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BAPTISM IN THE THEOLOGY OF MARTIN LUTHER  
*SEMPER ES IN MOTU ET INITIO*

Jonathan D. Trigg

The thesis examines Luther's mature doctrine of baptism in the context of his wider thought. The study is centred upon the years after 1527 when, after the impact of the radical reformation had fully worked through, Luther's baptismal theology reached its final form, as regards content, balance of emphasis, and profile.

A two-pronged approach to the material is adopted. Luther's formal baptismal doctrine is analysed according to the categories of the *Greater Catechism* (1529): baptism as word and water; what baptism accomplishes; baptism and faith; baptism's *significatio*; and *Kindertaufe*. But it is argued that an examination of the formal baptismal theology needs to be complemented by an understanding of the dynamics of Luther's use of baptism and its place in his thought. This is supplied by an examination of Luther's handling of baptismal themes in a wide variety of contexts in the *Lectures on Genesis* (1535-45).

The difficulties of relating the older Luther's sacramental theology of baptism to the central themes of his thought are posed. These problems are viewed from a number of angles: the continuity of Luther's baptismal doctrine over time is assessed, and the interplay between his view of baptism and a number of soteriological and ecclesiological themes discussed. Finally, Luther's baptismal doctrine is viewed against its sixteenth-century background.

The 'present tense' of baptism emerges as crucial to Luther's understanding of it from 1520 onwards. This theme reflects Luther's theology of the means of grace; it is linked to his understanding of the shape of the Christian life, the nature of the Church, and the *simul* doctrine. When understood like this, Luther's baptismal theology, so far from being at odds with his doctrine of justification by faith, is a most powerful expression of it.

BAPTISM IN THE THEOLOGY  
OF MARTIN LUTHER

*SEMPER ES IN MOTU ET INITIO*

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Submitted for the degree of Ph. D.

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

Department of Theology

1991

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## CHAPTER ONE

### A CUCKOO IN THE NEST? Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

##### 1.1.1 "A proper respect and a true appreciation"

Indeed if I had the matter under my control, I would not want God to speak to me from heaven or appear to me; but this I would want — and my daily prayers are directed to this end — that I might have the proper respect and true appreciation for the gift of baptism, that I have been baptised (*ut in digno honore habeam et vere aestimem donum baptismi, quod sum baptisatus*)  
...<sup>1</sup>

Why study Luther's theology of baptism? Luther's own "proper respect and true appreciation" of the sacrament is reason enough in itself. From 1520, the year of his great tract on the sacraments, *De Captivitate*, onwards, Luther is loud in praise of baptism. If the frequency with which he referred to it is a reliable guide, it is clear that Luther's appreciation of baptism continued to grow; it is in the documents which date from the last years of his life that it assumes the highest profile of all. It is also in the years from the mid 1530's onwards that his praise of it is loudest. This high valuation of baptism is expressed in a reminting of baptismal theology whose power and originality merit close attention.



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Luther's increasing respect for baptism cannot be understood in isolation from its context in his wider theology. Indeed, one of the main burdens of what follows is that for Luther, a right understanding and use of baptism is intimately linked with the central issues involved in his theological 'Copernican Revolution'. It would be possible to go further and say that Luther's reformation breakthrough began with, or was inextricably linked to, a rediscovery of a vigorous theology of baptism.<sup>2</sup> The link between baptism and the reformation breakthrough will be examined below.<sup>3</sup> It will be argued that the doctrine of justification by faith is indeed intimately related to — is even predicated upon — Luther's understanding of the abiding covenant of baptism. One aspect of the closeness of baptism to the centre of Luther's thought is the strong pastoral concern which is evident. His view of its utter dependability as a work of God, permanently valid without regard to human factors, enables Luther to glory in baptism in a new way. It becomes a bastion against all *Anfechtungen*; its importance in the assurance of the graciousness of God alone is sufficient to link baptism with the very heart of Luther's concern.<sup>4</sup>

It will not, however, be the purpose of this study to advance the view that baptism is in some exclusive way at the centre of Luther's thought, or that it is the one key to the complexities of his theology. The temptation to seek one focal point or one foundation theme in terms of which everything else can be explained is pervasive in Luther research. Such a temptation is in itself a tribute to the depth of Luther's theology, but it must be resisted.<sup>5</sup>

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## 1.1.2 Problems of Luther's baptismal theology in its context

One reason, then, for paying close attention to Luther's baptismal doctrine is his own valuation of baptism, which is important evidence of its intimate relationship to the centre of his theological concerns. But a second motive for examining this question arises, paradoxically, from the *difficulties* of relating Luther's theology of baptism to the central themes of his theology. *Prima facie* the baptismal doctrine is more plausibly cast as the negation of the great reformation doctrines than as their essential underpinning.

Karl Barth, in the sustained attack upon the 'sacramental' view of baptism which dominates *Church Dogmatics* IV.4, sees Luther as having developed such a view in the years after 1520. When he did so, according to Barth:

he managed with relative credibility, though not without some flaws, to integrate his doctrine of infant baptism into his doctrine of baptism (in the Greater Catechism, 1529) in an excursus on the receiving of the sacrament. Nevertheless, the main themes of his theology — Law and Gospel, justification by faith alone, the freedom of a Christian man, etc. — hardly prepare us for the statement that a small child becomes a Christian in baptism.<sup>6</sup>

Three separate sets of issues are implicit in Barth's remarks. They need to be disentangled from one another:

First, there are questions which concern alleged *discontinuities in Luther's thought over time* — the younger versus the older Luther. It will



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become clear that the profile of baptism and of the sacraments in general rose steadily over time.<sup>7</sup> Does the older Luther's baptismal theology, which is undoubtedly 'sacramental' in Barth's terms, constitute evidence of a decline from the 'pure' reformation theology of the earlier years, whether occasioned by Luther's innate conservatism or his reaction against the excesses of the radicals of the 1520's? There can be no doubt that in the present century much Luther scholarship has followed Holl in concentrating upon the younger Luther.<sup>8</sup> The presupposition appears to be that the creativity, vigour and distinctiveness of Luther's contribution to theology is to be located in these early years. The Luther of the years before 1522 (the return from the Wartburg) becomes the standard by which the Luther of a later period is judged.<sup>9</sup>

The second problem which emerges from Barth's critique is obvious: *infant baptism*. But it is to be noted that Barth himself admits, albeit with qualifications, that Luther's defence of infant baptism is sustainable once the presuppositions of his wider theology of baptism are admitted. The dominance of the infant baptism question in baptismal theology tends to overshadow this third set of issues, which are, however, of the greatest importance. They concern the alleged tensions and difficulties between *Luther's mature baptismal doctrine and its context in his general theology*.

Is the baptismal doctrine a 'cuckoo in the nest'? In seeming to imply that the 'main themes' of Luther's reformation theology are irreconcilable with the baptismal theology he developed and so vigorously defended in later years, Barth is echoing the verdict of many of Luther's contemporaries in the radical wing of the reformation movement. It is between the doctrines of

justification by faith and baptismal regeneration that the difficulty is most obvious. So far from being predicated upon Luther's baptismal theology, his understanding of justification by faith seems to be in head-on confrontation with it.<sup>10</sup> How can Luther's demand for a conscious, individual *fides explicita* be reconciled with the statement that the infant "becomes a saint in the hands of the priest"?<sup>11</sup> Infant baptism is no more than a particularly sharp form of a wider problem; Luther's many-stranded defence of it raises new difficulties, with his use at various stages of the concepts of *fides aliena* and *fides infantium*. But the general problem of what Barth terms the 'sacramental' understanding of baptism is not confined to infant baptism. It is the apparently inevitable collision between the reformation emphasis upon the necessity of faith and Luther's assertion of the 'objective efficacy' of the sacraments which is at the root of the issue.<sup>12</sup>

Although the tension between the doctrine of justification by faith and a 'sacramental' understanding of baptism is the most obvious, other difficulties cluster about this central one. The priority of word over sacrament in Luther's thought is commonly asserted.<sup>13</sup> Is not this inevitably compromised by an understanding of the sacraments which is prepared to ascribe to them a validity and even an efficacy which are apparently independent of the hearing (of the word) in faith?<sup>14</sup>

Another area of difficulty concerns what may be termed the normative 'shape' of the Christian life. The reformation emphasis upon faith seems to impose certain patterns upon the Christian's experience of the Christian life, in particular of its beginning. A theology of conversion has been an important feature of the tradition of many sections of the post-reformation

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Church. Generally it implies a radical distinction between the pre- and post-conversion phases of life, and frequently there are more or less detailed expectations of the conversion itself, especially of its subjective dimensions. That there are points of departure for such a development within the mainstream reformation movement, including the theology of Luther himself, cannot be denied. The subjective requirements of *fides explicita* constitute one of them. Another is the implication in Luther's theology that there is a definite temporal sequence ordering the preaching of law and gospel; the latter comes to those who have first been cast down by passing through the former.<sup>15</sup> In what sense is this beginning transferable to a regeneration in baptism, at whatever age it is administered?

A near relation of the problem of the boundary of conversion in the individual Christian life is the ecclesiological issue of the boundary of the Church as the *communio sanctorum*. The subjective requirements of *fides*, via the expectation of a recognisable conversion experience, divide the individual life into two parts. But they also divide humanity into two groups, placing a crucial boundary (visible or invisible) around the *fideles*. This boundary is not the same as the much wider circle which includes all the baptised. There is evidence that Luther was at times strongly attracted to a tightly drawn fellowship of believers.<sup>16</sup> But his theology of baptism is not least among those factors in his theology that pull in the opposite direction, towards a sacramentally defined Church of the baptised.

A web of interrelated tensions emerges when the mature baptismal theology of Luther is considered in the context of certain key reformation themes. This, the third and most fundamental set of issues implied in

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Barth's critique, provides the central impetus for this study. The first and second sets of problems, concerning continuity between the baptismal doctrine of the younger and the older Luther, and the narrower question of infant baptism, will be important, although subsidiary, to this main line of inquiry. Infant baptism presents the difficulties of the wider baptismal doctrine in particularly sharp form — but they remain the same difficulties because, as will be argued below, Luther's defence of infant baptism and his general baptismal theology are all of a piece.<sup>17</sup> Examination of Luther's baptismal theology over time will be necessary; it may reveal significant breaks and discontinuities in the pattern of development. These could in turn be markers for Luther's reaction to external forces (the irruption of the *Schwärmer* and the *Täufer*; the pressures of constructing a new church order) leading to a potential or actual distortion of the reformation theology precisely in the area of baptism. But the fundamental question must be addressed to Luther's mature baptismal theology in the period when such external pressures had fully worked themselves through into his thought and teaching. What is its relationship with the theological thrust of his reformation breakthrough? Is it reconcilable with the central themes of his theology — even an expression of them? Or is it, however well disguised, a 'cuckoo in the nest'?

### 1.1.3 A Twentieth-Century perspective

Motives for an investigation of Luther's baptismal theology are provided, then, both by the increasing importance of baptism to the Reformer himself, and by its apparently uneasy relationship to its context in his wider

theology. But in the particular circumstances of the late twentieth-century Church there is a further edge to the question.

On one hand, the churches are claiming a "large measure of agreement" on, *inter alia*, the doctrine of baptism.<sup>18</sup> Far greater significance than formerly is now attached to the mutual recognition of baptism by certain churches between whom the divisions in the spheres of eucharist and the ministry remain. The measure of agreement expressed in the baptismal section of the Lima document is indeed impressive, although the use of rather bland formulae ("Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift.") probably conceals the true extent of the differences which persist.<sup>19</sup> But the overall trend is to a far higher 'profile' for baptism, in theology, in ecumenical dialogue, and in the life of the local congregation as increasingly the administration of baptism is rescued from the obscurity of the 'private' service and placed in the context of public, usually eucharistic, worship.

On the other hand, the division between paedobaptists and the practitioners of believers' baptism remains sharp. As it was in Luther's day, the baptismal question is linked to a series of others: the nature of faith; the normative 'shape' of the Christian life; the nature and extent of the Church. In recent years especially, these matters have been at issue outside the traditional denominational lines of debate. Within some of the paedobaptist confessions there has been an increasingly vociferous dissatisfaction on the part of some with the apparently 'indiscriminate' way that infant baptism has been administered in main-line Protestant churches, and a questioning of the baptismal theology which is used to support this

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practice.<sup>20</sup> Fresh appeals are made to the necessity of faith and conversion in the baptisand, and above all to the identity of the Church as the community of faith in the secular world with a clear boundary around it. Baptismal practice should ensure that baptism reflects — and constitutes — that boundary. Much concern is expressed about the ability (as opposed to the willingness) of parents to make the baptismal promises.<sup>21</sup> This reflects the combination of an emphasis upon the justification of infant baptism on the basis of covenant theology with an interpretation of the 'covenant people' in terms of the visible community of communicant Christians. The relationship of baptism and faith; the nature of faith itself; the concepts of *fides aliena* and even, perhaps, *fides infantium*; the gathered church versus the mixed body of wheat and tares: all these issues are not far from the surface in the modern debate. In some ways it seems that the dialogue between Luther and the radicals continues with unabated vigour in the very different environment of the late twentieth century.

Baptism continues to be the focus of a number of issues which are vigorously contested in the contemporary Church. But the same debates can be traced back to the beginnings of the Reformation itself. Luther, the theologian of faith *par excellence*, stands at the hinge point of these questions. He had to face them all. Exploration of the modern debate cannot be part of the present study, but a fuller understanding of Luther's baptismal thought should have much to contribute to it.

