Testament, were great enough evils to Luther and Lutheranism that the Diet of Speyer (A. D. 1529) decreed the death penalty for Anabaptists, and in A. D. 1536 Luther signed a memorandum written by Melancthon assenting to putting Anabaptists to death (cf. 1 John 3:15-16). Luther stated, "The Anabaptists hold tenets relating to infant baptism, original sin, and inspiration, which have no connection with the Word of God,<sup>17</sup> and are indeed opposed to it . . . Secular authorities are also bound to restrain and punish avowedly false doctrine . . . For think what disaster would ensue if children were not baptized? . . . Besides this the Anabaptists separate themselves from the churches . . . and they set up a ministry and congregation of their own, which is also contrary to the command of God. From all this it becomes clear that the secular authorities are bound . . . to inflict corporal

---

<sup>15</sup> Since "faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17), one wonders if deaf infants are able to repent of their sins and trust in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for justification when the baptismal word is pronounced. Thankfully, in Lutheran families, infants that can hear are able, despite not knowing good from evil, Deuteronomy 1:39, to turn from their sins to trust in the Lord Jesus the moment they are baptized.

<sup>16</sup> Pg. 172-173, 177-178, 198, 187, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

<sup>17</sup> Consider this declaration of Luther that those with false views of inspiration should be put to death in light of his declarations about numerous New and Old Testament books in the Appendix.

punishment on the offenders . . . Also when it is a case of only upholding some spiritual tenet, such as infant baptism, original sin, and unnecessary separation, then . . . we conclude that . . . the stubborn sectaries must be put to death.”<sup>18</sup> The baptismal doctrines of Luther and the Baptists of the Reformation era were radically opposed to one another; so far, was the gospel believed by Baptists from the saving truth that Luther thought they should be executed. Luther lived and died believing that baptism was essential for the receipt of the remission of sin.

John Calvin likewise taught that baptism was a means of regeneration and salvation. He declared that “God, regenerating us in baptism, ingrafts us into the fellowship of his Church, and makes us his by adoption . . . whatever time we are baptized, we are washed and purified . . . forgiveness, which at our first regeneration we receive by baptism alone . . . forgiveness has reference to baptism. . . . In baptism, the Lord promises forgiveness of sins.”<sup>19</sup> However, defining regeneration as the renovation of the new man which continued over the course of one’s life, rather than the work of an instant, he asserted that the guilt of sin is removed in baptism, but regeneration only begins at that moment of time. Calvin wrote, “We assert that the whole guilt of sin is taken away in baptism, so that the remains of sin still existing are not imputed. That this may be more clear, let my readers call to mind that there is a twofold grace in baptism, for therein both remission of sins and regeneration are offered to us. We teach that full remission is made, but that regeneration is only begun and goes on making progress during the whole of life. Accordingly, sin truly remains in us, and is not instantly in one day extinguished by baptism, but as the guilt

---

<sup>18</sup> (Janssen, X, 222-223; pamphlet of 1536).

<sup>19</sup> *Institutes*, 4:17:1, 4:15:3, 4, 15.



is effaced it is null in regard to imputation. Nothing is plainer than this doctrine.”<sup>20</sup>

However, while the Holy Spirit wrought the work of regeneration, and the blood of Christ washed away the sins of baptized infants through the instrumentality of the ordinance, Calvin held, however, contrary to the Catholic and Lutheran doctrines, that baptism was not absolutely essential to salvation, but people could be saved by faith who had no opportunity to be baptized. For “when we cannot receive [baptism] from the Church, the grace of God is not so inseparably annexed to them that we cannot obtain it by faith, according to his word.”<sup>21</sup> Grace is annexed to baptism, and the sacrament is the ordinary vehicle for sealing grace,<sup>22</sup> remission of sins, and regeneration, but God may perform an extraordinary and unusual work to save some even apart from baptism. Calvin stated, “We, too [as do the Catholics], acknowledge

---

<sup>20</sup> John Calvin, 1547 *Antidote to the Council of Trent*, Reply to the 1st Decree of the 5<sup>th</sup> Session.

<sup>21</sup> *Institutes*, 4:15:22.

<sup>22</sup> The Scriptural uses of the words “sign” and “seal” give no support whatever to the idea that baptism is a vehicle to convey saving grace. A Biblical “sign” was by no means a method of bestowing grace that led to the forgiveness of sin. The censers of false worshippers who were burned by the fire of God and eternally damned were a “sign unto the children of Israel” (Numbers 16:38), but they neither saved those that worshipped with them nor any other Israelite from hell. No use of “sign” in either the Old or New Testament provides any support whatever to the idea that “signs” are conjoined to justifying grace.

Nothing in Scripture associates the word “seal” with the communication of saving grace. Romans 4:11 is the only verse that one could even somewhat reasonably attempt to use to defend the Calvinist doctrine from the Bible; one could allege that circumcision is a “seal” of grace, that the sacrament of infant baptism is equivalent to circumcision, and that, therefore, infant baptism seals or conveys grace to infants. This argument breaks down at many points. First, the verse does not say that circumcision was a seal of grace to Jewish male infants; while circumcision was a “sign” by nature, it is not affirmed to have been a “seal” to all, but only to believing Abraham personally, who received it when he had already been justified by faith. A recognition of this distinction in Romans 4:11 explains the Old Testament use of the word “sign” or “token” (Hebrew *’oth*) in connection to circumcision in general (Genesis 17:11), but the total lack of Old Testament references to the ceremony as a “seal.” Second, the New Testament does not equate circumcision with baptism or state that the latter replaces the former. Third, the Biblical immersion of believers has nothing to do with the ceremonial application of water to infants that Catholics and Protestants claim is baptism. Fourth, when advocates of Reformed theology and other Protestants speak of baptism as a “seal” or vehicle of grace, they use the word in a sense entirely absent in Scripture. None of the appearances of *sphragis* in the New Testament, or similar words in the Old Testament, indicate that grace is conveyed through a “seal” (Romans 4:11; 1 Corinthians 9:2; 2 Timothy 2:19; Revelation 5:1-2, 5, 9; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 7:2; 8:1; 9:4).

that the use of baptism is necessary—that no one may omit it from either neglect or contempt. In this way we by no means make it free (optional). And not only do we strictly bind the faithful to the observance of it, but we also maintain that it is the ordinary instrument of God in washing and renewing us; in short, in communicating to us salvation. The only exception we make is, that the hand of God must not be tied down to the instrument. He may of himself accomplish salvation. For when an opportunity for baptism is wanting, the promise of God alone is amply sufficient.”<sup>23</sup> Ordinarily, baptism is the means of communicating salvation. However, in the rare situations where one cannot receive the sacrament, then God “may” of Himself save the unbaptized. The limitation of this exception to situations where “an opportunity for baptism is wanting” is significant—no hope of heaven is set forth for the unbaptized in the great majority of situations where access to the sacrament is possible. Nonetheless, infants who die without baptism, as long as they have Christian parents and the omission of sacrament was not on account of “sloth, nor contempt, nor negligence,”<sup>24</sup> can expect to be saved. Indeed, elect infants are “received into the Church by a formal sign [of baptism] because, in virtue of the promise [of a saving covenant between God, Christians, and the children of Christians], they previously belonged to the body of Christ. . . . the children of believers are not baptized, in order that though formerly aliens from the Church, they may then, for the first time, become children of God.”<sup>25</sup> Since the children of the Church were already part of the body of Christ from the womb by virtue of God’s

---

<sup>23</sup> John Calvin, 1547 *Antidote to the Council of Trent*, Antidote to the Canons of Baptism, Canon #5.

<sup>24</sup> *Institutes*, 4:15:22.

<sup>25</sup> *Institutes*, 4:15:22.

covenant, they can be saved even without the seal of baptism. Their membership in the Church before baptism explains how Calvin can maintain both the salvation of the children of Reformed parents and the doctrine that outside of the visible Church there is no salvation.<sup>26</sup> Since infants with Reformed parents were also not “aliens” but already “the children of God” at that time, it would also be unnecessary, indeed, sinful, for such “covenant children” to come to a place where they recognized themselves as lost, hell-bound sinners who were certain of present damnation on account of their sins and needed to, for the first time, consciously repent and believe the gospel, and so become Christians and be adopted into God’s family through a conversion experience. “Our children [those in the Reformed faith], before they are born, God declares that he adopts for his own when he promises that he will be a God to us, and to our seed after us. In this promise their salvation is included.”<sup>27</sup> All that was required for eternal bliss on the part of these infants was perseverance in their

---

<sup>26</sup> “It is now our purpose to discourse of the visible Church. Let us learn, from her single title of Mother, how useful, nay, how necessary the knowledge of her is, since there is no other means of entering into life unless she conceive us in the womb and give us birth, unless she nourish us at her breasts, and, in short, keep us under her charge and government, until, divested of mortal flesh, we become like the angels (Matt 22:30). For our weakness does not permit us to leave the school until we have spent our whole lives as scholars. Moreover, beyond the pale of the Church no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, can be hoped for, as Isaiah and Joel testify (Isa 37:32; Joel 2:32). To their testimony Ezekiel subscribes, when he declares, “They shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel” (Ezek 13:9), as, on the other hand, those who turn to the cultivation of true piety are said to inscribe their names among the citizens of Jerusalem. For which reason it is said in the psalm, “Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance” (Ps 106:4-5). By these words the paternal favour of God and the special evidence of spiritual life are confined to his peculiar people, and hence the abandonment of the Church is always fatal” (Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:1:4). The notion that outside of the visible church there is no salvation is not inconsistent with the doctrine of an invisible church made up of the elect; Calvin’s favorite patristic writer, Augustine, held both dogmas, affirming that the invisible church of the elect consisted of a portion of the members of the visible catholic church, but nobody was a member of the invisible church who was not as well a member of the visible Catholic denomination.

<sup>27</sup> *Institutes*, 4:15:20.

adherence to the Reformed faith and perseverance in the type of life consistent with Christian morality, thus evincing their election and regeneration in infancy.

Calvin also held that all those who received remission of sins as sealed in baptism were secure; those God made true Christians in their infancy in accordance with the baptismal covenant could not later fall and be finally lost. This was contrary to the Catholic and Lutheran doctrines that the regeneration given in baptism could be lost by subsequent sinning,<sup>28</sup> so that a true Christian could fall from a state of grace and be eternally lost on account of acts of post-baptismal transgression. Calvin held that the saving power of baptism affected one's entire life, rather than only communicating grace at the moment of its administration. "Nor is it to be supposed that baptism is bestowed only with reference to the past, so that, in regard to new lapses into which we fall after baptism, we must seek new remedies of expiation in other so-called sacraments, just as if the power of baptism had become obsolete. To this error, in ancient times, it was owing that some refused to be initiated by baptism until their life was in extreme danger, and they were drawing their last breath, that they might thus obtain pardon for all the past. Against this preposterous precaution ancient bishops frequently inveigh in their writings. We ought to consider that at whatever time we are baptized, we are washed and purified once for the whole of life. Wherefore, as often as we fall, we must recall the remembrance of our baptism, and thus fortify our minds, so as to feel certain and secure of the remission of sins. For though, when once administered, it seems to have passed, it is not abolished by

---

<sup>28</sup> The Catholic *Council of Trent* declared "that the received grace of justification is lost, not only by infidelity whereby even faith itself is lost, but also by any other mortal sin whatever" (Session VI, Chapter 15). The Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* "condemn[s] the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost."

subsequent sins. For the purity of Christ was therein offered to us, always is in force, and is not destroyed by any stain: it wipes and washes away all our defilements.”<sup>29</sup> When a follower of Calvin’s theology sins, he does not need to fear that he is again lost; by recalling that in baptism he was washed and purified once for his whole life, he can feel certain and secure of the remission of his sins.

Bromiley provides an insightful analysis of John Calvin’s baptismal theology:

Calvin referred to baptism as “an incorporation into Christ, an entry into the divine Sonship.”<sup>30</sup> He said “we are baptized for the mortification of our flesh, which is begun in baptism [note by this writer: consider that Calvin does not say that mortification begins at the point of faith, prior to baptism, but at the moment of baptism itself], is prosecuted every day, and will be finished when we depart from this life to go to the Lord.”<sup>31</sup> Calvin said that the necessity of precept of baptism, was not an absolute necessity, so that it was not true “that all who have not obtained baptism must perish.”<sup>32</sup>

The teaching of Calvin . . . like Bucer . . . repudiated the traditional “enclosing of the grace and virtue of the Spirit by the external sign.”<sup>33</sup> But he avoided the opposite extreme of denying that there is any connection between the sacraments and the grace which they signify.<sup>34</sup> He emphasized three main facts: first, that God has ordained the sacraments as means of grace; second, that repentance and faith are indispensable to their proper use; and third, that their efficacy depends ultimately upon the divine election. The sacrament of baptism does have a real effect, but only as it is sovereignly used by the Holy Spirit and received and understood in faith.

It may be noted that there are many affinities between the doctrine of Calvin and that of the Schoolmen, for they started from the same fundamental principles. But they applied the principles in very different ways and with widely divergent results. On both sides, for example, it was held that God Himself is the true and sole author of baptismal grace. But while the Schoolmen deduced from this that God will inevitably operate through the means which He Himself has instituted, Calvin contended for His continuing freedom and sovereignty as “the internal master.”<sup>35</sup> Again, both sides could admit the indispensability of repentance and faith, but whereas the Schoolmen

---

29 *Institutes*, 4:15:3.

30 Pg. 17, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

31 Pg. 29, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing *Institutes*, IV, 15, 11.

32 Pg. 54, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing *Harmony of the Evangel.*, pg. 387.

33 *Tracts*, II, pg. 574.

34 *Tracts*, II, pg. 87.

35 *Tracts*, II, pg. 214; *Institutes*, IV, 14, 9.

conceived of repentance and faith narrowly and negatively, and argued that even the insincere and unbelieving will receive at least a spiritual impress, Calvin regarded repentance and faith positively as themselves the creative work of the Holy Spirit by which baptism has its effect and without which it can never be more than the external sign.<sup>36</sup> And although he did not dispute that in baptism an offer of grace is made to all, and that “the grace of baptism may resume its place” at any time when there is true repentance, he could not accept either the artificial concept of a baptismal character or the view that grace itself is present even when obstructed by insincerity or unbelief. As Calvin saw it, “the promises are common to all, but the ratification of them is the gift of the Spirit.”<sup>37</sup> . . . With the believing . . . as they received the sign they perceived Christ Himself, and therefore they enjoyed the grace. In the normal course, it was the specific function of the sacrament to confirm the faith in Christ already evoked by the word, but in the case of infants baptism could be a powerful adjunct to the word even in the evocation of the faith by which its benefits were subsequently received and enjoyed.

Along lines such as these Calvin was able to hold a definite doctrine of sacramental efficacy without slipping into that static conception which meant an automatic efficacy and a practical denial of the free sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. The presentation of his doctrine varied to some extent with his successors, but not in any important particular. . . . The lesson had been well learned that although there is a sacramental union of sign and grace it must be understood in a dynamic rather than a static sense, related on the one hand to the sovereign freedom of God, and on the other to the individual faith of the recipient.<sup>38</sup>

The insistence of Luther and Lutheranism on the real presence and oral manducation in the Lord’s Supper, not Lutheran insistence on baptismal regeneration, was the reason for the inability for the Lutheran and the Reformed denominations to combine, either at the Colloquy of Marburg during the disputation between Luther and Zwingli, or in later times. “In regard to the Confession of Augsburg [which affirms, “baptism . . . is necessary to salvation,” Article IX], [Calvin] says in his *Last Admonition to Westphal*, ‘my answer is, that, as it was published at Ratisbon (1541) [in this version Luther’s position on communion was moderated], it does not contain a word contrary

---

<sup>36</sup> *Tracts*, II, pg. 343.

<sup>37</sup> *Tracts*, II, pg. 342-343.

<sup>38</sup> Pg. 189-190, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

to our doctrine.”<sup>39</sup> Baptismal regeneration was not a primary matter of disagreement between Luther, Calvin, and the denominations that adopted their theologies,<sup>40</sup> because all involved held to the doctrine. Calvin’s view that a possibility of salvation existed for those infants of Christian parents who died without the sacrament in the rare situations where it was not possible to have it performed, and other secondary differences from the position of Luther, did not alter the primary agreement between these Reformers that the sacrament of baptism was a means of bestowing grace and regeneration on infants and others who received it.

In agreement with Luther, John Calvin advised that “Anabaptists . . . should . . . be put to death.”<sup>41</sup> The Baptist doctrines of justification by faith apart from sacraments, the necessity of personal conversion, and believer’s baptism, were anathema to him. Calvin and the Baptists were by no means partakers of a common Christian faith.

---

<sup>39</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 (3<sup>rd</sup>. revised ed), chap. 15, sec. 133, “Calvin and the Augsburg Confession.”

<sup>40</sup> This lack of Reformed dissent and strife over the Lutheran doctrine of baptismal regeneration (“The only serious doctrinal difference which divided Luther and Zwingli at Marburg was the mode of the real presence in the eucharist,” *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed.) continued after the time of the Reformation into later centuries and down to modern times. The position expressed by Charles Hodge, the famous Presbyterian theologian of old Princeton, as seen in his *Systematic Theology* (vol. 3, *Soteriology*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003, reprint ed., pg. 522-523, 517, 604), is representative. After a stirring denunciation of the Roman Catholic doctrine of baptismal regeneration, including declarations such as “Any one, therefore, who teaches that no man can be saved without the rite of baptism, and that by receiving that rite he is made a child of God and heir of heaven, is antichrist,” Hodge declares that his “remarks are not intended to apply, and in fact are not applicable, to the Lutheran system,” despite the fact that both “the Lutherans and Romanists . . . hold that the sacraments are necessary means of grace, in the sense that the grace which they signify is not received otherwise than in their use. There is no remission of sin or regeneration without baptism [in the Roman and Lutheran view],” and Hodge knows very well that “the Lutheran standards . . . the Augsburg Confession . . . the Apology for that Confession . . . the two catechisms of Luther, the larger and smaller . . . [affirm] that the baptism of infants is not in vain but necessary and effectual to salvation.” The Reformed have constantly opposed the Roman doctrine of infant salvation, but pronounced no denunciation against the Lutheran doctrine of baptismal regeneration. It is not much different than the Reformed view.

<sup>41</sup> Vol. 1, Chapter 15, *A History of the Baptists*, John T. Christian, 1922, 1926. Way of Life Literature electronic edition (Oak Harbor, WA), May 2003, citing Froude, *History of England*, V.99.

Ulrich Zwingli was closer to the Anabaptist position that baptism, like the Lord's supper, was not a means of receiving salvation, but he still retained elements of the Catholic and Protestant connection of infant baptism and forgiveness.

The contribution made by Zwingli and the Anabaptists was on the whole the negative one of attacking the prevailing notion that the external element could itself accomplish an internal cleansing.<sup>42</sup> The Anabaptists in particular had no very positive doctrine to substitute for the rejected teaching. Although they maintained with truth that it is the blood of Christ which cleanses from sin,<sup>43</sup> they did not think of baptism as in any way a means of grace, but only as a sign of grace, and more especially as a sign of individual conversion. Zwingli did not altogether share this view. As he saw it, baptism in the full sense embraces the inward baptism of the Spirit as well as the outward baptism of water. Where the two are conjoined in true believers, the effect of baptism is a genuine inward purgation. If Zwingli erred, it was in his too harsh divorcing of the two aspects or 'natures' of the sacrament. The union which he envisaged was only an incidental union suspended entirely upon an operation of the Spirit which was sovereign and unpredictable. At this point the sacramental theology of Zwingli betrays both the strength and the weakness of his doctrines of providence and the incarnation.<sup>44</sup>

Schaff states, "Zwingli stood midway between Luther and the Anabaptists. He regarded the sacraments as signs and seals of a grace already received rather than as means of a grace to be received. They set forth and confirm, but do not create, the thing signified. He rejected the doctrine of baptismal regeneration and of the corporal presence."<sup>45</sup> Bromiley maintains that "Zwingli compared the external sign of baptism to the badge worn by patriotic supporters of the Confederation. Indeed, he refused to ascribe to it, as an external sign, anything more than the psychological value of a reminder and profession."<sup>46</sup> His successors, however, were more concerned to work out the difficult question of the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit in baptism,

---

<sup>42</sup> *Corpus Reformatorum*, IV, pg. 215, 627

<sup>43</sup> *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandia*, II, pg. 280, IV, pg. 44.

<sup>44</sup> Pg. 173, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

<sup>45</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 (3<sup>rd</sup>. revised ed), chap. 3, sec. 27, "The Eucharistic Controversy. Zwingli and Luther."

<sup>46</sup> *Corpus Reformatorum*, IV, p. 210ff.



and they could almost take for granted its effect as a call to Christian discipleship.”<sup>47</sup>

Bromiley also contrasts the baptismal theory of Zwingli with that of Luther and of Calvin:

“The revolt against the [absolute necessity of baptism for infant salvation] was not against the principle that the sacrament itself is a means of grace. It was against the tacit assumption that baptism is the only means of the divine operation, the claim that grace is bound to this sacrament by an indissoluble bond. . . . Luther himself did not make any clear or definite stand against the traditional doctrine of necessity. . . . So striking was this emphasis . . . upon the ordinary necessity [of baptism for salvation] . . . that opponents could mark off his teaching on the subject from that of Bucer and Calvin.

With Zwingli the matter was otherwise. He did of course defend infant baptism, and to that extent he could urge the importance of its administration. But his very defense carried with it a denial of the absolute necessity. Christian children had a right to the sign of the covenant because by divine election they were already members of the covenant. The sign itself did not effect covenant-membership: it merely signified a covenant-membership already existing. If the sign lacked, the covenant-membership, and therefore salvation, still remained. . . . [This view of Zwingli] reduced [baptism] to a mere sign of grace, and . . . not in any sense a means of grace. Zwingli himself unashamedly admitted this fact, as far as the external action is concerned, for he argued that the outward sign is not able either to cleanse from sin or even to confirm faith. On the other hand he did not preclude an inward operation of the Spirit in fulfillment of the sign or even in conjunction with it. What he denied was that the external rite is indispensable to that inward operation . . . Zwingli commit[ed] himself to what is virtually a denial of original guilt. . . . Zwingli retorted not merely that water-baptism cannot cleanse from sin, but that there is no original sin to be cleansed. . . . [unlike] Hübmaier [the Anabaptist, who] retained some doctrine of original sin . . . Zwingli could hold out hope for the children of the heathen, as well as for those who had the privilege of a Christian descent. . . . [In contrast, for] Calvin . . . baptism . . . [had] certain specific promises . . . annexed to it. It was, moreover, a definite means of grace. Therefore ‘if anyone of his own accord abstains from the use of the sacrament . . . he contemns Christ, spurns His grace, and quenches His Spirit.’”<sup>48</sup>

Zwingli’s defense of the baptism of the infants of believers precluded the necessity of the rite for heaven, based on his doctrine that they are already partakers of salvation.