1.2 RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

There has been a tendency in Luther scholarship for the investigation of the Reformer's sacramental theology to concentrate upon the Supper, at the expense of baptism. There is a certain inevitability about this — in Luther's lifetime controversy surrounded the eucharist in a far more focused way than was the case with baptism. The real presence issue presented the issue of sacramental objectivity in a peculiarly sharp way. There is of course no direct parallel to the real presence in the sacrament of baptism. From the Colloquy of Marburg onwards the debate between supporters and opponents of the interpretation of the sacraments as a divine work, and all the related issues of subjectivity versus objectivity has tended to fix itself primarily upon the bread and wine of the eucharist, rather than upon the water of baptism.<sup>22</sup> But the comparative neglect of baptism is surprising because baptismal theology raises questions which are not so immediately apparent in the context of the eucharist, especially in the areas of soteriology (the beginning of the Christian life, conversion) and ecclesiology (the nature of the Church and its boundaries).

Some of the recent historical studies of the relevant years of Luther's life have tended to reflect this pattern. For example, in his uncompleted work (published posthumously in 1979), *Martin Luther in der Mittes seines Leben*, Heinrich Bornkamm devotes a complete chapter to the only controversy which "proved explosive in the life of the Reformation churches" of the mid 1520's — the break with Karlstadt concerning the Supper.<sup>23</sup> Although the book finishes at the year 1530, no sustained attention is paid to Luther's

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reactions to the Anabaptist movement. Mark Edwards, in his study of Luther's relationship with the radicals, excludes the Anabaptists from consideration.<sup>24</sup> There are other historical studies which do handle this theme, however.<sup>25</sup>

Turning from the historical to the more strictly theological works, a considerable amount of material is available in English in which some of the relevant issues are addressed. Jaroslav Pelikan in particular has made important contributions from various angles.<sup>26</sup> There is much that is useful in other works available in English whose overall frame of reference is either much wider than the baptismal issue, or tangential to it. One of the recently published biographies of Luther, that by Heiko Obermann, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, contains a persuasive treatment of baptism as "the sacrament of the ignorant".<sup>27</sup> Some of the general surveys of Luther's thought offer useful summaries of Luther's theology of baptism.<sup>28</sup> Among the rather mixed collection of works which have been important sources for the present study are Regin Prenter's seminal work on Luther's doctrine of the Spirit, *Spiritus Creator*,<sup>29</sup> an article by T.F. Torrance on "The Eschatology of Faith",<sup>30</sup> and the works of Pelikan already cited.

The younger Luther, of the years before 1520, has been a magnet for scholarship for much of the present century, often at the expense of the older Luther, particularly of the years after 1530.<sup>31</sup> Although it has already been argued that in the context of Luther's baptismal theology it is the later period which is crucial, some of the many recent studies of the younger Luther are of indirect relevance. Two in particular stand out among them. Marilyn Harran has written on the younger Luther's understanding of conversion.<sup>32</sup> *Conversio* is an important concept in the soteriological field



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in which baptism is set. Equally important are the ecclesiological dimensions of baptismal theology; here an important contribution has been made by Scott Hendrix.<sup>33</sup>

The relevance of many of these works is, however, of a tangential nature; in recent years no major study of Luther's baptismal theology as such has been undertaken in English. But there have been a number of important post-war treatments of the subject in German:

Werner Jetter has studied the baptismal theology of the younger Luther in relation to the medieval background.<sup>34</sup> He concentrates on material from the period before the reformation breakthrough. Not the least disadvantage of his approach is the extreme thinness of the material with which he has to work; a difficulty which he himself admits.<sup>35</sup> Jetter is asking important questions, which concern the role of baptism and the sacraments in the young Luther's struggles about a gracious God, and the relationship of the reformation breakthrough to the reminting of sacramental theology.<sup>36</sup> But it is doubtful that the definitive answers to such questions can be elucidated from the early material alone; in these years baptism is not at the forefront of Luther's attention, even though a theological revolution is going on which will in time affect it profoundly.<sup>37</sup> Some of the other studies in German have been relatively narrow in scope, either in the issue upon which they focus or in the documents which they examine. Ursula Stock has written on Luther's three sermons on the sacraments of 1519.<sup>38</sup> Karl Brinkel has investigated the role of *fides infantium* in Luther's defence of infant baptism.<sup>39</sup>

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The most comprehensive study of Luther's mature baptismal theology to have emerged in recent years is that of Lorenz Grönvik.<sup>40</sup> Grönvik argues convincingly for the essential continuity of Luther's baptismal thought from the time immediately after the reformation breakthrough when Rome was the only opposition until well after the impact of the *Täufer* and *Schwärmer* in the 1520's. He demonstrates this by means of a comparison between the baptismal material in *De Captivitate* (1520) and the Catechisms (1529).<sup>41</sup> A well-rounded picture of Luther's theology of baptism emerges from Grönvik's book; perhaps its most distinctive aspect is his emphasis upon the 'word' joined to the baptismal water understood as God's act of creating power.<sup>42</sup> One disadvantage of Grönvik's approach, however, is that in his concentration upon the central issues of baptismal theology proper he pays less attention than he might to the wider issues of that theology in its setting, to the relationships between baptism and other themes in Luther's thought, such as his ecclesiology, or his understanding of the Christian life.

But it is the absence of a sustained treatment of Luther's theology of baptism in English which is the most striking — and surprising — feature of the scene.

1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE ARGUMENT

From what has been said it is already clear that it is Luther's doctrine of baptism as it developed *after* the emergence of the radical alternative to the main-stream reformation movement which must be the primary focus of attention. Not only is baptism increasingly conspicuous in the writing of the later years, indicating Luther's growing 'appreciation' of the sacrament; the problems and tensions in relation to the rest of his theology are clearest here too. Thus the centre of gravity of this study will be an examination of the baptismal theology of the years following 1527.

The investigation of Luther's mature baptismal theology will be prosecuted in the next two chapters, from two very different, although complementary, angles. In chapter 2 a broad picture will be drawn of baptism as it appears in one of the most substantial documents from the last years of Luther's life, the *Genesisvorlesung* (1535-45). The chief justification of this somewhat surprising starting place will be the vivid, although necessarily impressionistic picture uniquely available there of baptism 'in action', playing the role Luther demands of it in Christian theology and experience. In chapter 3 this picture will be balanced by an analysis of Luther's formal baptismal doctrine, which will be based on the categories and structure of the *Grosse Katechismus* (1529), but whose scope will also include a variety of other material from the late 1520's onwards. At all stages due attention must be paid to the ease — or strain — with which the theology of baptism operates within its wider context in Luther's thought.

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In chapter 4 the question of the continuity of Luther's baptismal doctrine over time will be addressed, by means of a survey of the earlier period. The treatment here will of necessity be more selective. Two 'cross-sections' or 'bench-marks' will be chosen. One will be the *Dictata super Psalterium* of 1513-1515, a document which has been the object of much scholarly attention of recent years as central to an understanding of the nascent Reformer. The other will be the years 1519-1520, which will be represented by the sermon *On the Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism* and *De captivitate Babylonica Ecclesiae*.

Two aspects of Luther's wider theology require special attention in the context of a study of baptismal doctrine; they have an important impact upon the correct interpretation of baptism in Luther's theology and, in turn, the baptismal theology can throw important light upon them. The first area, which will be handled in chapter 5, is soteriological. A cluster of themes will be involved: conversion and baptism, and baptism as beginning; assurance; Christian progress; the 'shape' of the Christian life, and the *simul* doctrine. In chapter 6, the ecclesiological dimensions and implications of Luther's baptismal doctrine will be explored. Luther's understanding of the 'shape', extent and boundaries of the Church are clearly of great relevance to his baptismal doctrine and *vice versa*. In fact there will be a strong ecclesiological 'sub-theme' in this study from chapter 2 onwards, because nowhere does Luther assemble a more impressive model of the Church than in his exposition of the story of the beginnings of that Church as he found it in the pages of Genesis.

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A final assessment will be offered in chapter 7. It will aim to highlight what is *distinctive* about Luther's theology of baptism, chiefly by means of a brief comparison with some of his contemporaries. The ultimate purpose of highlighting the distinctive features of Luther's baptismal theology, however, is to provide the basis for an appreciation of its lasting significance and worth to the Church Catholic.

NOTES

1. WA 42,666,31-34 = LW 3,165 on Gen. 17:22. In quotations from Luther, the English translation of LW will generally be followed where it is available, the original Latin or German being supplied for particularly important words or phrases. On occasion, where the LW translators appear to be somewhat further than usual from a literal rendering of the original, a retranslation will be offered.
2. So, for instance, L. Goppelt, "The Existence of the Church in History according to Apostolic and Early Catholic Thought", *Current Issues in NT Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper*, ed. W. Klassen and G.F. Snyder (New York, 1962), p. 201: "the reformation of Luther began at this point; it was Luther who first cracked the basis of the penitential system started by Hermas, namely, the presupposition that baptism is merely a closed historical act and repentance a subsequent act." Luther's denial of the 'closedness' of baptism and his insistence upon its continuing vigour in the life of a Christian will be a recurrent theme in this study. Similarly, F.D. Maurice argued that Luther grounded his doctrine of justification by faith on baptismal regeneration. (*The Kingdom of Christ* (London, 1883) I, p.323.)
3. At § 4.3.4.
4. Werner Jetter remarks that Luther's baptismal teaching struck a new and distinctive note, that had been silent in the Church for the twelve hundred years between Augustine and Beil: "*Das Lob der Taufe wider alle Anfechtungen, das Trotz aus Getauftsein — das is die beherrschende Klangfarbe seiner Lehre von der Taufe.* (*Die Taufe beim jungen Luther: Eine Untersuchung über das Werden der reformatorischen Sakraments- und Taufanschauung* (Tübingen, 1954), p. 109.)
5. Cf. some words of N.E. Nagel: "Luther indeed tempts people to find keys. While confidence in them may decrease as their number increases, they yet serve to strengthen the conviction of coherence in Luther's theology." ("Luther's Understanding of Christ in relation to his Doctrine of the Lord's Supper", Ph.D. Thesis, Cambridge 1961, p. vi.) That so many keys can be advanced reflects the number of different 'Luthers' on offer. The exposure of the shortcomings of other putative 'keys' to Luther's thought is a relatively easy matter; to detect the inadequacies of one's own is more difficult. For instance P.S. Watson refers to "Luther's concentration", which "guarantees the fundamental coherence and unity of his outlook" and proceeds to endorse Einar Billing's claim that the different themes in Luther's theology are not "strung together like pearls in a necklace, united only by the band of a common authority or perhaps by a chain of logical argument, but . . . all lie close as the petals of the rose about a common centre, [shining out] like the rays of the sun from one glowing source." The trouble is: What is that common centre? For Billing it is the forgiveness of sins; every other idea in Luther's theology is a corollary of this one. Watson is rightly unhappy with such a view, but the effect of his own book is to

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- substitute a new common centre, namely, *Soli Deo Gloria*. (P.S. Watson, *Let God be God!: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* (London, 1947), p. 26; E Billing *Vår Kallelse* (Stockholm, 1920), pp. 6f.) Nagel graphically points out the danger of this procedure: "Luther has been too much read with an inverted triangle: determine the point and then everything can be fitted into its place within the triangle and be seen as deductively deriving from that point." (Nagel, p. vii.)
6. Church Dogmatics IV.4, tr. Bromiley, (Edinburgh, 1969), p. 169.
  7. Compare §§ 2.1.1 and 4.2.1 below.
  8. Cf. K.G. Hagen, "Changes in the Understanding of Luther: The Development of the Young Luther", *Theological Studies*, Vol. 29, (1968), pp. 472-496.
  9. See below, § 2.1.2, p. 35, note 18.
  10. Cf. James Atkinson, *Martin Luther and the birth of Protestantism* (London, 1968), p. 192: "There is no satisfactory way of reconciling Luther's clear teaching on justification by faith alone with his views on baptismal regeneration. His contemporaries saw this chink in his armour, and so have many radicals who succeeded them."
  11. WA 41,166,25f. = LW 13,303; Sermon on Ps. 110:3 (1535); see below, § 3.3.1, pp. 131ff.
  12. So, for instance, J.D.C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: The Reformation Period* (London, 1970), p. 5. Fisher argues that Luther's later emphasis upon the 'objective efficacy' of the sacrament (implied, according to Fisher, in the notion of *fides infantium*), is inconsistent with his earlier stress upon the subjective element, the faith of the baptisand.
  13. In various senses and different contexts by Paul D.L. Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (London, 1981), pp.16f. (the supremacy of the word amongst the *notae ecclesiae*); H. Bornkamm, *Luther's World of Thought*, tr. M.H. Bertram (St. Louis, 1965), pp. 93ff. (sacraments as another form of word; and, unlike word, potentially dispensable); Jetter, pp. 191-195 (on the younger Luther — the sacraments valued less than the preaching of the word — Jetter appears to suggest that in the context of the increasing emphasis upon the interpretation of scripture and Christian existence *spiritualiter* the sacraments are 'handicapped' in some way by the physical nature which they share with the Old Testament signs); Watson, pp. 160-65 (sacraments added to word, which gives them significance); Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, tr. R.C. Schultz (Philadelphia, 1966), p. 346 (the sacraments founded upon the word, and therefore nothing without it).
  14. It will be argued below, § 3.2.2 (pp. 122f.), that, as 'word' is a polyvalent term in Luther's usage, it is important to be clear in exactly which sense its priority is being asserted. See also § 2.2.1 below (p. 42).