However, an acceptance of this Zwinglian position also precludes, as does the

---

<sup>47</sup> Pg. 169, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

<sup>48</sup> Pg. 52-54, *Baptism*, Bromiley. Quote from Calvin is from *Tracts*, II, pg. 85.

doctrine of Calvin, the necessity and even the reasonableness of personal conversion. The child of Christian parents, as one who is already a partaker of God's covenant, never needs to come to a point where he recognizes himself as a lost, hell-bound sinner, who then must repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and so be born again. His view is consistent with the declaration of the modern Protestant Reformed Church, that it is a "sin against God's covenant . . . that covenant, baptized, Reformed young people are made the objects of an 'evangelism' that treats them as unsaved sinners who must be saved by accepting Christ. If this is what is meant by the conversion of the child, Reformed parents and the Reformed church reject it in the name of the covenant of God sealed to their children in infancy."<sup>49</sup> Zwingli "insisted that baptism, like circumcision by which it was foreshadowed, was a sign, a simple form of action which was of itself certainly not necessary for salvation. There was also a spiritual or internal baptism, given by God in man's heart, presuming and requiring faith. Not only did baptism not wash away sins, but its recipient was not then or later sinless; Christ alone did this. It was an indication that an obligation to live a Christian life had been accepted by, or on behalf of, the recipient."<sup>50</sup> Baptism was thus a public assurance that children would receive a Christian education, and an initiation ceremony to show their future allegiance. "Baptism . . . was simply a token of membership of the Christian community, a public advertisement, an initiation and an acceptance (by deputy in the case of infants) of the obligations of the followers of

---

<sup>49</sup> Pgs. 21-22, *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers*, David J. Engelsma, South Holland, IL: Evangelism Committee, Protestant Reformed Church, n. d.

<sup>50</sup> *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtlich Werke*, hg. V. E. Egli, G. Finsler, W. Köhler, O. Farner, F. Blanke, L. v. Muralt, E. Künzli, R. Pfister, J. Staedtke, F. Büsser. Corpus Reformatorum, (Berlin/Leipzig/Zürich, 1905-), IV, 199-201, 229-231.

Christ.”<sup>51</sup> If infants were already members of the Christian community and followers of Christ before baptism, they never need to come to a point of personal admission of an unconverted state or an experience of evangelical repentance. This fit in with Zwingli’s personal life; he gradually moved to his position of reformation doctrine, without having a personal point of conversion. Furthermore, the association of infant baptism and salvation was not absent even in Zurich, since “in the Baptismal Order at Zürich prayer could be offered for incorporation into Christ.”<sup>52</sup> . . . The initiation [of baptism taught there] was into the church as the family of God, or the body of Christ. The sacramental entry taught clearly the divine adoption and sonship. Baptism was not merely the historical sign or badge of external church-membership. It was an entry into the people of God.”<sup>53</sup> A connection between baptism and salvation was maintained by Zwingli’s successor at Zürich, Heinrich Bullinger, who “described baptism as ‘the seal of the righteousness of faith’”<sup>54</sup> and said “Baptism is a visible sign and seal of our ingrafting into the body of Christ.”<sup>55</sup> Bullinger also continued Zwingli’s denial of the necessity of personal conversion for those baptized in infancy, since “In Bullinger’s *Decades* . . . the text ‘Of such is the kingdom of heaven’ was used to prove infant discipleship: ‘He manifestly calleth the littler ones, not yet able to confess, believers.’”<sup>56</sup> If infants are already disciples and believers, they never need to recognize themselves as lost unbelievers and repent. Zwingli’s fellow-reformer, Martin Bucer, also “could not agree either that the sacraments are ‘naked

---

<sup>51</sup> pg. 189, 192, *Zwingli*, G. R. Potter (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>52</sup> Pg. 423, *Documents of the Continental Reformation*, Kidd.

<sup>53</sup> Pg. 17, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

<sup>54</sup> Pg. 12, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Bullinger, Parker Society Series, IV, pg. 323.

<sup>55</sup> Pg. 17, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Bullinger, Parker Society Series, IV, pg. 399.

<sup>56</sup> Pg. 105, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Bullinger, Parker Society Series, IV, pg. 385.

and bare signs,<sup>57</sup> or that they are ‘such instruments or channels of grace as that they bring grace with whatever mind or faith you partake of them.’<sup>58</sup> They have a real, instrumental efficacy, but that efficacy is dependent upon two interrelated facts: first, the divine election, and second, the faith of the individual recipient. Sign and grace together constitute the one true baptism where the Holy Spirit uses the means of grace and the response of faith is either evoked or confirmed.”<sup>59</sup> Bucer taught that for non-elect infants, for those who lived and died in opposition to the Christian faith in later life, the baptismal sacrament did not convey salvation, but for elect infants baptism was a real, effective vehicle, as the “sacrament of regeneration,”<sup>60</sup> of conveying God’s saving grace.

The analysis above deals with the later Zwinglian position on infant baptism; in earlier years, the Reformer had affirmed, “Nothing grieves me more than that at present I have to baptize children, for I know it ought not to be done.”<sup>61</sup> Article 18 of Zwingli’s 67 articles stated that baptism was originally designed for people of mature, responsible years.<sup>62</sup> Zwingli knew that “if we were to baptize as Christ instituted it then we would not baptize any person until he has reached the years of discretion; for I find it nowhere written that infant baptism is to be practiced.”<sup>63</sup> However, Zwingli’s

---

<sup>57</sup> Land, Art. In *Evangelical Quarterly*, I, 2, pg. 159f.

<sup>58</sup> W. Goode, *The Effects of Baptism in the case of Infants*, pg. 167.

<sup>59</sup> Pg. 188, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

<sup>60</sup> Pg. 213, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*, Leonard Verduin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), citing *Urkundliche Quellen zur hessischen Reformationsgeschichte, 4 Band (Widertäuferakten, 1527-1626), von Günther Franz (nach Walter Köhler, Walter Sohm, Theodor Sippell bearbeitet, Marburg, 1951)*, pgs. 226f.

<sup>61</sup> Pg. 198, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*, Verduin, citing *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, VIII Band, Balthasar Hubmaiers Schriften, von Westin-Bergsten* (Gütersloh, 1962), pgs. 184f..

<sup>62</sup> Pg. 261, *Landmarks of Church History*, Robert Sargent. Oak Harbor, WA: Bible Baptist Church Publications, n. d

<sup>63</sup> pg. 199, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*, Verduin.

recognition that, “if however I were to terminate the practice [of infant baptism] then I fear I would lose my prebend,” and his recognition of the necessity of the administration of the ordinance to infants to support a State-Church union, led him in 1525 to change his mind, and in 1530 to deny that he had ever spoken against infant baptism, despite affirmations such as “The error [of believer’s baptism] also misled me some years ago, so that I thought it would be much more suitable to baptize children after they had arrived at a good age.”<sup>64</sup> He did not oppose the decree of the magistrates of Zurich in 1525 that all who would not have their children baptized were to be exiled, nor their drowning of the Baptist Felix Manz in the Limmat river in A. D. 1527. His angry outburst, “Let those who talk of going under go under indeed!” gave rise to the method of death by drowning for Anabaptists.<sup>65</sup>

While the earlier Zwinglian position on baptism repudiated infant baptism entirely, even the later Zwinglian doctrine was the furthest from the explicit, unabashed doctrine of infant baptismal salvation of Catholicism and the closest to the Anabaptist denial of a salvific character of the ordinance, although Zwingli was by then far enough from the Baptists that he would have them put to death. Reformed theology after his death continued to feel his influence, but generally was closer to the sacramental baptismal theology of Calvin, although Reformed respect for the Bible and its affirmations of justification by faith apart from any religious rites continually called the Calvinist movement, and especially the elect with Reformed roots, to the

---

<sup>64</sup> pg. 152, Newman, Henry Albert, *A Manual of Church History*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publishing Society, 1908), cited on pg. 261 of *Landmarks of Church History*, Robert Sargent. Oak Harbor, WA: Bible Baptist Church Publications, n. d.

<sup>65</sup> Pg. 229, *Landmarks of Church History*, vol. 1, Robert Sargent. Oak Harbor, WA: Bible Baptist Church Publications, n. d.

Scriptural and Baptist position away from the sacramentalist salvation propounded by its founders and standard Reformed confessions.

Reformed confessional statements continued to link the sacrament of baptism and the forgiveness of sin in the manner of John Calvin. The *Second Helvetic Confession*, composed by Zwingli's successor Bullinger in 1562, the most widely adopted and authoritative of continental Reformed symbols after the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the official creed of the Reformed communions in Switzerland, Hungary, Poland, and Bohemia, states that "to be baptized in the name of Christ is to be enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance of the sons of God . . . to be cleansed also from the filthiness of sins . . . God . . . adopts us to be his sons, and by a holy covenant joins us to himself . . . all these things are assured by baptism. . . . We condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that newborn infants of the faithful are to be baptized" (Article 20). The extremely influential *Heidelberg Catechism* of 1563, drafted by Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, and the chief symbol of German and Dutch Reformed churches, affirms that "Christ appointed this external washing with water . . . [of] holy baptism . . . adding thereunto this promise, that I am as certainly washed by his blood and Spirit from all the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water, by which the filthiness of the body is commonly washed away. . . . Christ promised us that he will as certainly wash us by his blood and Spirit, as we are washed with the water of baptism . . . In the institution of baptism, which is thus expressed . . . 'he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.' This promise is also repeated, where the scripture calls baptism

‘the washing of regeneration, and the washing away of sins.’<sup>66</sup> . . . [T]he external baptism with water [is not] the washing away of sin itself . . . for the blood of Jesus Christ only, and the Holy Ghost, cleanse us from all sin. . . . [but] the Holy Ghost [doth] call baptism ‘the washing of regeneration,’ and ‘the washing away of sins’ . . . [with] great cause, to wit, not only thereby to teach us, that, as the filth of the body is purged away by water, so our sins are removed by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ; but especially that, by this divine pledge and sign, he may assure us that we are spiritually cleansed from our sins as really as we are externally washed with water.’<sup>67</sup> The Belgic Confession of 1561, prepared by Guido de Brès, and revised by Francis Junius, a student of Calvin, became the recognized symbol of the Reformed Churches of Holland and Belgium. It stated:

The sacraments . . . seal unto us [God’s] promises . . . thereby assuring and confirming in us the salvation which he imparts to us. For they are visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing, by means whereof God works in us by the power of the Holy Ghost. . . . [T]he number of sacraments . . . are two only, namely, the sacrament of baptism, and the holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Jesus Christ . . . having abolished circumcision . . . has instituted the sacrament of baptism instead thereof; by which we are received into the Church of God, and separated from all other people and strange religions, that we may wholly belong to him, whose ensign and banner we bear: and which serves as a testimony to us, that he will forever be our gracious God and Father. Therefore . . . as water washes away the filth of the body, when poured upon it, and is seen on the body of the baptized, when sprinkled upon him; so does the blood of Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, internally sprinkle the soul, cleanse it from its sins, and regenerate us from children of wrath, unto children of God. . . . Therefore the ministers, on their part, administer the sacrament, and that which is visible, but our Lord gives that which is signified by the sacrament, namely, the gifts and invisible grace; washing, cleansing and purging our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts, and filling them with all comfort; giving unto us a true assurance of his fatherly goodness; putting on us the new man, and putting off the old man with all his deeds. Therefore we believe, that

---

<sup>66</sup> The catechism is misinterpreting Mark 16:16; Titus 3:5; and Acts 22:16.