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15. Althaus, p. 260: see Luther's teaching on dying to the Law, for example WA 40,I,270,20-27 = LW 26,157f. on Galatians 2:19. See below, § 5.3.1 (p. 281).
16. See below, § 6.2.1 (p. 298); cf. Atkinson, p. 261: "It is certain from a study of [the preface to the German Mass, 1526] that his heart lay in this simple house Church [of the true evangelical believers] rather than anywhere else."
17. See below, § 3.6, esp. § 3.6.5 (pp. 175f.).
18. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. III (Geneva, 1982; the 'Lima' document), p. ix.
19. See below, § 7.3.2 (p. 372, note 78).
20. Perhaps this is most obviously the case in the Church of England. See, for example, Colin Buchanan, Clifford Owen and Alan Wright, *Reforming Infant Baptism* (London, 1990). But the trend is by no means confined to the Anglican Communion; nor to the British Isles.
21. Buchanan et. al., pp. 63, 77.
22. It is also true that the disputes over the eucharist had a higher political profile. So, for instance, J. Tonkin, "Luther's Understanding of Baptism: A systematic approach", Lutheran Theological Journal (Vol. 11,3, 1977), p. 97.
23. English translation: *Luther in Mid Career*, tr. E.T. Bachmann (London, 1983), p. 501. Chapter 19, pp. 501-551, deals with the Supper.
24. Mark Edwards, *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford, 1975). He does so on the basis that Luther "never engaged in a major controversy with them." (Note 4 to Introduction, pp. 209f.)
25. Notably John S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists* (The Hague, 1964); Harry Loewen, *Luther and the Radicals* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1974).
26. In *Spirit versus Structure: Luther and the Institutions of the Church* (London, 1968); "The Theology of the Means of Grace", H.O. Kadai ed. *Accents in Luther's Theology* (St. Louis, 1967) pp. 124-145; "Luther's Defense of Infant Baptism" ed. Meyer, *Luther for an Ecumenical Age* (St. Louis, 1967) pp. 200-218.
27. Tr. E. Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven and London, 1989), pp.226-232.
28. Most notably Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, tr. R.C. Schultz (Philadelphia, 1966), pp.345-374, H. Bornkamm, *Luther's World of Thought*, pp. 93-106; and, an older work (1931), W. Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, tr. W.A Hansen, (St. Louis, 1962) pp. 291-300. Bornkamm's treatment of baptism is somewhat disappointing; he makes the profound statement that baptism is "Luther's theology in miniature", but says that this "astonishingly rich prelude in which all the great motifs of his faith are already sounded" merits only a brief examination because it presents far fewer difficulties than the doctrine of Holy Communion (p. 102).
29. Tr. J. Jensen, (Philadelphia, 1953).



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30. "The Eschatology of Faith: Martin Luther" George Yule ed., *Luther, Theologian for Catholics and Protestants* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp.145-199.
31. Mark Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531-46* (Leiden, 1983), p. 1.
32. M.J. Harran, *Luther on Conversion: The Early Years* (Ithaca and London, 1983).
33. Scott H. Hendrix, *Ecclesia in Via: Ecclesiological Developments in the Medieval Psalms Exegesis and the Dictata Super Psalterium (1513-15) of Martin Luther* (Leiden, 1974).
34. W. Jetter, *Die Taufe beim jungen Luther: Eine Untersuchung über das Werden der reformatorischen Sakraments- und Taufanschauung* (Tübingen, 1954).
35. Jetter, pp. 112, 175; see below, § 4.2.1.
36. Jetter, p.111.
37. E. Bizer is of the opinion that Jetter stopped just at the point where he should be getting under way. *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* (Stuttgart) vol. 67, 1955/6, p. 342; Nagel, pp. xix-xx.
38. Ursula Stock, *Die Bedeutung der Sakramente in Luthers Sermonen von 1519* (Leiden, 1982).
39. K. Brinkel, *Die Lehre Luthers Von der Fides Infantium bei der Kindertaufe* (Berlin, 1958).
40. L. Grönvik, *Die Taufe in der Theologie Martin Luthers* (Åbo, 1968).
41. In general his arguments for continuity are cogent, although on occasion he tends unduly to minimise the contrasts between the earlier and later periods, for instance in regard to the faith-baptism relationship, see below, § 4.4.1 (p. 244, notes 158 and 159).
42. Grönvik, pp. 46-54.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BAPTISM AS THEOPHANY : The Lectures on Genesis (1535-45)

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

His *Genesisvorlesung* took Luther some ten years to deliver. There were interruptions, including some fairly lengthy ones necessitated by outbreaks of the plague, but for most of these last years of his life much of Luther's energy was absorbed by the Lectures. He had promised as much on 31st May 1535, when at the conclusion of his lectures on Psalm 90 he gave notice of his new, and final, project.<sup>1</sup> The three volumes of the Weimar edition devoted to the Lectures on Genesis represent an invaluable — although not an unimpeachable — source for Luther's thought in the last decade of his life. They are particularly valuable as far as Luther's baptismal theology is concerned. It will be the purpose of this chapter to exploit this resource to the full, in a sustained attempt to allow Luther to speak for himself.

##### 2.1.1 A fertile source

Why begin here? The *Lectures on Genesis* do not appear to be the logical starting point for an investigation of Luther on baptism. The *loci* where Luther deals specifically with baptism, such as the 1519 sermon on *The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism, De Captivitate* (1520), or the *Grosse*

*Katechismus* would seem to be far more obvious choices. All three set out Luther's baptismal thought point by point in a far more structured and comprehensive way than could be anticipated in a document whose primary focus is the exposition of an Old Testament text. So why begin here?

As the years passed, the profile assumed by baptism in Luther's writings steadily advanced.<sup>2</sup> His baptismal doctrine continued to develop well after the various crises of the 1520's. The fact of this development, and its nature, will emerge later, but it identifies the last period of his life as that in which Luther's baptismal doctrine shows its greatest range and depth. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the Lectures. Nowhere else are Luther's thoughts on baptism more available. As far as baptismal theology is concerned the Lectures on Genesis represent something by way of a 'finished product'. The same goes for other aspects of the Reformer's theology intimately linked with baptism, most notably his doctrine of the Church.

One aspect of the Genesis Lectures as a fertile source for the investigation of Luther's baptismal thought is the frequency of reference to baptism within them. Of particular significance is the way in which baptism comes into Luther's mind where the text before him by no means appears to warrant it. In some places a baptismal reference is only to be expected, and is indeed forthcoming, such as when Luther considers the entrance to the Ark, the Flood, or circumcision.<sup>3</sup> But far more typically it is Luther who brings baptism to the subject matter before him, not the subject matter which forces it upon him. A great variety of triggers provoke these *ad hoc* references to baptism. The tree of knowledge of good and evil; Cain's departure from the face of the Lord; Abraham's visit from the three men;

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Lot's prayer; Abraham's feast at the weaning of Isaac; the trial of faith on Mount Moriah; Esau and the pottage; Isaac's blessing of Jacob; Jacob's dream at Bethel; the wrestling at the brook Jabbok; Joseph in prison: to all these contexts, and to many others, Luther introduces a reference to baptism.<sup>4</sup> The contrast here with material from the younger Luther is complete. In the *Dictata super Psalterium* (1513-15), for instance, not only is there a lack of such *ad hoc* references; baptism fails to make an appearance even where the text appears to demand a mention of it.<sup>5</sup>

Frequently baptism does not appear alone; where Luther brings it into his exposition of a text he commonly introduces other topics and issues alongside it. In particular, the other means of grace often appear with baptism.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Luther's style in the Lectures is admittedly discursive in the extreme, and the freedom with which he introduces themes into unlikely contexts is by no means limited to baptism. For these reasons caution should be exercised in making any claims about the precise significance of this phenomenon. But, for the moment, of greater importance than its precise significance is the phenomenon itself, namely, the frequency and variety of the contexts which call forth references to baptism in the Genesis Lectures.

The amount of material available to work on is a crucial factor in the selection of the Genesis Lectures as a primary source for the investigation of Luther's baptismal doctrine. The nature of the material is another. Many of the references are brief and tangential, although there are occasions when Luther offers a more sustained treatment of baptismal theology or of issues connected with it.<sup>7</sup> By concentrating on a source where baptism is *not* the

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primary subject matter, it will be possible to obtain a rounded picture which would not emerge from formal statements of baptismal theology alone. The contexts in which Luther is moved to speak of baptism will themselves furnish clues about the 'use' Luther makes of the sacrament, the weight he typically expects it to bear, and about the role it plays in his thought. This major work of Luther's last years gives him ample scope to develop and expand upon the whole spectrum of his theological themes. At the same time the Lectures offer the reader an unrivalled opportunity to set the Reformer's baptismal theology against the background of that spectrum of themes, to see it, as it were, 'in action'.

### 2.1.2 A questionable source?

We are not in possession of Luther's prepared notes for his lectures on Genesis. Nor does the record we have of them amount to a direct verbatim transcription of the lectures. Peter Meinhold has offered a searching criticism of this record.<sup>0</sup> Meinhold's work is essentially an appreciation of the role of the three editors of the Lectures, Michael Roting, Jerome Besold, and above all, Veit Dietrich. The existing record is at least two removes from the lectures themselves; Luther's students took their notes, which were later compiled by the editors. It is the freedom which the editors appear to have allowed themselves which is at the root of the problem.

There are various signs of the editors' hands in the published edition. There are, for example, occasional anachronisms; the text depicts Luther as referring to events which took place after he was speaking. For instance, in

lecturing on Genesis 4:10, in all probability during 1536, he is made to speak of the martyrdom of the Englishman Robert Barnes, who died in 1540.<sup>9</sup> The work of the editor also appears in such touches as "dear reader",<sup>10</sup> Another indication of the hand of Dietrich in particular is the length and accuracy of Luther's citations from classical and Christian authors. The extensive use made in the Lectures of the commentary of Nicholas of Lyra is the most conspicuous example. Meinhold seeks to demonstrate that Dietrich consulted the text of Lyra's works as he was engaged on the redaction of Luther's lectures.<sup>11</sup> Sketchy references were transformed into far more substantial drawings from Lyra. The end result, according to Meinhold, is not just more accurate and more extensive quotations from Lyra, but a far higher profile for him in the record of the Lectures than would have been evident in a verbatim transcription of what Luther actually said.

Meinhold seeks to demonstrate the distance between the lectures themselves and the edited record more directly. He quotes Luther's own remarks about the meagreness of Dietrich's 1532 edition of the 1527-29 lectures on Isaiah, and Justus Jonas's (rather sycophantic?) reply, "It isn't yours, *Herr Doctor*."<sup>12</sup> The problem with the Lectures is far deeper than these rather commonplace indications of the hand of the editor would suggest on their own, however. The substance of Meinhold's case is theological.

Meinhold surveys the evidence outside the Lectures for the theology of Luther's editors. In his reconstruction of Dietrich's theology he finds evidence of Melancthon's influence, which makes itself powerfully felt in the Lectures on Genesis. The use of natural theology, arguments for the natural immortality of the human soul, faith as assent; all these suggest the

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influence of Melanchthon.<sup>13</sup> This was not necessarily the result of a consciously pursued policy on the part of the editors. Luther's own language and expressions were clearly part of Dietrich's stock-in-trade as an enthusiastic collector of Lutherana. But when he uses these expressions, for Meinhold they are often compromised by their interpretation within the framework of a different theology.<sup>14</sup>

Meinhold presents the evidence for a series of intrusions of 'alien' theology in the Lectures through Luther's redactors. Sacramental theology is not immune. Meinhold asserts that the Lectures tend to talk of three sacraments, while the Schmalkald Articles and the *Confessio Augustana* restrict the number to two.<sup>15</sup> Another 'alien' sacramental theme alleged by Meinhold is the emphasis upon the 'symbolic character' of the sacraments. He relates it to the psychological effect in the recipients; the sacraments are presented in the Lectures as aids for the human conscience, and helps for the strengthening of faith.<sup>16</sup> Other areas of the theology of the Lectures with a direct bearing on baptism are also under suspicion, notably ecclesiology. Meinhold appears to see statements about the true church being where the pure teaching and right administration of the sacraments is seen as an example of the reinterpretation of an undoubtedly genuine Lutheran theme, the hiddenness of the Church.<sup>17</sup>

Detailed questions about the authenticity or otherwise of statements in the Lectures about baptism will have to be faced as they arise. A complete resolution of such issues must await the results of an examination of the older Luther's baptismal theology in chapter 3. In the meantime, however, a response can be made to Meinhold's critique in more general terms. First,

there is an irredeemable element of circularity in any argument which seeks to undermine the standing of a source which represents such a significant part of the output of the Luther of 1535-45. To which document, comparable in size and importance, can we look for an authentic expression of Luther's thought in these years, so that the Lectures can be compared with it? In fact Meinhold expressly uses the *younger* Luther as the measure against which the Lectures must be judged.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, there is inevitably a subjective aspect to the interpretation and assessment of the Lectures. Partly this is a matter of listening for style and tone.<sup>19</sup> But there is more to it than that. There can be no doubt that the signs of external influence noted by Meinhold have to be set against the presence in the Lectures of many theological themes close to the heart of Luther's theology. Our investigation of baptism will throw this fact into sharp relief. The subjective element comes above all with an examination of precisely *how* these themes appear in the Lectures. For instance, the theme of God hidden *sub specie contraria* is not only close to the heart of Luther's theology — it is also very much present in the Genesis Lectures.<sup>20</sup> Nothing less would be expected of such an extensive document bearing Luther's name. But does the doctrine appear as a lifeless *datum*, received from the master, but overlaid with alien embellishments and embodying other concerns? Or does its presentation here bear an authentic stamp, does it show all the signs of dynamic tension and life which are to be expected from a doctrine in Luther's hands? In fact there is no presentation of the theme of God appearing under his opposite more profound or more sharply focused than the one given in the treatment of Jacob's wrestling match at the brook Jabbok, Genesis 32:24-32.<sup>21</sup> The indicators here, however subjective, all point in one direction.



Is the voice of Luther truly heard in the Lectures on Genesis? The only possible answer to this question, which will nevertheless have to be substantiated in the remainder of this chapter, is clear: Yes.

2.1.3 Method

The presentation of the baptismal theology of the Genesis Lectures in this chapter will be followed in the next by an examination of the formal baptismal doctrine, which will concentrate upon the Catechisms and other texts from the later period where baptism is the chief subject matter. The two presentations will of necessity be very different. The picture drawn on the basis of the Lectures will be much more impressionistic and much less sharply defined than a reconstruction of formal doctrine can afford to be. There are a number of reasons for the adoption of this double approach.

To begin with, it is clear that conclusions based solely on a source such as the Lectures must require confirmation from elsewhere in the Lutheran corpus. Furthermore, any attempt to present Luther's baptismal theology must give particular weight to those *loci* where Luther himself is aiming to do the same; to those documents in which baptism and the theology of baptism are at the forefront of his attention. It is obvious that conclusions based on the Lectures require the buttressing of an examination of texts like the *Grosse Katechismus*. It is less obvious, but no less true, that an investigation of baptism in the Lectures has much to add to a formal presentation of Luther's baptismal theology. The sheer amount and variety of material on offer in the Lectures is one factor here. But another factor is

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more important. In the impressionistic picture which follows, baptism is portrayed, not in a static, formalised, manner, but dynamically. In a document like the Lectures on Genesis it becomes clear precisely where baptism belongs in Luther's theology, and how it fits in with other themes. An unmistakeable pattern emerges; again and again certain themes lead him to speak of baptism. The formal theology is not enough on its own; with Luther, above all other theologians, no adequate understanding of a formal theological proposition is possible unless that proposition is seen in action, bearing weight, being put to use. Our recourse to the Lectures does not constitute an attempt to 'get behind' the formal baptismal doctrine of the *Grosse Katechismus*, say. Nor is it an attempt by some psychological sleight of hand to discover Luther's 'real' concerns about baptism, which are hidden elsewhere. The aim is to exploit this most fertile of sources to supplement and elucidate the formal doctrine by capturing it 'in use'.

The Lectures will provide the vast bulk of the material used in the presentation which follows, although occasional reference will be made to other documents of roughly equal date. The Lectures will also determine the structure of the presentation. The fourfold plan of the baptismal section of the *Grosse Katechismus* will provide the structure for the presentation of the formal baptismal doctrine in Chapter 3. But this framework would amount to a most ill-fitting strait-jacket for the present chapter — the theme of baptism in the Lectures possesses an inner logic of its own, which will necessitate a very different arrangement. This difference of approach will lead to some unavoidable awkwardness in correlating the results of the two inquiries. In order to bring the two halves of the inquiry into relationship with one another, Chapter 3 will include an examination of the Lectures from

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the perspective of the fourfold formal baptismal structure; what constitutes baptism, what benefits it conveys, how it is to be received, and its *significatio*.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, however, in this chapter the inner logic of baptism in the Lectures will be pursued without regard for this fourfold structure. The aim will be to begin with the broadest features of the picture of baptism in the Lectures, before progressively refining and sharpening it, and supplying all the background detail which is available.

One further introductory point must be made. Luther's exegetical method in the Lectures requires assessment. It will be argued below that Luther's approach to the text of Genesis is predicated upon his view of the continuity of the Church of both Testaments from Adam onwards. Chiefly for this reason, the analysis of Luther's exegesis will be postponed until this theme has been broached, towards the end of the chapter (§ 2.5.5). This will have the additional merit of setting the analysis in the context of some concrete examples of Luther's use of the text, so that it does not have to be attempted in a vacuum.

2.2 SEEKING GOD WHERE HE WILLS TO BE FOUND: Baptism as Trysting Place

. . . God governs us in such a way that wherever he speaks with us here on earth, the approach to the kingdom of heaven is open. This is truly extraordinary consolation. Wherever we hear the word and are baptized, there we enter into eternal life. But where is that place found? On earth, where the ladder which touches heaven stands, where the angels descend and ascend, where Jacob sleeps. It is a physical place (*locus corporalis*), but here there is an ascent into heaven without physical ladders, without wings and feathers. This is how faith speaks: "I am going to the place where the word is taught, where the sacrament is offered and baptism is administered." And all these things that are done in my sight in a physical place are heavenly and divine words and works. That place is not only ground or earth; but it is something more glorious and majestic, namely, the kingdom of God and the gate of heaven. Here one goes to the stars, as is stated by the poet. There is no reason for you to run to St. James' or to withdraw into a corner or to hide yourself in a monastery. Do not seek a new and foolish entrance (*novum et stultum introitum*). But look in faith to the place where the word and the sacraments are. Direct your step to the place where the word resounds and the sacraments are administered, and there write the title THE GATE OF GOD.<sup>23</sup>

The Luther of the *Genesisvorlesung* is a theologian of the means of grace.<sup>24</sup> This is unquestionably the most striking feature of the picture of baptism painted in the Lectures, and therefore the best starting point. The theology of the means of grace also brings together two of the most important features of the pattern of baptismal reference in the Lectures, both illustrated in the passage above. One of them is that baptism belongs at the heart of a cluster of themes which is very near the centre of Luther's theology. "Seeking God where he wills to be found" represents the thought at its simplest. Baptism is one of those places where God wills

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that he shall be found; it is no less than a divinely appointed 'trysting place' for the encounter between God and man. The second feature is the way in which baptism typically occurs, not on its own, but alongside the other means of grace.

### 2.2.1 The Means of Grace

Baptism, the sacrament of the altar and the word are the core members of the group of New Testament means of grace. When Luther refers to baptism, he usually refers to the ministry of the word and to the eucharist at the same time. This is particularly the case with the briefer *ad hoc* references, although baptism, like the others, occasionally appears on its own. The term 'means of grace' is to be preferred as a suitably non-specific term to cover the ways and places in which God has chosen to be found. 'Sacraments' or even 'word and sacraments' would convey too much theological precision. There is a certain fluidity about the edges of the group, despite the fact that its central core is constant. Sometimes the keys are included, sometimes not. Occasionally Luther underlines the haziness towards the perimeter of the group of means of grace, as when he concludes his list with *et cetera* or with *et similia*.<sup>25</sup> Other means of grace make an occasional appearance in the list, such as the Christian's *vocatio*, and his brother.<sup>26</sup>

The text of Genesis itself, given Luther's approach to it, militates against too closed a group of means of grace. In Genesis Luther finds that the record of his dealings with mankind shows God to have chosen a whole variety of external objects, signs and places in which he is to be

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encountered. The tree of knowledge of good and evil, the rainbow, circumcision, the prescribed altars and sacrifices, the pillars of fire and cloud, the tabernacle; all these in their different ways were divinely appointed signs to which a word of promise or threat had been joined, and through which God is to be known. The constancy of the divine way of dealing with mankind is far more striking in the Lectures than any difference of dispensation between the two Testaments. Luther's adherence to this unchanging principle leads him to posit the divine choice of signs, places and means of grace even where the text shows no evidence of it. Thus when he asks whether Cain and Abel had a divine command to offer sacrifice Luther answers:

. . . yes. For all the sacred accounts give proof that by his superabundant grace our merciful God always placed some outward and visible sign of his grace alongside the word (*semper iuxta verbum constituit aliquod externum et visibile suae gratiae*), so that men, reminded by the outward sign and work or sacrament (*externo signo et opere ceu Sacramento admoniti*), would believe with greater assurance that God is kind and merciful. Thus after the flood the rainbow appeared in order to serve as a convincing proof that in the future God would not give vent to his wrath against the world by a similar punishment. To Abraham, as we shall hear, circumcision was given, ~~so that he might firmly believe that God would be his God and that he would give him the seed in whom all the nations would be blessed.~~ To us in the New Testament, baptism and the eucharist have been given as the visible signs of grace, so that we might firmly believe that our sins have been forgiven through Christ's suffering and that we have been redeemed by his death. Thus the church has never been deprived to such an extent of outward signs that it became impossible to know where God could surely be found. (*Sic Ecclesia nunquam ita destituta fuit externis signis, ut non posset sciri, ubi Deus certo inveniretur.*)<sup>27</sup>

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Luther makes far more of the similarity of the two dispensations in this respect than of their differences.<sup>28</sup> Within the Old Testament, indeed within Genesis itself, Luther saw that one sign had often replaced another as a chosen means of grace; the pattern remained constant, although its expression altered. The variety of signs within the different dispensations in the Old Testament and the fluidity of the group of means of grace has its effect upon the New Testament means of grace — too sharp a line cannot be drawn around them.

There is little evidence of a clear hierarchy amongst the means of grace, beyond the unchallenged position of baptism, eucharist and the word at the core of the group. The question of the priority or primacy of *verbum* will be addressed below.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile it is sufficient to note that there is no evidence in the Genesis Lectures for any lauding of one of the means of grace at the expense of any other. This remains true, when from another angle the same signs, places and appointed means of grace appear as the marks of the Church.<sup>30</sup>

In a rather different sense there is, nevertheless, a priority to be recognised — the priority of baptism as the first sign. Thus Luther sees the adding of the keys (here apparently equivalent to the word) and the eucharist to baptism as a divine accommodation to human weakness:

because in this weakness of ours it is very easy for us to fall, there have been added to baptism the keys or the ministry of the word (*claves seu ministerium verbi*) — for these must not be separated . . . The same thing takes place in the use of the Holy Eucharist.<sup>31</sup>

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Priority in time is one thing; primacy of importance, centrality or usefulness is another. It is the christological unity of the signs which forbids any attempt to divide them by playing them off one against another. For the first sign of all must be God's Son, "born of the Virgin Mary and lying in his manger among the cattle".<sup>32</sup> All the signs, word and sacraments, flow from the wounds of the Son of God.<sup>33</sup>

### 2.2.2 Places where God is to be found

Baptism appears as one of the external signs which God has appointed for his encounter with mankind. This expresses the focal point of the baptismal theology of the Lectures at its simplest; progressive refinement will follow later. The signs or means of grace also have the aspect of 'places' chosen by God for his tryst with mankind. Luther is emphatic — God is truly present there. At its height, this theme includes the language of theophany. When discussing the vision in which Abraham received the promise of Isaac, Luther dismisses all thought of envying the patriarch's privilege of a visible appearance of God:

Indeed, if I had the matter under my control, I would not want God to speak to me from heaven or to appear to me; but this I would want — and my daily prayers are directed to this end — that I might have the proper respect and true appreciation for the gift of baptism, that I have been baptised, and that I see and hear brothers who have the grace and gift of the Holy Spirit and are able to encourage with the word, to admonish, warn, and teach. For what more profitable appearance of God do you want? (*melioem et utiliorem Dei apparitionem*) But alas the proud spirits despise these things and see that we, too, do not assign to these common appearances (*communes has apparitiones*)



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in the word, baptism, the Lord's Supper, etc. the position we should give them.<sup>34</sup>

In baptism we have such a clear appearance of God that, along with the eucharist, the keys, and the ministry of the word, it surpasses the appearance of any angel.<sup>35</sup> Aural as well as visual terminology is employed; in fact it is more common.<sup>36</sup> If we should not envy Abraham his visions, neither need we envy him that God spoke to him, for "we too have God speaking to us in the word, in baptism, and in Communion." (*Habemus enim nos quoque Deum loquentem nobiscum in verbo, in baptismo, in communione.*)<sup>37</sup> Luther reverses any comparison the Christian might be tempted to make of himself with Abraham or the other patriarchs. Abraham saw the day of Christ only in faith and spirit, "but we see this glory face to face (*facie ad faciem hanc gloriam videmus*). We hear God speaking with us (*audimus Deum nobiscum loqui*) and promising forgiveness of sins in baptism", and in the supper and the keys.<sup>38</sup>

The thought of the presence of God in baptism and at the other appointed 'places' is naturally associated with the idea that he appears, speaks and promises in them. Thus commenting on Abraham's encounter with the three men at Genesis 18:19, Luther says that God is present in baptism (as he is in the supper and the keys), "because his own word is present there." Even though our eyes and ears perceive not him, but the minister, God "himself is nevertheless truly present (*tamen ipse Deus revera adest*), baptises and absolves."<sup>39</sup> This language provides two markers for later investigation. One has already been touched upon; the relationship of baptism and the other sacraments to the Word. The other is God as the active subject in

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baptism.<sup>40</sup> For the moment however, the emphasis remains on one simple point. Because God is present, God appears, and God speaks in it, baptism is truly an appointed place for mankind's encounter with the divine.