<sup>67</sup> Question 69, 71-73.

every man, who is earnestly studious of obtaining life eternal, ought to be but once baptized with this only baptism, without ever repeating the same: since we cannot be born twice. Neither does this baptism only avail us, at the time when the water is poured upon us, and received by us but also through the whole course of our life; therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received, and moreover condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, whom we believe ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as the children in Israel formerly were circumcised, upon the same promises which are made unto our children.<sup>68</sup>

If baptism is a testimony to infants that God “will forever be [their] gracious God and Father,” and God conveys and seals through it the invisible grace of “washing, cleansing and purging our souls of all filth and unrighteousness,” and the sacrament continues to be means of saving grace “through the whole course of our life,” and we ought not to be baptized twice because “we cannot be born twice,” it is clearly a channel of conveying salvation. This explains why the Belgic Confession affirms, as did Calvin, that “there is no salvation outside of . . . [the] congregation” (Article 28), the location where the sacraments are administered (Article 29); those outside of the church, the baptized community, are lost. Those who grow up in Reformed families, on the other hand, can properly believe that God is already their own Father because they have been baptized, and consequently they are under no necessity to, as lost sinners, personally and consciously repent and believe in Christ; God already performed the work of regeneration on them in their infancy, and this salvation was sealed to them in baptism. The *Westminster Confession*, which was prepared by the Westminster Assembly in 1647, adopted by the Long Parliament, by the Kirk of Scotland, and the Presbyterian Churches of America, states that “baptism . . . is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of [one’s] ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of

---

<sup>68</sup> Article 33, 34



remission of sins . . . by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost.”<sup>69</sup> Contrary to Baptists, who would gladly admit that baptism is a sign or picture of grace, though not a means of conveying it, the Westminster divines affirmed that the Holy Spirit also seals and confers grace through baptism. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* likewise states that “outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are . . . sacraments<sup>70</sup> . . . which are made effectual to the elect for salvation . . . sacraments become effectual means of salvation . . . a sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied unto believers. . . . The sacraments of the New Testament are baptism and the Lord's supper. . . . Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's. . . . infants of such as are members of the visible Church are to be baptized.”<sup>71</sup> The *Westminster Larger Catechism* affirms that “the sacraments become effectual means of salvation. . . . A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his church, to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation. . . . Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into himself, of

---

<sup>69</sup> Article 28.

<sup>70</sup> “The Word . . . and prayer” are also said to bring the elect to salvation.

<sup>71</sup> Questions 88, 91-95

remission of sins by his blood, and regeneration by his Spirit; of adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's. . . . infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized. . . . The needful but much neglected duty of improving our Baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long . . . by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace . . . as those that have therein given up their names to Christ . . . as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.”<sup>72</sup> The

*Westminster Directory for Public Worship*<sup>73</sup> states:

Before baptism, the minister is to use some words of instruction, touching the institution, nature, use, and ends of this sacrament, shewing, “That it is instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ: That it is a seal of the covenant of grace, of our ingrafting into Christ, and of our union with him, of remission of sins, regeneration, adoption, and life eternal: . . . the promise is made to believers and their seed; and that the seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church, have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it, and to the outward privileges of the church, under the gospel . . . children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers; and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and by their baptism are bound to

---

<sup>72</sup> Questions 161, 162, 165, 166, 167.

<sup>73</sup> The section “Of the Administration of the Sacraments,” particularly “of baptism.”

fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh: That they are Christians, and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are they baptized: That the inward grace and virtue of baptism is not tied to that very moment of time wherein it is administered; and that the fruit and power thereof reacheth to the whole course of our life; and that outward baptism is not so necessary, that, through the want thereof, the infant is in danger of damnation, or the parents guilty, if they do not contemn or neglect the ordinance of Christ, when and where it may be had." . . . [The minister] is also to admonish all those that are present, "To look back to their baptism; to repent of their sins against their covenant with God; to stir up their faith; to improve and make right use of their baptism, and of the covenant sealed thereby betwixt God and their souls." . . . This being done, prayer is also to be joined with the word of institution, for sanctifying the water to this spiritual use; and the minister is to pray to this or the like effect: "That the Lord, who hath not left us as strangers without the covenant of promise, but called us to the privileges of his ordinances, would graciously vouchsafe to sanctify and bless his own ordinance of baptism at this time: That he would join the inward baptism of his Spirit with the outward baptism of water; make this baptism to the infant a seal of adoption, remission of sin, regeneration, and eternal life, and all other promises of the covenant of grace: That the child may be planted into the likeness of the death and resurrection of Christ; and that, the body of sin being destroyed in him, he may serve God in newness of life all his days."

Then the minister is to . . . baptize the child with water: which, for the manner of doing of it, is not only lawful but sufficient, and most expedient to be, by pouring or sprinkling of the water on the face of the child, without adding any other ceremony. This done, he is to give thanks and pray, to this or the like purpose: "Acknowledging with all thankfulness, that the Lord is true and faithful in keeping covenant and mercy: That he is good and gracious, not only in that he numbereth us among his saints, but is pleased also to bestow upon our children this singular token and badge of his love in Christ: That, in his truth and special providence, he daily bringeth some into the bosom of his church, to be partakers of his inestimable benefits, purchased by the blood of his dear Son, for the continuance and increase of his church." And praying, "That the Lord would still continue, and daily confirm more and more this his unspeakable favour: That he would receive the infant now baptized, and solemnly entered into the household of faith, into his fatherly tuition and defence, and remember him with the favour that he sheweth to his people; that, if he shall be taken out of this life in his infancy, the Lord, who is rich in mercy, would be pleased to receive him up into glory; and if he live, and attain the years of discretion, that the Lord would so teach him by his word and Spirit, and make his baptism effectual to him, and so uphold him by his divine power and grace, that by faith he may prevail against the devil, the world, and the flesh, till in the end he obtain a full and final victory, and so be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Since the baby is said to be a Christian before his baptism, he never needs to come to a point where he sees himself as a lost, hell-bound sinner who must, for the first time,

repent and believe the gospel; as long as he continues to assent to Reformed doctrine as he grows older, and lives a moral life, he can have confidence he will go to heaven. If he lives in this manner, then “his baptism [was] effectual to him” as a “seal of adoption, remission of sin, regeneration, and eternal life, and all other promises of the covenant of grace” and he was planted in infancy “into the likeness of the death and resurrection of Christ” and had “the body of sin being destroyed in him” and was brought “into the bosom of [Christ’s] church, to be partak[er] of his inestimable benefits” and had “inward grace and virtue” conveyed by the sacrament. As a Reformed document, following John Calvin and opposed to the universal salvific benefit of infant baptism taught by Lutheranism, non-elect infants—those who, surviving infancy, fall away from Reformed doctrine and Christianity or live an immoral life—were not regenerated in infancy and did not have salvation sealed to them through the sacrament.

The pioneers of the English Reformation were under a mix of Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Baptist influences that contributed to the various positions on baptismal salvation among them. The traditional Catholic doctrine of baptismal regeneration was firmly entrenched in the English State Church at the time of the Reformation. Henry VIII followed the baptismal views of the medieval Catholic theologians. The “Schoolmen agreed that the sign and grace necessarily concur except where prevented by insincerity or unbelief[.] . . . Certainly, a miraculous work is done when the external sign is administered. By virtue of the divine institution and the passion of Christ the baptismal sign and the baptismal grace do almost automatically concur. . . . The majority of medieval scholars, and many of their

sixteenth-century admirers and successors, inclined to the most obvious and simple view that God had given to the water itself a regenerative force: the grace, or virtue, was in the water. Thomas himself favored this view, for which he could cite Augustine and Bede as venerable guarantors.<sup>74</sup> In the sixteenth century it found an exponent in Henry VIII. . . . As Henry VIII put it, quoting Hugo de Sancto Victore, ‘the sacrament of baptism cleanses internally.’<sup>75,76</sup> This view continued among later “High Church” Anglicans like Stephen Gardiner, who “asserted bluntly that we are all justified ‘in the sacrament of baptisme before we could talk of the justification we strive for.’”<sup>77</sup> The opening prayer in the Anglican Baptismal Office included the words, “Who by the baptism of Thy well-beloved Son in the river Jordan didst sanctify water to the mystical washing away of sin.”<sup>78</sup> However, Lutheran and Reformed influences made the situation in the English Protestant State-church more complex:

The position in England was complicated. The earlier formularies used the language of medieval theology, and even the Prayer Book and Article might suggest a traditionalist understanding. The Article, for example, described baptism as an instrument, and referred to forgiveness as one of its benefits. But there is evidence that from quite an early period the baptismal forgiveness was understood by the Reformers in a Lutheran or Reformed sense rather than the Scholastic. The *King’s Book* is perhaps the one exception which confirms the general rule. Even the formularies themselves make this plain. The *Ten Articles* ascribe the forgiveness primarily to Christ Himself, and the Baptismal Office speaks of the benefits rather than the effects of the sacrament, and relates them in the first instance to the author of grace, and only secondarily to the means. The *Homilies* have exactly the same emphasis, for although it is boldly stated that baptized infants are washed from their sins, the washing is

---

<sup>74</sup> Pg. 185, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing pgs. 344-346, *La Théologie de Bellarmine*, J. de la Serviere.

<sup>75</sup> Pg. 172, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing *Assertio*, pg. 100.

<sup>76</sup> Pg. 172, 185, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

<sup>77</sup> Pg. xiv, *Baptism and the Anglican Reformers*, Bromiley, pg. xiv; Gardiner cited from Letters (ed. Muller) pg. 407.

<sup>78</sup> Pg. 9, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ and not of the sacrament. The Article certainly describes baptism as an efficacious sign, but it then shows clearly that its efficacy is not to cleanse from sin, but to sign and seal the divine promise of forgiveness. . . . The individual Anglicans were all anxious to maintain the traditional connection between baptism and forgiveness.”<sup>79</sup>  
While English Anglicanism never attained anything like theological uniformity in the Reformation era (or any subsequent period to the present day), Reformed views of baptismal salvation eventually became dominant:

It was the Reformed view which finally prevailed in England . . . Cranmer himself made it plain that in baptism infants do not believe either vicariously or actually, but sacramentally; i. e. they have the sign of faith. Philpot, too, did not think that infants may make any profession of present faith. The Elizabethans were if anything even more definite, for Whitaker disowned the Lutheran view in his controversy with Bellarmine, although he stressed the fact that his opponent was misrepresenting it. Rogers flatly denounced it as an error. . . . The Puritans, of course, took up the Reformed view with vigour.”<sup>80</sup>  
The Reformed doctrine found advocates in Cranmer, Jewel, Whitgift, and others.

Bromiley explains their views well:

Whitgift believed that “Although the necessity of baptism is not so tied to the sacraments, that whosoever hath the external sign shall therefore be saved, yet it is so tied to them, that none can be saved that willingly and wittingly is void of them.”<sup>81</sup> . . .

The statement of Jewel clearly reflects the language of the Prayer Book: “For this cause are infants baptized, because they are born in sin, and cannot become spiritual but by this new birth of water and of the Spirit.”<sup>82</sup> . . . Jewel<sup>83</sup> . . . linked together the baptismal remission and the baptismal entry into newness of life in Christ and in the church of Christ. The emphasis is important, because it marks a return in Anglican teaching to the . . . patristic doctrine, and a rejection of the quasi-material conception of cleansing. Baptism was not merely an obliteration of past sin, but the giving of a new and divine life, an entry into the resurrection. The baptismal forgiveness was not as it were a literal washing of the soul from sin and its endowment with new grace and virtue. It was a forgiveness, and accompanying renewal, by identification in faith with the crucified and risen Redeemer.

---

79 Pg. 174, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

80 Pg. 114-115, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

81 Pg. 61, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Whitgift, Parker Society, II, pg. 537.

82 Pg. 112, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

83 Jewel, *Parker Society Series*, I, pg. 140-141.

The true grace of baptism was, in fact, the new creation of God in which by the divine promise and faith the old things are passed away and all things are become new. It was a genuine and full regeneration, an incorporation into Christ with all the benefits which that implied and involved. It was more than the formal uniting with Christ, or the change in external status, which might be presumed of all those who received the outward sign. For although the Reformers distinguished between the first regeneration of faith and the process of moral renovation in which we become by sight that which we are already by faith, regeneration itself was a deep and inward operation of the Holy Spirit; not a bare ontological change, but a renewal of the whole life by saving faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>84</sup> . . .

Cranmer referred “to baptism as a receiving of the Holy Ghost and putting Christ upon us.”<sup>85</sup> According to Cranmer, no greater reverence ought to be paid to the bread and wine than to the water, for the presence and ‘shewing’ of Christ are the same in both sacraments.<sup>86</sup> . . . [T]he Holy Ghost was not given in the water or the font, but in the ministration.<sup>87</sup> The true baptismal transformation was not the transformation of the water, but “that wonderful change which God Almighty by his omnipotence worketh really in them that be baptized therewith.”<sup>88</sup> . . . Cranmer . . . perceived that there is both an outward work of baptism and also an inward, but that the true baptism will include both: “Through baptism, in this world, the body is washed, and the soul is washed: the body outwardly, the soul inwardly: the work is one.”<sup>89</sup> <sup>90</sup> . . . *Cranmer’s Catechism* . . . related baptism directly to the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit: “the Spirit works in faith and baptisme to make us new men agayne.”<sup>91</sup> In baptism the old life comes to an end with the identification of the believer with Christ’s death and the non-imputation of sin. But in baptism, too, a new life begins with the identification of the believer with Christ’s resurrection and the imputation of the whole righteousness of Christ: “baptism delivereth from death and the power of the devil, and gyveth salvation and everlastynge lyfe to all them that believe.”<sup>92</sup> <sup>93</sup> . . . Cranmer said that unbaptized infants of Christians could possibly be saved; he rejected “as impious the unscrupulous superstition of those who so entirely confine the grace of God the Holy Spirit to the elements of the sacraments as to affirm that no infant of Christians will obtain eternal

---

84 Pg. 180-181, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

85 Pg. 11, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Cranmer, Parker Society Series, I, pg. 64.

86 Pg. 13, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Cranmer, *Works*, ed. Jenkins, III, ppg. 10, 61f., 242.

87 Cranmer, *Parker Society Series*, I, pg. 148

88 Pg. 137, Cranmer, *Parker Society Series* II, pg. 180.

89 Foxe, VI, pg. 457.

90 Pg. 175, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

91 *Cranmer’s Catechism*, pg. 122.

92 *Cranmer’s Catechism*, pg. 189.

93 Pg. 179, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

salvation, who shall have died before he could be brought to baptism, which we consider to be far otherwise.”<sup>94</sup>

The main Anglican Reformers affirmed baptismal salvation, as the continental Reformed denominations did. They likewise joined with continental Reformed theology in rejecting the Catholic notion that all unbaptized infants of Christians were necessarily lost and in shifting the materialistic aspects of Catholic baptismal regeneration to an emphasis upon the imputation of the alien righteousness of Christ, in accordance with their Protestant understanding of justification.

Anglican documents of all sorts followed the position of the Anglican Reformers in affirming baptismal salvation. The binding *39 Articles* affirm that as “by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; [and] the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God, by the Holy Ghost are visibly signed and sealed.”<sup>95</sup> The 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, in “The Ministration of Publick Baptism of Infants, to be Used in the Church,” requires the priest to pray, “by the Baptism of thy well-beloved Son Jesus Christ, in the river Jordan, [Thou, God] didst sanctify Water to the mystical washing away of sin . . . We call upon thee for this Infant, that he, coming to thy holy Baptism, may receive remission of his sins by spiritual regeneration. Receive him, O Lord, as thou hast promised . . . that this Infant may enjoy the everlasting benediction of thy heavenly washing, and may come to the eternal kingdom which thou hast promised by Christ our Lord. Amen.” The form for “The Ministration of Private Baptism of Children” requires the priest to “pour Water upon [the child], saying these words; ‘I baptize thee in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

---

<sup>94</sup> Pg. 57, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Cranmer, Parker Society Series, II, pg. 60.

<sup>95</sup> Article XXVII.



Amen.’ Then, all kneeling down, the Minister shall give thanks unto God, and say, ‘We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this Infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own Child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy Church. And we humbly beseech thee to grant, that as he is now made partaker of the death of thy Son, so he may be also of his resurrection; and that finally, with the residue of thy Saints, he may inherit thine everlasting kingdom; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.’” It further commends the “baptizing of [a] Child; who being born in original sin, and in the wrath of God, is now, by the laver of Regeneration in Baptism, received into the number of the children of God, and heirs of everlasting life.” While a great variety of issues were debated within the Anglican communion, the communication of saving grace through baptism was a point of general agreement.<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> The Wesley brothers and the Methodist denomination retained the Anglican belief in salvation through baptism, as taught in the *39 Articles*, when they left the English state-church to start their own religion. Commenting on John 3:5, Wesley affirmed, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit—Except he experience that great inward change by the Spirit, and be baptized (wherever baptism can be had) as the outward sign and means of it [he cannot enter into the kingdom of God].” He states here that baptism is the means of the new birth. He also declared, “It is certain our Church supposes that all who are baptized in their infancy are at the same time born again; and it is allowed that the whole office for the baptism of infants proceeds upon this supposition” (Wesley, sermon, *The New Birth*). In his *Doctrinal Tracts* (pg. 246, 251) he wrote, “What are the benefits . . . we receive by baptism, is the next point to be considered. And the first of these is the washing away of original sin, by the application of Christ’s death. . . . the merits of Christ’s life and death, are applied to us in baptism. . . . infants are . . . proper subjects of baptism, seeing, in the ordinary way, they cannot be saved unless [sin] be washed away in baptism. Infants need to be washed from original sin. Therefore they are proper subjects for baptism.” (cited in chapter 9, *The Evils of Infant Baptism*, Robert Boyt C. Howell, accessed in the *Fundamental Baptist CD-Rom Library*, Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 2003). John’s brother, the Methodist hymn-writer Charles Wesley, wrote against the Baptists, “Partisans of a narrow sect/ Your cruelty confess/ Nor still inhumanly reject/ Whom Jesus would embrace./ Your little ones preclude them not/ From the baptismal flood brought/ But let them now to Christ be saved/ And join the Church of God.” (*Charles Wesley’s Journal*, 18 October 1756, 2:128). The Wesleys only called adults already baptized as infants to conversion because of their heretical Arminian theology. Since they rejected the Biblical truth that once one is saved, he is always saved (Romans 8:28-39), they held that one who was regenerated in infant baptism could fall away and become a child of the devil again, at which time he would need a second new birth.

John Knox, the great enemy of Scottish Catholicism, and essentially the founder of Scottish Presbyterianism, also supported the Reformed connection between salvation and baptism. He described baptism as “a holie syne and seale of God’s promises.”<sup>97</sup> Knox referred to being “received in baptism into [God’s] familie and congregation,” and spoke of baptism as “the syne of our entrance into the household of God our Father.”<sup>98</sup> Knox declared, “That lyke as water outwardlye doth wash away filth, so by baptism we are cleansed in soul.”<sup>99</sup> The liturgy of Knox claimed that regeneration “stands chiefly in these two points, in mortification, that is to say, a resisting of the rebellious lustes of the fleshe, and in newness of life, whereby we continually stryve to walk in that pureness and perfection wherewith we are clad in baptisme.”<sup>100</sup> The Scotsman followed Calvin in affirming a necessity of precept for infant baptism, but not an absolute necessity: “Without injurie infants cannot be debarred from the common syne of God’s children,” but “neither yet is this outwarde action of such necessitie, that the lacke thereof shuld be prejudiciall to their salvation, yf that prevented by death, thei may not be conveniently be presented to the church.”<sup>101</sup> Knox’s fierce opposition to Popery appeared in his contention that Papist baptism is not the “true baptisme whilke Cryst Jesus did institute.”<sup>102</sup> The problem with the Catholic sacrament was not its connection with the salvation of the infant receiving it, for Knox retained the salvific baptismal doctrine of Reformed theology;

---

<sup>97</sup> Pg. 11, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Knox, IV, pg. 172.

<sup>98</sup> Pg. 17, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Knox, IV, pg. 172 and Knox, IV, pg. 123, respectively.

<sup>99</sup> Pg. 20, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Knox, IV, pg. 188.

<sup>100</sup> Pg. 29, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing *Knox’s Liturgy: Baptism*.

<sup>101</sup> Pg. 54-55, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Knox, IV, pg. 186.

<sup>102</sup> Pg. 9 *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Knox, I, pg. 19.

the Catholics erred, rather, in the nature, end, and necessity of the grace communicated in infant baptism.

The medieval English Bible translator Wycliff progressively rejected aspects of the Catholic doctrine of infant baptism. Wycliff taught, “Bodily baptizing is a figure, how mennis soulis shuld be baptisid fro synne both originall and actual. . . . Baptisme is a tokene of waishing of the soule fro synne . . . bi vertu taken of Cristi’s deth.”<sup>103</sup> He taught that the baptismal immersion (the mode practiced upon infants in English Catholicism and early English Protestantism) was a picture of Christ’s death and resurrection, and of the death to sin and resurrection to new life in the one baptized. “And so this water that we ben putte inne is token of Cristis tribulacioun fro his bygynnyng to his deth . . . the baptizing of us in this water betokeneth biryng of Crist. . . . Oure taking up of this water betokeneth the rysinge of Crist fro deth.<sup>104</sup> . . . The baptizing of us in this water betokeneth . . . how we ben biried with him fro synne that rengneth in this world. Our takyng up of this water betokeneth . . . how we shulden rise goostli in clenness of newe life.”<sup>105</sup> “Wycliffe seems to have argued that the sacrament is not necessary to any who die in infancy, but his protest merely called down Episcopal and conciliar denunciations, and even at a later date ‘Wycliffe of damnable memory’ was still condemned for his conclusion ‘that it is presumptuous to say, that infants dying without baptism will not be saved.’<sup>106</sup> . . . In England there had been a long tradition of protest against the belief in an absolute necessity [of baptism for infant salvation], and Wycliffe had already made some pertinent

---

<sup>103</sup> Pg. 19, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Arnold, II, pg. 328.