### 2.2.3 "Running to St. James"

If God wills to be found in certain appointed places, there is the clear implication that he is not to be found elsewhere. Yet men and women frequently make their search for God in ways and places of their own choosing. Luther finds evidence of this false religion of human devising throughout the pages of Genesis, and beyond them. Cain, the citizens of Ur, the idolatrous worshippers at Bethel in the time of Hosea, and those contemporaries of Luther who follow the religion of the papists all have this in common; they despise the places of God's choice and manufacture signs and places of their own.<sup>41</sup> To seek another place and form of worship is to disregard a fundamental principle of Luther's thought, which he set out most forcibly in 1527:

. . . the right hand of God, although this is everywhere . . . you can actually grasp it nowhere, unless for your benefit it binds itself to you and summons you to a definite place. This God's right hand does, however, when it enters into the humanity of Christ and dwells there. There you will surely find it, otherwise you will run back and forth throughout all creation, grasping here and yet never finding, even though it is actually there; for it is not there for you.<sup>42</sup>

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Such attempts are doomed to failure, because in this life God shows his face only by Word and sacraments.<sup>43</sup> We must find God where he wills to be known, in the visible forms he prescribes; our own choice is sinful and delusive.<sup>44</sup> Luther repeatedly adverts to the Deuteronomic prescription for worship at a single, designated place. Thus when he comments on Genesis 22:19, which records Abraham's departure to Beer-sheba after the events on Mount Moriah, he finds it remarkable that the patriarch erected no altar and established no shrine on the mountain where he had received such a wonderful revelation and promise concerning the future Seed. Despite all his natural inclinations to offer worship there, Abraham declined to do it. And from the time of Moses the people were to offer worship only at "the Tabernacle, that is the appointed, definite, and fixed place." (*statum, certum et fixum locum.*)<sup>45</sup> But we, on the other hand, desert our tabernacle, and run to self-chosen places and forms of worship:

Such is the deplorable perversity of our nature that we do not keep what God commands or value it highly; but whatever the devil commands, this we receive and observe with the utmost eagerness and deference; we erect altars, chapels, churches; we run to Rome and to St. James. . . But meanwhile we slight Baptism, the Eucharist, absolution, and our calling.<sup>46</sup>

Luther is faced with two sets of opponents. The despising of the means of grace or of the appointed 'places' may take two different forms. There are those, most notably the papists, who substitute places, forms, signs, and externals of their own, not God's, choosing. But there are also those (here Luther is thinking of such as Carlstadt) who affect to despise external things altogether; they are in reality despising God's instituting decree. Beginning with the tree of knowledge of good and evil external forms of

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worship have been prescribed for mankind.<sup>47</sup> It is the Word of God which gives these external things their power, but it is the human necessity for some external form of worship, some prescribed form of obedience, which requires them.<sup>48</sup>

Sometimes the prohibition of all self-chosen signs and 'places' is expressed positively. In baptism and the other means of grace we have such marvellous and clear appearances of God, that all other appearances or manifestations are devalued in comparison, and it is the height of ingratitude to seek them.<sup>49</sup> But Luther must speak negatively as well. There is a sinister side to all attempts to seek God apart from the appointed signs and places — they are in reality attempts to penetrate to the hidden God; as such they are folly and worse than folly.<sup>50</sup> God wills that he is revealed only under the masks and covers of the means of grace.

### 2.2.4 The 'masks' of God

To seek God elsewhere than in baptism or in the other appointed 'places' and signs is an enterprise of great peril. The God who is found in this way is the *Deus nudus*, not the *Deus revelatus* to be encountered through the means of grace. Such *hubris* is far more than a matter of incorrect, ineffective, or even idolatrous worship; because to find the *Deus nudus*, to seek and find God other than as he wishes to be found, is to find wrath and condemnation. Inquisitive speculation about God's predestinating decree is just as much an attempt to find the *Deus nudus* as is a self-chosen form of worship.<sup>51</sup>

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The record of the Lectures depicts a thoroughgoing use by Luther of the nominalist categories associated with the distinction between *Deus nudus* and *Deus revelatus*. Luther distinguishes between the *potentia absoluta* and the *potentia ordinata*. Although from time to time God acts directly and absolutely without means, as when Daniel walked in the fire, he does so only most exceptionally. It is a fundamental principle in the Lectures that God chooses to act, speak, and deal with mankind through appointed externals, means, and agents. Thus when the text of Genesis says that God speaks to Abraham, for example, Luther is only too ready to conclude that he did this through Shem or Eber or one of the other godly patriarchs.<sup>52</sup> The corollary of this principle is clear; God wants us to act in accordance with *potentia ordinata*.<sup>53</sup>

Luther also employs the parallel distinction between the 'two wills' of God; the will of the sign (*voluntas signi*), and the will of his good pleasure (*voluntas beneplaciti/substantiali*).<sup>54</sup> Although the vocabulary is different the principle is the same; to seek God apart from the appointed means and places is like walking in the midday sun unprotected from the heat. Contemplation of the unveiled Deity should be shunned, says Luther, like hell.<sup>55</sup> The man who, through visions or speculation, finds one foot on heaven's threshold should quickly draw it back.<sup>56</sup>

Baptism and the other appointed means of grace appear in this context under the heading of the will of the sign, or of *potentia ordinata*. God's will that without baptism no one is saved ranks with the wetness of water and the burning of fire as a manifestation of *potentia ordinata*; we are wise to form our opinion on the basis of it. "God is able to save without

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Baptism . . . But in the church we must judge and teach, in accordance with God's ordered power, that without that outward Baptism no one is saved."<sup>57</sup>

But it is with the doctrine of the 'masks' that this theme reaches its greatest precision. The *Deus nudus* is awesome uncovered majesty. God wills to be encountered 'covered'; he reveals himself in a hidden way. He does so by showing himself under appointed 'masks', 'coverings' or 'faces'. Baptism is one of these. In commenting on the creation story Luther reins in speculation about God and the beginning of time:

It is folly to argue much about God outside and before time, because this is an attempt to understand the Godhead without a covering, or the uncovered divine essence (*nudam essentiam divinam*). Because this is impossible, God envelopes himself in his work in certain forms, as today he wraps himself up (*se involvit*) in baptism, absolution, etc. If you should depart from these you will get . . . into the merest nothing . . . <sup>58</sup>

The water of baptism is a veil (*velum*) or means of God's communication with us, as is the Word in which he is veiled. "*God stands behind them*" (Luther — or his editor — adds emphasis by changing to German); so that "they are the faces (*facies*) of God through which he speaks with us and works in every person individually."<sup>59</sup> As 'faces of the Lord', baptism, the supper, the keys, and the ministry of the Word and the like are to be seen as the New Testament equivalents of the pillars of fire and cloud, and of the mercy seat: "By means of these God shows us, as by a visible sign, that he is with us, cares for us, and favours us."<sup>60</sup>

2.2.5 God concealed under his opposite

It is already becoming clear that a number of themes from the heart of the Reformer's theology emerge from a review of baptism in the Lectures. One of this cluster of themes leads on to another. The 'masks', 'faces', or 'coverings' introduce the concept of God paradoxically hidden under what appears to be his opposite, *sub contraria specie*. When God 'hides behind' the veil of baptism, or of the supper, or behind circumcision or one of the other Old Testament signs, he is concealed under what he is not.<sup>61</sup> Moreover he is hidden behind what is weak, unimpressive, and all too easily despised.

Baptism, like the other appointed signs and places where God is to be encountered, is easily despised because it is common.<sup>62</sup> When the water of baptism is compared with the showy things of a manufactured religion, its appearance is doubly unimpressive. Here lies the root of the attraction of monasticism under the papacy: "For they despised the word, baptism, and the sacraments because these were less showy and did not strike the eyes of men."<sup>63</sup>

The concept of God hidden under weakness is an aspect of Luther's *theologia crucis*. The ecclesiological aspects of the theology of the cross are fully developed in the Genesis Lectures, as will emerge later. The poor appearance of the appointed signs and 'places' around which it is gathered is reflected in the outward aspect and reputation of the Church.<sup>64</sup> But meanwhile the same theme also points the argument forward in a rather different direction. At the appointed 'places' God has chosen to hide himself under wrappings. These wrappings are weak and unimpressive, so that in his

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revelation in concealment under them God is paradoxically hidden under that which is his opposite. The ground is thus prepared for a consideration of the proper mode of encountering God in baptism and at the other trysting places. That mode is faith.

### 2.2.6 The struggle of faith

But we should look at the external place not only as the world does with the eyes of flesh and in the manner of beasts; nor should we think that the word itself is an empty sound.

In baptism water is water. For the flesh judges in no other way concerning all these matters . . .

. . . the flesh fixes its eyes only on the water, on the bread, on the wine, and on the ground where Jacob slept; but the spirit must see the water, the hand, the word of God, and God in the water. The flesh sees so keenly that it judges that water is water and it excludes God, as the Sacramentarians and Anabaptists do.<sup>65</sup>

The eyes may be deceived by the ordinariness of the water of baptism. A true understanding of baptism, and a genuine encounter with God there, must see and hear the word of God added to the water. To approach the 'external place' like this requires faith. In close juxtaposition with these remarks of Luther is another to the effect that there is a struggle for faith; it is not easy to see these things in the right way.<sup>66</sup> A full discussion of baptism and faith must await the more formal presentation of baptismal theology of chapter 3.<sup>67</sup> But part of the essential background to that discussion is clear already. The faith required of man corresponds to the hiddenness of



God. The struggle for faith is closely related to the free choice of God that he is to be found under the cover of weak external things.

But there is a further dimension to the picture. The depth of the relationship between the hiddenness of God and the struggle for faith is not fully plumbed by developing the theme of the weakness of the signs and places. The paradox of God hidden under his opposite goes beyond that. God is hidden, not only under weakness, but also under the appearance of implacable hostility.

This further aspect of the matrix for the struggle of faith appears, alongside some of the other *motifs* already discussed, in Luther's exposition of Jacob's wrestling at the brook Jabbok (Gen. 32:22-32). This is indeed a truly 'Lutheran' passage if there ever was one, and it is not surprising to find that Luther develops it at some length. In the exposition the concept of 'masks' and 'coverings' is present, although not explicitly. God could have saved without Christ, without baptism, without the word of the gospel. But he did not. This fact stands out against all the self-chosen devotions of men; God is to be met where he chooses to be met. Luther echoes Hosea's condemnation of those of his contemporaries who used this passage in support of their claim that God could be worshipped anywhere. Luther castigates all those in his own time who do the same, by 'running to St. James' or the equivalent. But "[God] says, 'Here you shall adore, worship and make offerings. In the word, in the Lord's Supper, in baptism, you have the remission of sins. With these you will have to be satisfied if you wish to be saved.'"<sup>68</sup> But there is another dimension to his exposition, which arises directly out of the text before him. God is presented to Jacob as his

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opponent. Jacob has to win a victory over this hostile God. Luther compares Jacob's refusal to let go of his opponent without a blessing to the faith of the Canaanite woman of Mt. 15:28.<sup>69</sup> In reality, there is every reason to keep praying and seeking until victory is won; the divine opponent has already given firm notice of surrender. He has done so with an oath, or rather with two: "Truly, truly I say to you, that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you" (John 16:33) and, "He who believes and is baptised will be saved" (Mark 16:16).<sup>70</sup> Baptism and the other means of grace are God's notice of surrender:

But [God] is conquered in this way as soon as he has surrendered himself to us, so to say, and revealed himself in the word, in promise, in baptism. It remains that you should conquer those things which want to take this God away from you . . . Or if he pretends that he is alien and wrathful, unwilling to hear and to help, then say 'Lord God, you promised me this in your word. Do not change the promise. I am baptised, I am absolved . . .'<sup>71</sup>

### 2.2.7 The 'Trysting Place'

The controlling idea of Luther's theology of baptism as one of the means of grace in the Lectures may be expressed very simply: Baptism is a trysting place appointed for the encounter between God and man. The choice of this rather quaint vocabulary requires justification. The chief justification is that Luther uses this sort of language himself. He frequently employs the language of place in connection with the appointed signs and means through which mankind may encounter the *Deus revelatus*.<sup>72</sup> To describe baptism as a 'trysting place' makes one crucial point; baptism,

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along with other such 'places', is the site for a meeting with God. It is, moreover, a site for a meeting with God in the present.<sup>73</sup>

The metaphor which lies beneath the vocabulary is a thread which runs throughout the Lectures on Genesis. It is also a point at which a number of themes meet, all of them close to the heart of the theology of the mature Reformer. The warning against departing the appointed 'places' in favour of alternative, self-chosen sites for worship is the condemnation of a manufactured religion and the theology of glory. The unimpressiveness of baptism and the other trysting places is linked via a different metaphor — that of the 'masks' or 'veils' — to the hiddenness of God. All these things provide the arena for the struggle of faith, and, indeed, for some of the human dimensions for the outworking of that struggle in terms of *Anfechtungen*. The fact that in this initial foray into the Lectures, the exploration of just one *motif*, baptism as 'trysting place', should so readily harvest such a crop of strongly developed themes, all of which bear the authentic stamp of the mature Luther, must be allowed to say something for the value of the *Genesisvorlesung* as a source. Not only are all these themes at or near the core of the Reformer's theology; they appear in the Lectures not as a received dead orthodoxy but in living, creative form.<sup>74</sup>

The theology of baptism understood as a 'trysting place' now requires progressive refinement. The first and most pressing need is to consider God as the active subject of baptism.

2.3 GOD'S PRESENCE AND ACTIVITY IN BAPTISM

If baptism may be spoken of as one of the 'trysting places' of God and man, appointed by divine command, it is not at all surprising that Luther should be moved to speak of it frequently. Genesis is full of descriptions of encounters at various places between the patriarchs and God. When he comes across passages such as Jacob's dream at Bethel, or his wrestling with God at the brook Jabbok, it seems almost inevitable that Luther will introduce baptism and the other New Testament signs and 'places' into his exposition. But the metaphor of the 'meeting place' is not sufficient on its own, nor can it stand without further refinement.

Taken by itself, the notion of a trysting place at which God is to be found, or the 'gate of God' through which we pass has one notable danger. It could lead us to imagine that such a place or gate could be made the object of our active piety. To put aside the metaphor for the moment, the theology of the means of grace itself is open to the same charge. The water of baptism, the bread and wine of the eucharist, even the word itself; all the externals appointed under both dispensations could be used by man in his active search for God. The danger is not confined to a semi-magical *ex opere operato* view of sacramental efficacy; it concerns the fundamental question of the man-ward or God-ward *direction* of the Christian religion. To return to the metaphor, the 'places' could become the bottom rungs of a ladder, the first steps of man's progress towards God.

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The necessary corrective to this sort of thinking is the reminder that in the encounter at the chosen meeting places it is God who takes the initiative. At these places, in these signs, through these means, he is present and active in the encounter with man. The Lectures are full of references to God's presence and activity in the means of grace, and we have already seen that Luther does not stop short of the language of theophany about baptism.<sup>75</sup> It will be the aim of this section to set out and progressively to develop and refine Luther's teaching about God as present and active in the sign or at the trysting place of baptism.

### 2.3.1 God, the Minister of Baptism

Luther makes liberal use of the vocabularies of appearance, epiphany, presence, action, and speech to describe the divine role in baptism and in the other means of grace. There is no need to envy Abraham, as "we have God speaking to us in the Word, in Baptism, in Communion."<sup>76</sup> Even though we cannot see him or hear him, God is "truly present, baptises and absolves"<sup>77</sup> "He appears to you in baptism. He baptises you himself and addresses you himself."<sup>78</sup> Occasionally Luther uses almost all these categories at once, as when he comments on the bowing of Jacob's head in reverence (Gen. 47:31). God stands behind the veils of baptism and the word, so that:

they are the faces of God through which he speaks with us and works (*per quas nobiscum loquitur et operatur Deus*) in every person individually. He baptises me, he absolves me . . . For God works salvation in baptism, and this is the presence or form and epiphany of God in these means (*praesentia seu forma et Epiphania Dei in his instrumentis*).<sup>79</sup>

The same rich passage presents the trinitarian dimensions of God's revelation and speech in baptism, of which Jesus' baptism is the pattern. In baptism our attention should be fixed on the manifest appearance in the Jordan "where the voice of the Father is heard from heaven, the flesh of the Son is seen, and the Holy Spirit appears in the form of a dove . . . In Baptism the voice of the Trinity sounds, and the words of baptism must not be heard or received in any other way."<sup>80</sup>

Two features of the pattern of Luther's language about God's activity and presence in baptism are particularly striking. One of them is the predominance of speech as the mode in which he typically presents the divine activity, which will be explored in the next section. The other is the way in which Luther frequently speaks of God as the minister of baptism. Naturally, Luther does on occasion refer to the human minister as the baptiser.<sup>81</sup> Yet it is more common for him to discourage any attention to the human minister, and to point to the divine minister, who "baptises you himself".<sup>82</sup> One effect of this emphasis is that it tends to identify the divine presence, action and revelation in baptism with the moment of administration. Thus when the voice of the Trinity sounds in baptism, and Luther warns that baptism must be heard and received as such, and not in any other way, the link with Jesus' baptism by John appears to place Luther's readers or hearers firmly in the position of witnesses to a baptism. *There* they can see and hear the divine minister acting and speaking. But is what Luther means by God's epiphany or speech or presence in baptism to be entirely located at that particular moment? This question is of fundamental importance to the whole of Luther's baptismal theology; if the thought of the divine ministry of the rite accounts for *all* Luther's words about God's

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presence and activity in baptism, nothing is left which can last beyond the completion of the rite — except, perhaps, memory.

The answer to the question introduces a theme which is vitally important to a correct understanding of baptism in Luther's writings. It can best be described as the 'present tense' of baptism for Luther. When Luther talks of God appearing, working or speaking in baptism, his attention is *not* confined to the time at which the baptismal formula is spoken and the water is poured. Some of the examples already given in this section give at least indirect support to this proposition. Luther is lecturing to baptised people, but his hearers — and others — are exhorted to attend to God's presence and word in baptism, now. When Luther considers himself blessed above Abraham for the clarity of the appearance of God vouchsafed him in baptism, or when he discourages any seeking of special visions, he does so because God is visible in baptism and the other signs, to be beheld, *now*:

We do not long for such revelations or appearances; we are satisfied, and we thank God to the best of our ability for our own appearances and faces (*apparitionibus et faciebus*) of God, which we behold (present tense: *videmus*) in baptism and in the entire ministry of the word.<sup>83</sup>

The 'present tense' of baptism will be a recurrent theme in this study. (See, for example §§ 3.2.4; 3.3.2; 3.3.3; 3.5.2; 3.7; 4.3.1; 4.3.4; 4.4.2; 5.3.3; 6.4.2.) Meanwhile it is sufficient to note, both that the theme of God as the active subject of baptism has clear implications for the understanding of the baptismal rite itself, through the notion of the divine minister of the

sacrament; and that divine action in the administration of baptism does not exhaust the significance of God's presence and activity in the sacrament.

2.3.2 God's Speech: Baptism and Word

In baptism, in absolution, in communion, it is said to us: 'I am the Lord your God, do not be troubled . . .'<sup>84</sup>

Although Luther uses other language to describe God's presence and activity in baptism, his vocabulary is predominantly that of speech. God addresses man at the trysting place of baptism. This *motif* is more prominent in the Lectures on Genesis than that of the divine baptiser, a fact which in itself illustrates Luther's apparent lack of exclusive focus upon the moment of administration.

The notion that in the means of grace God speaks his word to mankind opens up a way into the understanding of God's action and presence in the sacraments. Baptism as God's speech or word also raises the vexed question of the relationship of word and sacrament with Luther. The most obvious starting point in a consideration of that relationship is the Augustinian formula, *accedit verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum*, with which Luther concurs.<sup>85</sup> In the Lectures the New Testament sacraments, like the Old Testament signs such as the rainbow, circumcision or the sacrifices of the cult are visible externals to which God has added his word of promise; or rather, to use the order more typical of the Lectures, they are the external things which God has chosen to add to his word. Word and sign are always



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*iuxta*.<sup>86</sup> But the relationship of word and sacrament is more complex than it might at first seem. The word, and the ministry of the word, not only appear as that which is joined to the appointed external signs, or as that to which in God's accommodating mercy they are added.<sup>87</sup> The word also appears *alongside* baptism, the eucharist and other external signs as another of the means of grace, as another 'mask' or 'veil'. For Luther, the word of promise is added to the simple water of baptism; the water is a creature "apprehended by the word".<sup>88</sup> But the word is also one of the visible signs itself, and by far the most typical expression of the relationship between baptism and word in the Lectures is when they stand side by side as fellow members of the group of external signs and 'places'.<sup>89</sup>

At the root of the complexity in the relationship of word and sacrament is the polyvalence of *verbum*. There is clear evidence within the Lectures of this polyvalence. Sometimes, when Luther placed *verbum* alongside the sacraments as one of the 'masks' Luther appears to be thinking of the ministry of the word, which in turn seems on occasion to be equivalent to the keys, added to baptism in accommodation to human weakness.<sup>90</sup> At other times *verbum* is the divine word to which the sign is joined. The tension between *verbum* as the divine self-disclosure and *verbum* as the human speech which conveys it (or Him) is fully reflected in the Lectures. This issue will be explored more thoroughly in the context of Luther's formal baptismal theology in the next chapter (§ 3.2.2). Meanwhile it is important to note the danger of attempting to move too quickly to a clear-cut view of the priority of word over sacrament which does not account for the fluidity to be observed in Luther's actual usage.

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The complexities of the word/baptism relationship do not, however, undermine the simple proposition that Luther's most characteristic statement about God's presence and action in baptism is that in baptism, God is speaking. This statement needs further precision, which is supplied by the category of promise.

### 2.3.3 The Word of Promise

But because the rabbis do not pay attention to the word, they blunder miserably and come out in favour of the opinion that the inherent character of those trees was either death-dealing or life giving. They do not realise that all these things happen because God either promises or threatens.<sup>91</sup>

The divine word to which the sign of baptism is joined is a word of promise.<sup>92</sup> This is so with all the New Testament signs and 'places'; although in the Old Testament a sign could instead be joined to a word of threat, as with the tree of knowledge of good and evil.<sup>93</sup> Without the divine promise or threat, the appointed external sign would have no value whatsoever. The religion of Cain was empty and aimless wandering precisely because there was no divine promise attached to an appointed place or work.<sup>94</sup> But the people of God have never been without his promises, whether of the rainbow, of circumcision, or of baptism. Luther uses the present tense in the context of promise, just as he does in the less specific context of God's speech: "we see this glory face to face. We hear God speaking with us and promising (*audimus Deum nobiscum loqui, et promittere*) forgiveness of

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sins in baptism, in the supper of his Son, and in the true use of the keys. These Abraham did not have . . . "95

The category of promise is fundamental to Luther's understanding of the Christian life. Because God's characteristic activity in baptism and at the other trysting places is promising, there is a demand for faith. The eschatological tension in Luther's baptismal doctrine stems directly from this point:

Thus baptism is handed over to me now (*sicut mihi traditur Baptismus in praesenti*), and forgiveness of sins is handed over; for I do not hope for the remission of sins, but I have it forthwith in faith.<sup>96</sup>

Therefore faith is not a laughable cold quality that snores and is idle in the heart. No, it is agitated by horrible trials concerning the nothingness and the vanity of the divine promises (*nihilitudine et vanitate promissionem divinarum*). For I believe in Christ, whom I do not see; but I have his baptism, the sacrament of the altar, consolation through the word and absolution. Yet I see nothing of what he promises. Indeed I feel the opposite in my flesh. Here, then, one must struggle and do battle against distrust and doubt.<sup>97</sup>

Within the space of a few pages we find Luther expressing both sides of the paradox; the 'already' versus the 'not yet', the possession of the promise against the apparent invisibility of what it conveys. The scene is set for the struggle and trials of faith. Part of this struggle consists of an active waiting. Jacob had to wait for the promised blessings, as the baptised have to wait for what is promised them. The sacraments are powerful, even to the point of opening heaven and shutting up hell, but all is done in faith. "We are still waiting", says Luther.<sup>98</sup>

That God's speech with us is after the manner of promise is one dimension of the paradoxical hiddenness of God's epiphany in baptism and the other sacraments, and part of the identity of the means of grace as the 'masks' of God. The centrality of promise is also part of the 'weakness' of the signs and 'places'; they, and the people of God who gather round them are despicable because they exhibit no external evidence of glory. That glory remains hidden for the present.<sup>99</sup>

#### 2.3.4 The Forgiveness of Sins

God is present and active at the trysting place of baptism in that he speaks there; when he speaks he promises. Finally, the content of that promise must be specified. Luther uses a range of expressions to describe what the promise of baptism conveys. For instance, in baptism we are promised the kingdom of God, eternal life, God's favour.<sup>100</sup> But by far the most typical of Luther's statements about the content of the promise is that it conveys the forgiveness of sins. For reasons that will become clear, however, it is important to note that the content of the promise is not *completely* expressed in terms of the forgiveness of sins.

There are two important features of this further identification of God's action in baptism as promising the forgiveness of sins. One of them is the underlining of the unity of the means of grace, in that the same promise is spoken in them all. The New Testament signs and 'places' are not only all joined to divine promises — they are joined to the *same* divine promise. God is promising the forgiveness of sins in, or at, all of them.<sup>101</sup> The

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unity of the promise lies behind Luther's apparent carelessness in his listing and ordering of the meeting places of God and man.

The other important aspect of the identity of the promise as the forgiveness of sins is that it fully preserves the eschatological tension. The baptismal promise of forgiveness is an *effective* promise. To say that forgiveness of sins has been promised is also to say that it has been granted, handed over, in the present.<sup>102</sup> Yet because it is *forgiveness* of sins that has been so conveyed, the consequence is that there remains a 'not yet', a waiting for the full experience of all that baptism implies and promises *beyond* forgiveness, including the complete *removal* of sin.

Because, says Luther, the papists will not follow Augustine in distinguishing between the forgiveness of sins and the removal of sin,

they never penetrate to the true light of scripture, of the Kingdom of Christ, and of theology as a whole. .

. . . through baptism we have been taken upon God's beast, that is, the most precious sacrifice for us, or the the humanity of Christ, by which we are carried; certainly accepted once, we are truly cared for and healed from day to day. (*semel quidem recepti, de die vero in diem curamur et sanamur.*)<sup>103</sup>

Sandwiched between the two halves of this quotation is Luther's strange allegorical use of the story of the man left half dead by robbers in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:34). The man is "half dead" because, although his wounds have been bandaged, and he is strapped to the Samaritan's ass, and on the way to the place of rest and healing, he is still

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only on the way, and above all, the bandages do not alter the fact that the wounds are still deadly. Likewise, Luther is prepared to argue, we are baptised, seated upon God's beast of baptism, but the gift of the Holy Spirit to us has only begun. It is not just the tinder of sins which remains after baptism, and "we have been received into grace through baptism not only for the remission of sins but also for purging sin away (*Sumus enim recepti in gratiam non solum ad remissionem peccatorum, sed etiam ad expurgationem*)."<sup>104</sup> For Luther the work of baptism is never complete in this life, it is not something which can be left behind as the static doorpost marking the entry into life, as we progress to other, new grace or sources of grace.<sup>105</sup> There is always a tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet' in Luther's statements about the promise of baptism.