<sup>104</sup> Pg. 22, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Arnold, II, pg. 258.

<sup>105</sup> Pg. 24, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Arnold, II, pg. 258.

<sup>106</sup> Pg. 50, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing H. Hart, *Ecclesiastical Records*, pgs. 365, 386.

criticisms of it. Perhaps the main reason for his rejection was his refusal to believe that God cannot and will not ‘save an infant unless an old woman or someone perform this ceremony of baptism.’ But again, his doctrine of the twofold baptism made it impossible for him to accept the external rite as the test of the internal work, for after all, could not Christ ‘without any such washing, spiritually baptize, and by consequence save infants?’<sup>107</sup> . . . Even in the fourteenth century automatic theories [of baptismal efficacy] had been opposed by such thinkers as Wycliffe, who had separated between the external baptism of water and the inward purgation of the Holy Spirit, which ‘God Himself must do.’<sup>108,109</sup> Furthermore, “Wycliffe had had no place for the doctrine of ‘character’<sup>110</sup> [an indelible character being conveyed in baptism] and the later Reformers dismissed it as meaningless and artificial. The English attitude was summed up by Tyndale, when he described ‘character’ as ‘one of those feigned words with which the Papists make merchandise.’<sup>111,112</sup> It is a matter of historical dispute if Wycliff ever adopted the Baptist baptismal position, but it appears certain that many of the Lollards did.<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Pg. 55, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing *Triologus*, pg. 160.

<sup>108</sup> Arnold, II, pg. 4.

<sup>109</sup> Pg. 186, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

<sup>110</sup> Wycliff, *Triologus*, pg. 157-159.

<sup>111</sup> Tyndale, *Parker Society Series*, I, pg. 342.

<sup>112</sup> Pg. 182, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

<sup>113</sup> J. T. Christian, in his *History of Baptists* (the chapter, “The British Baptist Churches,” accessed in the Fundamental Baptist CD-ROM Library, Port Huron, MI: Way of Life Literature, 2001), stated the following: “It is evident that Wyclif made great advances in reform over the Roman Catholic Church of his day. Year after year marked a further departure from Rome and her dogma. In nothing was this more manifest than in infant baptism. In the early years Wyclif firmly believed in the efficacy of infant baptism, but in later years he appears to have greatly modified his views. Thomas Walden goes so far as to call him “one of the seven heads that came out of the bottomless pit for denying infant baptism, that heresy of the Lollards, of whom he was so great a ringleader.” Walsingham says: “That damnable heretic, John Wyclif, reassumed the cursed opinions of Berangarius” (Walsingham, *Ypod. Neust.*, 133), of which it is certain denying infant baptism was one. Collier expressly tells us “he denied the necessity” of infant baptism (Collier, *An Ecclesiastical History*

William Tyndale, translator and promulgator (with Coverdale and Rodgers) of the immensely influential Tyndale Bible, held Baptist views on baptism. He described the ordinance as “the sign of repentance (or, if they will so have it called, penance), washing and new birth.”<sup>114</sup> As Baptists would, “Tyndale identified baptism primarily with repentance: ‘baptism is a sign of repentance signifying that I must repent of evil, and believe to be saved there from by the blood of Christ.’”<sup>115</sup> He

---

of Great Britain, III. 185). The statement of Collier is unquestioned. Wyclif did not deny infant baptism itself, but the necessity of it. He did not believe that a child dying unbaptized would be lost (Wall, *History of Infant Baptism*, I. 436, 437). This was greatly in advance of the age and marked Wyclif at once a heretic and “an enemy of the Church.”

There is no effort in this place to assign Wyclif to a position among Baptist martyrs, but there is no doubt he held firmly to many Baptist positions. Crosby, on the other hand, declared he was a Baptist and argues the question at great length. “I am inclined to believe that Mr. Wyclif,” says he, “was a Baptist, because some men of great note and learning in the Church of Rome, have left it upon record, that he denied infant baptism.” Among other authorities he quotes Joseph Vicecomes (*De Bit. Bapt.*, lib. ii. chap. i). “Besides,” continues Crosby, “they charged him with several of those which are called Anabaptistical errors; such as refusing to take an oath (art. 41. condemned by the Council of Constance), and also that opinion, that dominion is founded in grace (Fuller, *Church History of Great Britain*, 1.444, Art. 51). Upon these testimonies, some Protestant writers have affirmed that Wyclif was a Baptist, and have put him in the number of those who have borne witness against infant baptism. And had he been a man of scandalous character, that would have brought reproach upon those of that profession, a less proof would have been sufficient to have ranked him among that sect” (Crosby, *The History of English Baptists*, I. 8, 9).

No doubt the sentiments of Wyclif, on many points, were the same as those of the Baptists, but there is no document known to me that warrants the belief that he was a Baptist (Evans, *The Early English Baptists*, I. 13).

It is certain that the Lollards, who had preceded Wyclif and had widely diffused their opinions, repudiated infant baptism (Neal, *History of the Puritans*, II. 354). The testimony of Neal is interesting. He says:

That the denial of the right of infants to baptism was a principle generally maintained among Lollards, is abundantly confirmed by the historians of those times, (Neal, *History of the Puritans*, II. 354).

The followers of Wyclif and [the] Lollard[s] united and in a short time England was full of the “Bible Men.” “Tis, therefore, most reasonable to conclude,” says Crosby, “that those persons were Baptists, and on that account baptized those that came over to their sect, and professed the true faith, and desired to be baptized into it” (Crosby, I. 17).

The Lollards practiced believers’ baptism and denied infant baptism. Fox says one of the articles of faith among them was “that faith ought to precede baptism.” This at least was the contention of a large portion of those people.

The Lollard movement was later merged into the Anabaptist, and this was hastened by the fact that their political principles were identical (Hook, *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, VI. 123). The Lollards continued to the days of the Reformation. Mosheim says: “The Wyclifites, though obliged to keep concealed, had not been exterminated by one hundred and fifty years of persecution” (Mosheim, *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History*, III. 49).

<sup>114</sup> Pg. 11, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Tyndale, *British Reformers Series*, pg. 407.

<sup>115</sup> Pg. 25, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Tyndale, *Parker Society Series*, III, pg. 171.

denied the necessity of baptism for salvation. “Tyndale . . . deduced that ‘the infants that die unbaptized of us Christians are in as good case as those that die baptized.’ He could also allow that adults who believed in Christ and lived a Christian life might well be saved even without the sacrament.<sup>116</sup> . . . Tyndale . . . pointed out that the main function of [baptism] is that of ‘testifying and exhibiting to our senses the promises signified.’<sup>117 118</sup> . . . The Holy Spirit does not work in the water, but ‘accompanieth the preaching of faith, and with the word of faith, entereth the heart and purgeth it.’<sup>119,120</sup> He also “described dipping or plunging [not pouring or sprinkling] as the true sign.”<sup>121</sup> It is possible, but not certain, that Tyndale was a member of a Baptist church. J. T. Christian comments:

Davis (*History of the Welsh Baptists*, 21) claims that William Tyndale (A. D. 1484-1536) was a Baptist. He was born near the line between England and Wales, but lived most of the time in Gloucestershire. “Llewellyn Tyndale and Hezekiah Tyndale were members of the Baptist church at Abergavenny, South Wales.” There is much mystery around the life of Tyndale. Bale calls him “the apostle of the English.” “He was learned, a godly, and a good-natured man” (Fuller, *Church History of Britain*, II. 91). It is certain he shared many views held by the Baptists; but that he was a member of a Baptist church is nowhere proved. He always translated the word *ecclesia* by the word *congregation*, and held to a local conception of a church (Tyndale, *Works* II. 13. London, 1831). There were only two offices in the church, pastor and deacons (I.400). The elders or bishops should be married men (I. 265). Upon the subject of baptism he is very full. He is confident that baptism does not wash away sin. “It is impossible,” says he, “that the waters of the river should wash our hearts” (*Ibid*, 30). Baptism was a plunging into the water (*Ibid*, 287). Baptism to avail must include repentance, faith and confession (III. 179). The church must, therefore, consist of believers (*Ibid*, 25). His book in a wonderful manner states accurately the position of the Baptists.

---

116 Pg. 56, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Tyndale, Parker Society Series, I, pg. 350-351.  
 117 Tyndale, *Parker Society Series*, I, p. 357.  
 118 Pg. 179, *Baptism*, Bromiley.  
 119 Tyndale, *Parker Society Series*, I, pg. 423-424.  
 120 Pg. 192, *Baptism*, Bromiley.  
 121 Pg. 140, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

The involvement of Baptists, or at least those with Baptist views, in Bible translation is in accord with Scriptural promises of the responsibility of the saints and the church for the propagation of Scripture (Matthew 28:19-20; John 17:8, etc.). Furthermore, the diligent study of Scripture evident in and required for the production of the historic, Christ-honoring, anti-Papist English Bibles<sup>122</sup> would tend to move translators toward the Baptist baptismal doctrine<sup>123</sup> taught in the Word of God.

In stark theological contrast to the mainline Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed positions, but in closer continuity with at least some of those involved in the translation of the English Bible, Baptists maintained the Biblical position on the ordinance of baptism and opposed a connection between the ordinance and the receipt of salvation, infant baptism, and other corruptions of the ordinance by the old Catholic and the new protesting Catholic movements. “Anabaptism . . . insisted that baptism is merely a sign of individual conversion and the new birth.<sup>124</sup> . . . The Anabaptists . . . envisaged the external rite [of baptism] purely as a sign, and that it was not in any way, except the psychological, a means of spiritual grace.<sup>125</sup> . . . The contribution made by . . . the Anabaptists was on the whole the negative one of attacking the prevailing notion that the external element could itself accomplish an internal cleansing.<sup>126</sup> . . . [T]hey maintained with truth that it is the blood of Christ

---

<sup>122</sup> It has been estimated that the readings in the *Authorized Version* are well over 90% the work of Tyndale.

<sup>123</sup> It is possible that Baptist doctrine influenced other translators of the English Bible; for example, Coverdale said, “In baptism we have an undoubted true token and evidence of the grace of God” (Pg. 18, *Baptism*, Bromiley, citing Coverdale, Parker Society Series, II, pg. 86), a declaration consistent with the Baptist position on the ordinance.

<sup>124</sup> Pg. xiv, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

<sup>125</sup> *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, pg. 188, II, pg. 280, cited on pg. 188, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

<sup>126</sup> *Corpus Reformatorum*, IV, pg. 215, 627

which cleanses from sin,<sup>127</sup> they did not think of baptism as in any way a means of grace, but only as a sign of grace, and more especially as a sign of individual conversion.<sup>128</sup> . . . The main bulwark of the Anabaptists was that infants cannot have faith, and therefore lack the essential qualification for the [ordinance of baptism].”<sup>129</sup>

The *Schleitheim Confession* of 1527 stated well the Anabaptist position:

Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with Him in death, so that they may be resurrected with him, and to all those who with this significance request it [baptism] of us and demand it for themselves. This excludes all infant baptism, the highest and chief abominations of the pope.<sup>130</sup>

If baptism is given only to those who, having repented, know that their sins “are” taken away already by Christ, the ordinance cannot have saving efficacy, for conversion and justification are prerequisites to being “buried” with Christ in baptism. Since infant baptism is an abomination, indeed, “the highest and chief” of popish abominations, it must not be in any wise countenanced; the view of the early Zwingli, that infant baptism is unscriptural but “on account of the possibility of offence I omit preaching this; it is better not to preach it until the world is ready to take it,”<sup>131</sup> is entirely unacceptable. Protestantism may maintain that the practice of or opposition to infant baptism is a non-separating, secondary issue or a non-issue; but Baptists, who recognize infant baptism as an abomination, cannot trivialize its practice.