Baptism, then, is one of the appointed 'places' at which God wishes to be found. (§ 2.2) It is a 'place' at which he is the active subject — he baptises (§ 2.3.1) — but the essential mode of his action there, which cannot be tied exclusively to the moment of administration, is speech (§ 2.3.2). When he speaks in baptism, God addresses us with the word of promise (§ 2.3.3). Because his action there is promise, the proper mode of our encounter with him at this trusting place is faith. The content of what God promises in baptism is the whole of salvation in general, and the forgiveness of sins in particular; this dual statement preserves the eschatological tension which constitutes the matrix for faith (§ 2.3.4).

Much of what has been said about baptism thus far, however, could have been applied to any or all of the other means of grace. They share the same nature as signs which have been added to the word of promise, and God's

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action and presence in them as he addresses mankind with the same word of promise are one. It is now time to examine the *particular* identity of baptism as one of the trysting places. The most appropriate starting point is the Old Testament sign of circumcision.

2.4 ENTERING THE COVENANT: Baptism and Circumcision

How is baptism to be differentiated from the other signs and 'places' appointed for mankind's encounter with God? The obvious answer is that baptism has two distinctive features; its position as first in order of time amongst the means of grace, and its unrepeatability as the once and for all entry into the covenant.<sup>106</sup>

But a note of caution must be injected, before these seemingly obvious statements are taken at face value, and the entry to the covenant is too readily and too exclusively identified with baptism. It is only to be expected, and it is most certainly the case, that in Luther's references to baptism, the vocabulary of entering, beginning, and new birth abounds. But it would be wrong to assume that baptism has a monopoly of such application amongst the means of grace. It is already abundantly clear that baptism and the other 'places', the eucharist in particular, are so often bracketed together that it is difficult, and also inadvisable, to attempt to draw too sharp a distinction between them as regards their use, effects and significance. There is a certain fluidity of language to be reckoned with, as when Luther talks about children of the eternal kingdom being born through "them", referring to the sacraments in plural number, rather than restricting this to the use of one.<sup>107</sup> When Luther says that the title, *PORTA DEI* is to be written where the word and the sacraments are; *porta*, presumably, means something through which to enter, ie. we are to enter through all the signs, not just baptism.<sup>108</sup> But any question of looseness of



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expression or thought on Luther's part, is subsidiary to the underlying christological unity of all the means of grace, in all of which the same word of promise is to be heard (see § 2.3.4 above). This is the most pressing reason for caution as we begin the consideration of the particular place of baptism in distinction to the other means of grace.

This important caveat having been entered, it will be the purpose of this section to examine what can be gleaned from the Lectures about baptism as the first sign, as initiation into the covenant, and as 'covenant' itself. An invaluable source for the investigation lies ready to hand. When Luther reaches Genesis 17 he offers a sustained treatment of circumcision, and of the parallels and contrasts between baptism and circumcision; two signs and two covenants.<sup>109</sup>

### 2.4.1 Baptism and Circumcision: Two 'Certain Places'

Both baptism and circumcision are signs of the divine promise.<sup>110</sup> But the resemblance between them goes far deeper than that; it embraces the entire series of themes which cluster around Luther's theology of the means of grace. Luther speaks of circumcision, as he does of the New Testament signs, using the vocabulary of 'place':

this sign or covenant (*signum seu pactum*) was entrusted to Abraham as to a standard-bearer (*vexillifero*), in order that through circumcision all nations might have a definite place and a definite person (*certum locum et certum personam*) in whom God would appear visibly and in association with whom they

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would find the true God, who was to be found nowhere else in the entire world.<sup>111</sup>

Here is the trysting place *motif* writ large. God is to be sought where he wills to be found; in circumcision as in baptism. It is this common ground which underlies the whole comparison, and Luther returns to it again and again.

In addition to all that they share as divinely appointed 'places', baptism and circumcision share a common position. Both of them come first in the series of God-given signs under their respective covenants. Both stand at the entrance to the covenant as the unrepeatable beginning. Both are spoken of, not just as the entrance to covenant, but as 'covenant' *tout court*.<sup>112</sup> If one fell away from either covenant, there was no necessity or possibility of a repetition, rather a call to return to it and to courage and faith in its promise.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, the content of the promise and the manner of its appropriation are the same under the two covenants; the circumcised, like the baptised, are the people of God, "justified by the justifying faith (*iustificati fide iustificante*) which the Lord grants them through His Spirit."<sup>114</sup> There is also an important parallel between the covenants of circumcision and of baptism in the manner of their inauguration. Just as the baptism of Christ is distinct from all the other instances of Christian baptism which followed it; so the circumcision of Abraham is unique. Abraham was righteous *before* his circumcision, as Christ was not baptised in order to be made righteous; but by contrast those who come after in both cases "are made righteous by believing the promise and making use of the sacrament in faith."<sup>115</sup>

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Circumcision, like baptism, is administered to infants. Luther appears to allow his reasoning here to lead him in the same direction as it does about baptism; if circumcision, too, is efficacious by reason of the promise, which can only be accepted through faith, "it follows not only that the little boys who were circumcised were received into the people of God and justified, but also that, because of the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, the little boys have faith."<sup>116</sup> Under both covenants, infant faith is a phenomenon whose reality is not observed, but deduced.<sup>117</sup> Luther deals with the question of uncircumcised males who die before the eighth day in the same way that he approaches that of unbaptised infants. In both cases there is no sin against the covenant, whether of baptism or circumcision, and so their souls may safely be left to the mercy of God. It is those adults who have contempt for circumcision or baptism who are surely damned.<sup>118</sup>

Like baptism, circumcision is marked by external weakness, and seems trivial, paltry, even foolish (*non solum exiguum et vile, sed etiam stultum*).<sup>119</sup> Both signs are all too easily held in contempt; and as far as circumcision goes, Luther would add that part of the weakness of the sign is the shameful nature of the part appointed to receive it.<sup>120</sup> He paints a vivid picture of the faithful obedience of the aged Abraham in his submission to so shameful and disgusting a rite with no apparent sense in it.<sup>121</sup> The outward weakness of both signs is in accordance with their identity as 'masks' and 'coverings'; as they convey the revelation of God hidden under that which is his opposite. There is another parallel, which has further significance. When administered, circumcision causes pain. Such suffering is not to be thought of as having merit, or as a work.<sup>122</sup> Rather, it is to be seen as the precise parallel of the drowning or the death of

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baptism: "Thus God burdens and slays the church according to the flesh."<sup>123</sup> Like baptism, circumcision is an affliction, a cross; but the two signs are identical in that their *significatio* is double. The resemblance between the two covenants reaches its apex at this point; in circumcision, as in baptism, there is not only the crucifixion of the flesh but also the resurrection of the spirit.<sup>124</sup> But there is also strong evidence in the Lectures of a very different relationship between the two signs.

### 2.4.2 Circumcision and Baptism: Flesh and Spirit?

Baptism has superseded the earlier sign of the earlier covenant.<sup>125</sup> Circumcision was there to serve the promise of the Seed, and that promise was included in it. Now that the promise has been fulfilled, what further need is there for circumcision?<sup>126</sup> Part of the error of the Jews is that they refuse to see that circumcision lasted only until Christ came with a new sign, after the old sign or covenant had been abolished, to include the Gentiles as well.<sup>127</sup> There was to be a "new mark (*novum signaculum*) by which both the Jews and the Gentiles should be certified as sharers in the eternal grace".<sup>128</sup> Although Luther appears reluctant to talk in terms of the abolition of the old covenant, and is indeed capable of talking of one covenant; it is certainly the case that one sign has been replaced by another.<sup>129</sup>

But is the contrast between baptism and circumcision solely a matter of supersession? In apparent contradiction with his belief that the (spiritual) promises attached to the two signs are identical, Luther contrasts them as

flesh and spirit, and therefore he seems to imply that circumcision has to do with benefits conferred by birth according to the flesh.<sup>130</sup> The only way of resolving this contradiction is to draw the distinction between circumcision as a sign of the old covenant to be received by faith, and circumcision now, after its time, vaunted by the Jews as a work. It is the latter which Luther regards as 'flesh'. As circumcision is no longer one of the appointed meeting places at which God is to be sought, it has now fallen under the proscription of all self-chosen forms of worship.

Luther emphasises that circumcision is not given solely for the benefit of the circumcised. This is not only for the obvious reason that the female sex is excluded from the sign. It is also because, other races, similarly excluded from the sign, nevertheless are included in the right use of that sign in faith: ". . . circumcision is raised up as a sign or a banner to be looked at by those who are to be saved (*circumcisio erigitur in signum seu vexillum, quod respiciatur ab illis*) . . . a universal sign is given — a sign which pertained to the church in such a way that even those who did not have this sign, but believed it (*qui signum hoc non haberent, et crederent*), were not excluded from the church."<sup>131</sup> "The correct definition of circumcision is this: it is a public mark (*publicum insigne*) by which all, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, are urged to follow in the footsteps of Abraham."<sup>132</sup> This aspect of the covenant of circumcision has implications for Luther's use of the word *ecclesia* in his exposition of Genesis (§ 2.5.4 below). The boundary lines between church and not-church, salvation and exclusion from the promise, are very hard to draw. The use of circumcision by the faithful uncircumcised has to be taken account of, as has Luther's insistence that not all who possessed the sign had the use of it, in faith,

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for righteousness. The picture is further complicated by the fact that Luther does not achieve complete consistency in his adherence to the principle that the benefits and use of circumcision are spiritual. For example, Ishmael received the sign, and was therefore part of the wider covenant community, which received the promise in a physical sense, but he was excluded from the narrower promise of the future saviour.<sup>133</sup>

Has the use of the sign without possession of it any relevance to the case of baptism? Luther's insistence that apart from baptism there is no salvation implies that there can be no equivalent in the New Testament of 'looking at' the 'banner' or 'standard' without actual possession of the sign. But precisely what is involved in being 'apart from' baptism? When Luther compares the sacrifices ordained for Adam with the signs of today, he makes the familiar statement that where the signs of the eucharist, of baptism and the word are, so also are Christ, forgiveness of sins and eternal life. "Contrariwise, where these signs of grace are not present, or are despised by men (*ubi haec signa gratiae non sunt, vel ubi contemnuntur ab hominibus*)", there is no grace, only error.<sup>134</sup> But which is more critical, the absence or the despising of the signs? The example of the unbaptised through neglect or accident, where Luther cannot insist on the absolute necessity of baptism, suggests that it is the despising which is of greater consequence. In addition, of course, it is quite possible to despise baptism whilst in possession of the sign. But the obvious difference when baptism is compared with circumcision from this point of view is that the latter is in principle unavailable to some who may still 'look' to it.<sup>135</sup> In the case of baptism, absence of the sign must entail a despising of it, except in the exceptional circumstances of its unavailability. God is certainly able to save without

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baptism, "But in the church we must teach and judge in accordance with God's ordered power, that without that outward Baptism no-one is saved."<sup>136</sup>

### 2.4.3 Baptism as Covenant

Baptism and circumcision, then, are two signs and 'places' appointed by God. They stand as signs of initiation at the entrance to their respective covenants. Although Luther does not speak unequivocally on this point, the weight of the evidence confirms a spiritual and not a physical promise as the word to which circumcision is joined. Some of his statements imply that Luther saw baptism and circumcision as two signs, which, although appointed for use by different people and at different times, pertain to one and the same covenant. In their own times and in their right uses they are closely parallel; although the use of circumcision at a time when it is no longer an appointed 'place' puts it in the category of 'flesh'. At other times Luther's language does not present baptism and circumcision merely as entries to their covenants, but it identifies them as the covenants (covenant) themselves.

Luther's description of baptism as covenant (*pactum*) and his use of the parallel between baptism and circumcision have been questioned. Both have been seen as rare in Luther and as more typical of Melanchthon.<sup>137</sup> However, Luther described baptism as covenant in his 1519 treatise, one of his major works on baptism.<sup>138</sup> But it is the extent and depth of the sustained development of both these themes in the exposition of Gen. 17 which must count as the main defence of their authenticity. These are not additions or

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emendations at the margin; these themes dominate the record we have of the Lectures for page after page.<sup>139</sup>

Baptism then, not only is the sacrament of initiation to the covenant. Like circumcision, it is the covenant. After wandering away, the wanderers return to baptism or circumcision; there is no idea that as signs of initiation they can have no further use. In another way, both signs determine the nature of life under their covenant as death and resurrection. The pain and shame of circumcision and the drowning of baptism both signify and go on signifying what manner of life is to be lived under the covenant. That baptism cannot be confined to the beginning of life under the covenant but is that covenant; or that it is not just the entrance to a new life, but continues to determine that life throughout its length; these aspects of Luther's view of baptism further underline its 'present tense'.<sup>140</sup>

But if baptism is not only the entrance to the covenant, it is no less than this. Through the sign of baptism, as through circumcision, the Church is born. As the sign of initiation, baptism must play its part in defining the limits of the Church. The relationship between the covenant sign and the covenant people must now be considered.



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### 2.5 THE PEOPLE OF THE COVENANT: Baptism and the Church

How am I to know for certain that I belong to the people of God?<sup>141</sup>

Luther answers his question in terms of the signs.<sup>142</sup> Before the incarnation the fathers had the promise, the word and the voice of God, and the sign of circumcision. Now we have the keys, baptism, the eucharist and the promises of the gospel. Here one may find the grounds of assurance of Christian identity — in one's baptism, in one's discharge of a holy calling. Baptism, then, identifies the people of God. *Prima facie*, it would seem that because baptism is the sacrament of initiation into the Church, the relationship between baptism and Church must be simple; one is the boundary of the other. I can be certain that I belong to the people of God chiefly because I am within that boundary, I have been baptised.