---

<sup>127</sup> *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandia*, II, pg. 280, IV, pg. 44.

<sup>128</sup> Pg. 173, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

<sup>129</sup> Pg. 113-114, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

<sup>130</sup> Article 1 of the *Schleitheim Confession*, pg. 25, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, William L. Lumpkin. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969.

<sup>131</sup> Pg. 199, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*, Verduin.



The rejection of infant baptism had as its corollary a rejection of the universal State-church concept of the Catholics and the Reformers; indeed, many Baptists, following the New Testament definition of *ekklesia* as solely a local, visible body, entirely rejected the concept of a universal church. The ancient Donatists and the medieval Anabaptists that succeeded them denied the existence of a universal or catholic church.<sup>132</sup> The Reformation Anabaptists affirmed that the body of Christ was the local, visible assembly, entered by believer's baptism,<sup>133</sup> not a universal entity composed of the entirety of the elect.

The Baptists also held to what became known as the Regulative Principle,<sup>134</sup> namely, that whatever God did not explicitly command in His worship was forbidden. In this they were joined by the generality of the Reformed, who used the Principle to attack the patently extrabiblical ceremonies of the Papists and the Lutherans and their corollary affirmation that whatever was not explicitly forbidden in worship was permitted. In England, the Puritans endorsed the Regulative Principle, while the Anglicans opposed it. The Baptists, however, were the only ones able to consistently implement this Scriptural (Leviticus 10:1-3) teaching, since the rest maintained the practice of the infant baptism the New Testament was, at the very best, entirely silent about.<sup>135</sup> In Zurich, "Zwingli took steps to purge the office [of the state church] of all its non-scriptural elements. In this matter he was in full agreement with the

---

<sup>132</sup> Pg. 34-35, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*, Verduin.

<sup>133</sup> Articles 2 + 3 of the *Schleitheim Confession*, pg. 25, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, William L. Lumpkin.

<sup>134</sup> A Biblical and historical analysis is found in "Biblical Authority and the Proof of the Regulative Principle of Worship in *The Westminster Confession*," John Allen Delivuk, *Westminster Theological Journal* 58:2 (Fall 96) pgs. 237-256.

<sup>135</sup> See "Infant Baptism and the Regulative Principle of Worship," Fred Malone: <http://www.gracesermons.com/robbeeee/regulative.html>.

Anabaptists, who were clamoring that all ceremonies which had no sanction in the New Testament ought ruthlessly to be discarded. . . . Calvin called for the complete destruction of . . . added ceremonies . . . and he did not retain a single one of them in the Genevan liturgies. His disciples vied with one another in their attempts to heap scorn and ridicule upon the ancient customs.”<sup>136</sup> The Regulative Principle was an important component of the Baptist doctrine of baptism.

### III. Conclusion

Baptists stand for the necessity of conscious, personal and evangelical conversion as a prerequisite to baptism. The ordinance adds the saint to the membership of a local, visible assembly separated from a universal or catholic church or church-state. The Baptist restriction of immersion in the Reformation era to already justified believers accorded with the necessity of a Biblical mandate for elements of worship, but was in radical contrast to the baptismal theologies of Catholicism and all wings of the Protestant Reformation. The Catholic and Protestant movements that put Baptists to death, and the Baptists who declared that their opponents’ acceptance of infant baptism was an abomination, indeed, a chief abomination, were far more in accordance with the reality of the divergence of their soteriological doctrines than are the opinions of the many moderns in this soft, ecumenical age in Christendom who minimalize baptismal differences. Modern Baptists who affirm that the Reformers were set for the defense of the gospel are

---

<sup>136</sup> *Corpus Reformatorum*, IV, pg. 707, cited from pg. 149, *Baptism*, Bromiley.

greatly in error. Without sacrificing the heart of their Biblical soteriology to affirm that baptismal and sacramental salvation and a rejection of the necessity of personal, conscious faith in Christ for justification are non-issues, Baptists must believe that the soteriology of all of the mainline Reformers is damnable heresy.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, when Baptists read, or promulgate through their church bookstores and Christian schools, fundamental or evangelical books that glamorize the Reformers as great heroes of the faith, they must warn their flocks that these men are false teachers and their denominations are founded on a false gospel—or refuse to use such literature at all. Baptist soulwinners should also be well acquainted with the Reformation baptismal heresies, because modern conservative Protestants are likely to hold the same views as their denominational founders, and an overly cursory inquiry into a Protestant prospect’s personal state will likely lead soulwinners to erroneously conclude that their prospects are already regenerate. One who holds to a traditional Lutheran or Reformed soteriology of baptismal salvation will heartily affirm a belief in justification by faith alone if asked solely this question. Baptist involvement in interdenominational ministerial or educational activity with those who hold to infant baptism as a “secondary” or “non-separating” issue also demonstrates a wild lack of discernment; the main body of “brothers in Christ” in the Protestant denominations hold to a sacramental salvation. Finally, any truly regenerate persons in Protestant denominations, who of necessity reject sacramental salvation as inconsistent with the Biblical terms of the gospel they have received, should leave their false religions at once and be immersed into the membership of a Bible-believing Baptist church. The

---

<sup>137</sup> This is established by their doctrine of baptism alone. The mainline Reformers also held many other heresies; see the Appendix to this paper.

gospel that saved their souls is rejected in their confessional documents. Saints associated with the Romish whore (Revelation 17:1ff.) or her Protestant daughter churches (17:5)<sup>138</sup> should take heed to the inspired command: “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4).

---

<sup>138</sup> See “Can You Identify This Woman And Her Daughters?” Appendix III of *Three Witnesses for the Baptists*, Curtis A. Pugh (Bloomfield, New Mexico: The Historic Baptist, n. d.); electronically available at <http://users.aol.com/libcfl/witness1.htm>.

## Appendix:

### Other heresies of the Reformers

Apart from their connection of baptism and salvation, the Reformers adopted many other heresies. Zwingli held that “noble” heathen who had never heard of Christ would be in heaven, and only maintained the salvation of unbaptized infants by vitiating the Biblical doctrine of original sin (Romans 5:12-19).<sup>139</sup> Luther either questioned or denied the canonicity of Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation, as well as several Old Testament books, providing a basis for the rise of theological modernism in Germany a century after his death. In Luther’s preface to James, from his first edition of his German New Testament, he stated that “this epistle of St. James was rejected by the ancients . . . I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle; and my reasons follow. In the first place it is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works. . . . This fault, therefore, proves that this epistle is not the work of any apostle. . . . [T]his James does nothing more than drive to the law and to its works. Besides, he throws things together so chaotically that it seems to me he must have been some good, pious man, who took a few sayings from the disciples of the apostles and thus tossed them off on paper. . . . In a word, he wanted to guard against those who relied on faith without works, but was unequal to the task in spirit, thought, and words. He mangles the Scriptures and thereby opposes Paul and all Scripture . . . Therefore, I will not have him in my Bible to be numbered among the true chief books.” In a *Tabletalk* comment in 1542, Luther affirmed, “We should throw the Epistle of James out of this school [Wittenberg], for it doesn’t amount to much. It contains not a syllable about Christ. . . . I maintain that some Jew wrote it who probably heard about Christian people but never encountered any. Since he heard that Christians place great weight on faith in Christ, he thought, ‘Wait a moment! I’ll oppose them and urge works alone.’ This he did. . . . Besides, there’s no order or method in the epistle. Now he discusses clothing and then he writes about wrath and is constantly shifting from one to the other. He

---

<sup>139</sup> Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, 7:preface:11; 7:1:7:110; 8:2:9; 8:5:45; 8:3:29.

presents a comparison: ‘As the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead’ [Jas. 2:26]. O Mary, mother of God! What a terrible comparison that is! James compares faith with the body when he should rather have compared faith with the soul! The ancients recognized this, too, and therefore they didn’t acknowledge this letter as one of the catholic epistles” (*Luther’s Works* (LW) 54:424). He also said, “Some day I will use James to fire my stove”<sup>140</sup> (cf. Jeremiah 36:23-32).

Luther wrote concerning “the epistle of St Jude . . . he also speaks of the apostles like a disciple who comes long after them and cites sayings and incidents that are found nowhere else in the Scriptures. This moved the ancient fathers to exclude this epistle from the main body of the Scriptures . . . it is an epistle that need not be counted among the chief books which are supposed to lay the foundations of faith.”<sup>141</sup>

Concerning the book of Hebrews, Luther wrote that the book “does not lay the foundation of faith . . . Therefore we should not be deterred if wood, straw, or hay are perhaps mixed with [sound teaching in the epistle] . . . to be sure, we cannot put it on the same level with the apostolic epistles.” In certain places, Hebrews is, “as it stands . . . contrary to all the gospels and to St. Paul’s epistles” (LW 35:394).

In Luther’s *Preface to the Revelation of St. John* (1522), he wrote, “About this book of the Revelation of John . . . I say what I feel. I miss more than one thing in this book, and it makes me consider it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic. . . . For myself, I think it approximates the Fourth Book of Esdras; I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it. Moreover he seems to me to be going much too far when he commends his own book so highly—indeed, more than any of the other sacred books do, though they are much more important—and threatens that if anyone takes away anything from it, God will take away from him, etc.”<sup>142</sup> Again, they are supposed

---

<sup>140</sup> Weimer, “*Tischreden*” (5) pg. 5854, cited in “Luther and James: Did Luther Use the Historical-Critical Method?” by Mark F. Bartling; a paper presented to the Pastor-Teacher Conference, Western Wisconsin District, LaCrosse, WI, April 12, 1983.

<sup>141</sup> See Luther’s preface to Jude in his first edition of the German New Testament.

<sup>142</sup> Note that here Luther explicitly rejects the warning of Revelation 22:18-19! It goes “much too far”! Is the book of Revelation correct, and Luther in error, when the inspired prophecy warns that for he who add or take away from it (Is not rejecting its inspiration most certainly taking away from it?), “God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book . . . and . . . God shall take away

to be blessed who keep what is written in this book; and yet no one knows what that is, to say nothing of keeping it. This is just the same as if we did not have the book at all. And there are many far better books available for us to keep. Many of the fathers also rejected this book a long time ago; although St. Jerome, to be sure, refers to it in exalted terms and says that it is above all praise and that there are as many mysteries in it as words. Still, Jerome cannot prove this at all, and his praise at numerous places is too generous. . . . My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book.”

In his *Preface to the New Testament* (1522), Luther stated, “John's Gospel is . . . far, far to be preferred to the other three and placed high above them. So, too, the Epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter far surpass the other three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke.”

Luther's relegation of portions of the New Testament canon to a secondary status is followed by “conservative” modern Lutheranism to this day. Lutheran editions of the Bible in the centuries after the Reformation generally contained their Reformer's prefaces to the Scriptures along with the books, perpetuating his blasphemies among the following generations of Lutherans.<sup>143</sup>

Luther attacked portions of the Old Testament as well. He said, “Job didn't speak the way it is written [in his book] . . . One doesn't speak that way under temptation.”<sup>144</sup> He affirmed that “The [author of the] book of Solomon's Proverbs [is like] . . . the author of the book of [the Apocryphal book of] Ecclesiasticus. [He] preaches the law well, but he is no prophet. [Ecclesiasticus] is not the work of

---

his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book”? Or is Luther correct, and the Word of God in error, so that God goes “much too far” here?

<sup>143</sup> “The German Bible available to homes in the Missouri Synod in the late 1800's and early 1900's, the *Altenburger Bibel* (Concordia Publishing House), contained Luther's introductions to the New Testament books, giving his views about Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. The laymen therefore were acquainted with the view of [the] Scriptures [of Luther, questioning their inspiration].” The American Lutheran Synod of 1857 (minutes, pg. 334ff) affirmed, “The Lutheran church must leave it uncertain whether Revelation, or any of the other books of the New Testament which were spoken against by a few in the early church, were written by an Apostle or under Apostolic authority. . . . Consequently, it was an unwise, unchristian, and provocative act on the part of [a Lutheran minister] to conceal the actual status of the doubted New Testament books. Thereby he gave rise to rumors which cast aspersions on those who maintain the distinction between canonical books of the first and second rank; whereas in this distinction they were following the earliest church Luther, and the older orthodox theologians” (Quotations from “Luther and James: Did Luther Use the Historical-Critical Method?” by Mark F. Bartling; a paper presented to the Pastor-Teacher Conference, Western Wisconsin District, LaCrosse, WI, April 12, 1983.).

<sup>144</sup> Luther on Job from the *Table Talk*, John Aurifaber's version; LW 54:79.

Solomon, any more than is the book of Solomon's Proverbs. They are both collections made by other people. . . . [Concerning the book of] Esther . . . I wish [it] had not come to us at all, for [it has] too many heathen unnaturalities. . . . Daniel and Isaiah are [the] most excellent prophets."<sup>145</sup> In Luther's *Preface to Ecclesiastes*, he wrote, "Now this book was certainly not written or set down by King Solomon with his own hand. Instead scholars put together what others had heard from Solomon's lips, as they themselves admit at the end of the book . . . In like manner too, the book of the Proverbs of Solomon has been put together by others, with the teaching and sayings of some wise men added at the end. The Song of Solomon too has the appearance of a book compiled by others out of things received from the lips of Solomon. For this reason these books have no particular order either, but one thing is mixed with another. This must be the character of such books, since they did not hear it all from him at one time but at different times" (LW 35:263). Luther stated concerning "Esther . . . [that] despite [the Jews] inclusion of it in the canon [it] deserves more than all the rest in my judgment to be regarded as noncanonical" (LW 33:11). Before Luther attacked inspired books of the Old and New Testaments, instead of trembling before them (Isaiah 66:2), he should have considered more carefully that "Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:13; cf. 2 Timothy 3:16; Proverbs 30:5-6; Deuteronomy 12:32; Revelation 22:18-19).

In 1519, Luther exhorted his congregation to "call upon the holy angels, particularly his own angel, the Mother of God, and all the apostles and saints," although later on he moved away from prayers to angels, Mary, and other dead people. Nevertheless, Luther kept a graven image of Mary in his study his entire life.<sup>146</sup> Luther also believed his entire life in Mary's perpetual virginity. He taught, "Christ . . . was the only Son of Mary, and the Virgin Mary bore no children besides Him . . . [when Scripture speaks of the Lord Jesus'] 'brothers' [it] really means

---

<sup>145</sup> *Table-Talk Of Martin Luther* Translated By William Hazlitt, Esq. Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society. Utterance XXIV. Available at [http://www.ccel.org/l/luther/table\\_talk/table\\_talk.htm](http://www.ccel.org/l/luther/table_talk/table_talk.htm).

<sup>146</sup> cf. Reformation Church History, Lecture 5, W. Robert Godfrey, (Grand Rapids, MI: Institute of Theological Studies); [www.itscourses.org](http://www.itscourses.org).



‘cousins.’”<sup>147</sup> Calvin similarly affirmed, “Helvidius has shown himself too ignorant, in saying that Mary had several sons, because mention is made in some passages of the brothers of Christ,” arguing that “brothers” meant merely cousins or relatives.<sup>148</sup> Calvin never denied the perpetual virginity of Mary. Zwingli affirmed, “I firmly believe that Mary, according to the words of the gospel as a pure Virgin brought forth for us the Son of God and in childbirth and after childbirth forever remained a pure, intact Virgin.” Zwingli used Exodus 4:22 to defend the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity.<sup>149</sup>

Luther also taught that Mary was conceived without sin, as Christ was, preaching that “It is a sweet and pious belief that the infusion of Mary's soul was effected without original sin; so that in the very infusion of her soul she was also purified from original sin and adorned with God's gifts, receiving a pure soul infused by God; thus from the first moment she began to live she was free from all sin.”<sup>150</sup>

The Bible teaches that Mary was a very godly woman (Luke 1:48), although John the Baptist was greater than she (Matthew 11:11). Mary needed to have Christ as her “Saviour” (Luke 1:47) because she was a sinner just like every other descendent of Adam (Romans 3:10, 23; 5:12, 19). The gospels record her bringing a sin offering for her uncleanness (Luke 2:21-24; Lev 12:1-8). Jesus was her “firstborn” son (Matthew 1:25; Lu 2:7), after which God blessed her marriage to Joseph with many other children (Matthew 13:55-56; John 7:5 + Psalm 69:8; Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19). She does not have special access to the Lord Jesus (Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 11:27-28) and praying to her, saying she is the queen of heaven, making her a mediator between God and man, and all other Catholic or Protestant additions to Biblical teaching about her are abominable idolatry (Deuteronomy 12:32; 1 Timothy 2:5; Isaiah 48:11). “Idolaters . . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:8).

Luther also agreed that Philip of Hesse could have two wives to help the prince stop committing adultery; the second marriage just needed to be kept secret.

---

<sup>147</sup> *Sermons on John*, chapters 1-4, 1537-39.

<sup>148</sup> Bernard Leeming, “Protestants and Our Lady,” *Marian Library Studies*, January 1967, pg. 9.

<sup>149</sup> Ulrich Zwingli, *Zwingli Opera, Corpus Reformatorum*, Volume 1, 424.

<sup>150</sup> “On the Day of the Conception of the Mother of God,” 1527.

Luther was joined in this immoral counsel by Philip Melanchthon, Martin Bucer, and other lesser Reformers. They stated that “We declare under an oath that it ought to be done secretly . . . It is nothing unusual for princes to have concubines . . . and this modest way of living would please more than adultery.”<sup>151</sup> Luther wrote, “I cannot forbid a person to marry several wives, for it does not contradict the Scripture.”<sup>152</sup> After the secret got out, Luther lied, denying his role in the bigamy. He and the others who agreed to the second wife later were sorry that they had counseled Philip of Hesse as they had done—after they had already been exposed and the Lutheran cause had been damaged.

General Lutheran antisemitism and widespread complicity in the Holocaust under Hitler is also not surprising, in light of Luther’s affirmations about the Jews, such as: “Let their houses also be shattered and destroyed . . . Let their prayer books and Talmuds be taken from them, and their whole Bible too; let their rabbis be forbidden, on pain of death, to teach henceforth any more. Let the streets and highways be closed against them. Let them be forbidden to practice usury, and let all their money, and all their treasures of silver and gold be taken from them and put away in safety. And if all this be not enough, let them be driven like mad dogs out of the land.”<sup>153</sup>

The Lutheran view of the Lord’s Supper, consubstantiation, is a well known heresy. The idea that one actually eats Christ’s real human body and drinks His real blood in the Lord’s supper was retained in Luther’s split from Rome. To support the doctrine that Christ’s humanity is actually eaten in the bread of the Supper, Lutheranism also developed the doctrine of the ubiquity of the human nature of Christ, which claims His humanity is omnipresent, rather than localized in heaven at the right hand of God the Father (Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33-34; 7:55-56; Colossians 3:1; 1 Peter 3:22).<sup>154</sup> Since, by definition, a real human body cannot be

---

<sup>151</sup> Document dated December 10, 1539, *Luther's Letters*, De Wette -- Seidemann, Berlin, 1828, vol. 6, 255-265.

<sup>152</sup> De Wette, vol. 2, 459.

<sup>153</sup> Durant, 422; *About the Jews and Their Lies*, 1543; citing Janssen, III, 211-212.

<sup>154</sup> In the words of the confessionally binding Lutheran *Formula of Concord* (1577), “We believe, teach, and confess that in the Lord’s Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present, and that they are truly distributed and taken together with the bread and wine. . . .

omnipresent, or in countless numbers of pieces of bread all over the world at the same time, the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity, invented to defend Luther's heresy of consubstantiation, denies the genuine humanity of Christ (as does the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation) and so is antichrist (1 John 4:3).

The Calvinistic and Reformed doctrine of the Supper is also heretical, in that it joins the Lutheran position in affirming that the ordinance is a vehicle of saving grace, and maintains that Christ's human body is somehow spiritually eaten in the ordinance. Calvin and the Reformed were not willing to go all the way and agree with the Biblical, Baptist position that the Supper is simply performed "in remembrance of" Christ (1 Corinthians 11:24-25) as a memorial. After the words of consecration, the bread is still bread and the juice is still juice, and nothing more is eaten or drunk than bread and the fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; 1 Corinthians 11:26). The Reformers erred on much more than infant baptism alone.

---

That the right hand of God is everywhere; and that Christ, in respect of his humanity, is truly and in very deed seated thereat." (Articles I, V). If the right hand of God is everywhere (contrary to Scripture, which affirms it is in heaven, Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33-34; Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 1 Peter 3:22; etc.), and Christ's humanity is at this "everywhere" location, His humanity is omnipresent, and Lutherans are bound to believe this heresy by their confessional documents. Not only does this heresy undermine the Lord Jesus' true nature as man, but it makes a mockery of the ascension. Did the Lord "ascend" to everywhere? Did His body "ascend" to the earth, to the exact place where the disciples were standing looking up into heaven? Did His body "ascend" into the heart of the earth, or back into the grave where He had been laid, or to the placemat where men wipe their feet? What errors does a stubborn refusal to believe in the Scriptural, memorial view of the Supper bring!

## Select Bibliography

*Accordance* Bible software, version 7.0.1, OakTree Software, Inc.  
(www.accordancebible.com), numerous modules.

Bromiley, G. W., *Baptism and the Anglican Reformers*. London, England:  
Lutterworth Press, 1953.

Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, electronically accessed.

Christian, John T. *A History of the Baptists*, electronically accessed. Way of Life  
Literature, (Oak Harbor, WA), May 2003.

Engelsma, David J., *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers*. South  
Holland, IL: Evangelism Committee, Protestant Reformed Church, n. d.

Hodge, Charles, *Systematic Theology*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003, reprint ed.

Lumpkin, William L. *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press,  
1969.

Potter, G. R., *Zwingli*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Sargent, Robert, *Landmarks of Church History*. Oak Harbor, WA: Bible Baptist  
Church Publications, n. d.

Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons,  
1907, 1910.

*The Fundamental Baptist CD-ROM Library*, ed. David Cloud. Way of Life  
Literature, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061-0368.

*The Encyclopedia Puritannica*, CD Version 3.0. <http://www.puritannica.com/> Steve  
Mourning, P. O. Box 573, Bealeton, VA 22712.

Verduin, Leonard, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*. Grand Rapids, MI:  
Eerdmans, 1964.

Waterworth, J, ed. & trans. *The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical  
Council of Trent*. (London: Dolman, 1848), electronically accessed.