In reality the relationship is not simple at all for Luther. Sufficient evidence of this is already available. . . Many of those who are within the baptised community have effectively abandoned their baptism, by 'running to St. James', or elsewhere (§ 2.2.3). Not all hear the baptismal word of promise in faith (§§ 2.2.6, 2.3.3). In the Old Testament Church the picture is complicated, as there are uncircumcised people within the Church, and circumcised people who are, nevertheless, outside it (§ 2.4.2). This may have implications for the New Testament Church. Where and how are its boundaries to be drawn?

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It will be the task of this section to present the main features of Luther's ecclesiology as it appears in the Lectures, and in so doing to begin to explore the consequences for the relationship between baptism and the Church. Further discussion of the implications of Luther's ecclesiology for baptismal theology must, however, await chapter 6.

### 2.5.1 Ecclesia Adae

But this tree of the knowledge of good and evil was Adam's church, altar, and pulpit. Here he was to yield to God the obedience he owed, give recognition to the word and will of God, give thanks to God, and call upon God for aid against temptation.<sup>143</sup>

The Church begins with Adam. This is so in a number of ways. Already in Eden, in the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he had a prescribed external form of worship, a sign to which in this case a threat rather than a promise was attached. The Church makes its appearance at precisely the moment at which an external sign is designated by the divine word.

But in another sense it is after the Fall, at the promise of the Seed to Adam, that the Church can be said to have been born. From this point on, although the appointed signs and places for worship would vary, the continuity of the one Church through all these changes would consist in the unity of the promise to which the signs are joined. The word which constitutes the Church is the fountainhead of all other promises, the promise of the Seed.<sup>144</sup>

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Throughout the Lectures Luther conjures up a vivid picture of the preaching ministry of the patriarchs. It is with Adam that this ministry begins. He, with Eve, would remind his 'Church' of the hope of the promise of the Seed, and of the required sacrifices, which were the appointed sign of their time.<sup>145</sup> When Luther reaches the admonition to Cain at Gen.4:6f., he concludes that the words are a sermon of Adam.<sup>146</sup> When Adam fell asleep 'in faith in the blessed Seed', the leading role in this ministry as chief prophet and priest (*summus Propheta et Pontifex*) passed to Seth.<sup>147</sup> The pattern continues throughout the Lectures. In the time of Noah, Abraham, or Jacob the Church is gathered around the signs and 'places', and around the preaching of the patriarchs.

The impression gained from an initial survey of the Church in the Lectures is that Luther pays far more attention to the focus or centre about which the Church is gathered, than to the boundary which defines the Church and delineates its precise membership and extent.<sup>148</sup> This makes the roles of circumcision and of baptism more difficult to describe. Although they are signs of initiation and of membership of the covenant, and would therefore seem to be placed more naturally at the boundary of the Church; Luther places them alongside the other signs, firmly at the centre. Baptism is one of the 'places' at which the Church gathers, one of the standards at which people must gaze for salvation. The difficulties involved in assigning it a role at the circumference of the Church become yet clearer when the paradoxes and tensions which blur that circumference are explored.

2.5.2 The Two Churches

[With Cain and Abel] the church begins to be divided into two churches: the one which is the church in name but in reality is nothing but a hypocritical and bloodthirsty church; and the other one, which is without influence, forsaken, and exposed to suffering and the cross, and which before the world and in the sight of that hypocritical church is truly Abel, that is, vanity and nothing. For Christ also calls Abel righteous and makes him the beginning of the church of the godly, which will continue until the end (Mt. 23:35). Similarly, Cain is the beginning of the church of the wicked and of the bloodthirsty until the end of the world. Augustine treats this story in a similar way in his book *Civitate Dei*.<sup>149</sup>

From the beginning the Church appears as the community of those who have received the promise of the Seed, who worship according to the signs and other externals prescribed by divine command, and who receive the ministry of the word through the fathers. But also, almost from the beginning, the Church is divided. There is a constant pattern to be observed, a continual parting of the ways. The church of Cain must be contrasted with that of Abel or Seth; the church of Ham with that of Shem, that of Ishmael with that of Isaac. The church of Esau stands against that of Jacob. One is a church in name only (*in nomine*), although in appearance it possesses everything. The other has no influence, is marked by weakness, exposed to suffering and persecution from the former, in whose eyes it is despicable. The pattern remains constant throughout the ten year period of the Lectures, as does the way in which Luther applies it to his own day.<sup>150</sup>

There is an inescapably paradoxical element to the two churches theme in the Lectures. Luther views exterior weaknesses as the *vera et infallibilia*

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*signa verae Ecclesiae.*<sup>151</sup> This is the holy cross, one of the marks of the Church.<sup>152</sup> The contrast between the two churches is eschatological in nature, opposing the present wealth, success, size and splendour of the one and the beggarliness of the other, which can live only in faith and hope.<sup>153</sup> Although Jacob has been entrusted with the government of the household and the Church, he has to flee into an alien land, and live, not by bread, but by the word, and to wait for what has been promised. Esau, meanwhile, enjoys lordship as head of the household and priest of the Church, even though he has lost the blessing. The scene is set for the struggle of faith, which must be a true faith, as *fides informis* cannot sustain and bear such assaults.<sup>154</sup>

The division between the two churches is closely linked with the appointed trysting places. When Cain is banished, he wanders in the land of Nod: Luther emphasises that his wandering comes from the fact that he has no command, no promise, no given place. He is sent away from the face of the Lord, that is, away from the appointed signs of God's presence with his people.<sup>155</sup> This is the case of all those who have no command for all their self-chosen observances and traditions. Often the worship of the false church is more impressive and glorious than that of the true; the weak and despised appointed signs make a very poor showing in comparison with it.

An example of the false church's self-chosen worship *par excellence* is the building of the Tower of Babel. The Tower points to a worship of far greater impressiveness than that of the true church. It is a human attempt to climb up to heaven.<sup>156</sup> But it was through the despised church of Shem that God preserved, as was always his wont, "a people that would cling to

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the word and would be the guardian of religion and sound doctrine in the world, lest everything degenerate into ungodliness and there be no knowledge of God among men."<sup>157</sup> As its pattern develops, the two churches theme betrays Luther's tendency towards pessimism about the course of the world's history.<sup>158</sup> Gradually even the church of the godly departs from the word, and we are left with just a few lights shining brightly, like Noah, "in this conglomeration of people who were becoming progressively worse (*hominum colluvie degenerantium*)". The same thing, says Luther, is happening now, "at the end of the world".<sup>159</sup> Luther frequently uses the biblical concept of the *reliquiae Ecclesiae*, the 'remnants' of this preserved church of the godly.<sup>160</sup> The pattern acts in a cyclical way. The true church, when persecution and suffering recedes for a while, begins to grow in self-confidence, is tempted to abandon the appointed signs, and relies on its birthright. A new generation sees another division, the 'true' church is now false, except for a despised remnant which remains faithful.

The distinction, and indeed the conflict, between the two churches, is without doubt one of the most persistent themes of the Lectures.<sup>161</sup> But despite the sharp tension between the true church and the false, it is very hard to draw a clear boundary between them.

### 2.5.3 Separating the Two Churches: A Porous Boundary

The boundary between the two churches is permeable, in that it can be crossed by individuals. For instance, through God's uncovenanted mercies some of the Cainites were converted. Luther is also prepared to say this of

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some of the descendants of Esau.<sup>162</sup> The boundary of the true church is blurred yet further by Luther's recognition of knowledge of God completely outside the covenant of circumcision.<sup>163</sup>

There is also another, more corporate, aspect of the porosity of the boundary which separates the two churches. The cyclical nature of the pattern which Luther draws from the 'church history' he finds in Genesis demonstrates the temptation which continually faces the true church. It is easy and natural for it to begin to boast in its possession of the signs, and in a new generation for it to presume upon its place or birthright. But trust in *res presentes et possessas* is a snare, even if they are promised by God. In such trust, the true church sinks into falsehood. The Lectures present the same cycle again and again.

Luther pictures a group of people, closely centred upon, almost physically ranged around, the appointed places, signs and sacraments - a 'gathered' community indeed, with its appointed meetings and forms of worship.<sup>164</sup> This closely knit community endures tyranny, suffering and persecution from the other, much larger, and in every way more impressive group with its glittering shrines and glorious worship. Individuals may from time to time break out from the close community to which they belong and change their allegiance, as it were, although such to-ings and fro-ings happen very much at the margin. But at certain times of crisis a fresh division breaks out in the gathered community. Part of it is tempted to self-reliance, to pride, to self-chosen worship, to trust in its 'rights' according to the flesh. The true church thus has become a new false community, however much it retains the vocabulary and the name and the trappings of what it thinks it

possesses. The cause of the crisis of the Flood was not the general unrighteousness of the sons of Cain, the false church, but the falling away *en masse* of the children of Seth.<sup>165</sup> After each crisis a new pitiful remnant emerges, divinely chosen to receive the promise of the coming Seed. "He nevertheless has his little church (*ecclesiolam*), even though it is small and hidden."<sup>166</sup>

Luther hints that the process may happen in reverse — the boundary is porous in both directions. The false church is rejected because of its presumptuous reliance upon primogeniture and its confidence in its own size and glory. Yet there is the possibility of repentance, and hence of salvation, for the churches of Cain, of Ishmael, or of Esau.<sup>167</sup>

A further difficulty involved in the separation of the two churches is highlighted by Luther's occasional use of 'church' in an undifferentiated way, to encompass the whole mass of those who claim the name. Thus Luther talks of the need in the Church for the preaching of both law and gospel, for both the threats and the promises of which scripture consists. Why? "Because the church is never altogether pure; the greater part is always wicked as the parable of the seed teaches (Mt.13:3ff.). In fact, the true saints themselves, who are righteous through faith in the Son of God, have the sinful flesh, which must be mortified by constant chastening . . ."<sup>168</sup> Not only is it impossible completely to detach the true church from the false; a boundary cannot confidently be drawn because ultimately such a boundary would pass within the individual Christian, and not between a discrete pure church and the rest of the world outside. One might go further and say that the mere act of drawing such a line constitutes the confidence in the flesh



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which Luther condemns; one could only draw it to find oneself outside it. The question of the essential inseparability of the two churches will be taken up in chapter 6.<sup>169</sup>

### 2.5.4 The Church and the Two Testaments: Luther and Church History

If the *division* between the two churches is one of the most striking features of the Lectures, so also is the *unity* of the one Church across the divide between the Old and New Testaments. Much of the evidence for this unity has already been rehearsed. The promise attached to the covenant of circumcision was spiritual, not physical.<sup>170</sup> Luther speaks of the covenant as one, although the signs attached to it have changed from sacrifice to circumcision to baptism.<sup>171</sup> This unity across the divide between the Testaments is christologically rooted — the Church is one because the promise around which it is gathered has been one since the time of Adam, the promise of forgiveness of sins and salvation in the advent of the Seed.<sup>172</sup> The other parallels which have been noted: the weakness of the signs; the temptation of a showy manufactured religion; the struggle of faith; the despised remnant of the Church; these and all the other resemblances between life under the two dispensations are built upon the essential unity of the covenant and the promise.

The ecclesiology of the Lectures presents the essential unity and continuity of the one Church as persisting despite all the cycles of growth and decay, struggle and division.<sup>173</sup> But not only does the line from Adam onwards remain unbroken through all the crises and vicissitudes which Luther

sees in the pages of Genesis, it also continues, across the watershed of the Incarnation, right up to the crises and struggles of Luther's own day. This continuous 'line' from Adam bears no organic relationship to the visible 'line' of succession and inheritance in which man places his trust. Again and again the two lines diverge, as God demonstrates his disregard for all human claims. The continuity of the history of the Church must be sought, not on the historical plane, but in the unity of the word of promise itself.<sup>174</sup>

It is the continuity across the watershed of the Incarnation that is of particular interest. The extent of this continuity tends to undermine the qualitative distinction between history before, and after, the advent of Christ.<sup>175</sup> The 'line' seems to pass right through the divide between the two Testaments, which divide appears to occasion no radical alteration in the cyclical pattern of the conflict between the true and the false churches, or in the other pressures which affect the Church. Luther is at odds with the medieval tradition at this point, and in particular with Augustine. This is thrown into sharp relief by a comparison with Augustine's view of the history of the Church; in *De civitate Dei* the discontinuity at the Incarnation is so pronounced that sacred history is in suspension until the Parousia.<sup>176</sup>

Luther does not, of course, ignore the differences between the two Testaments; nor does he in any other sense underplay the significance of the Incarnation. It is, after all, the Incarnation which fulfilled the promise around which the Church was gathered from the time of Adam. Yet even though the promise of circumcision was fulfilled in Christ (which is why it is now 'flesh' for the Jews who rely on it) life after the Incarnation is still governed by the categories of faith and promise. Even if the promise

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is now, under the New Testament, revealed in Christ, the existential situation of the faithful member of the Church bears a strong resemblance to what it was under the Old Testament. There is still weakness on the surface, a need to see and hear God under the appearance of his opposite; all the requirements and struggles of a life of hope remain applicable.<sup>177</sup>

One of the reasons for the high profile of baptism and the other New Testament means of grace in a work devoted to the exegesis of an Old Testament book has now emerged — the essential continuity of the Church, of the covenant to which the means of grace pertain, and of the experience of the believer who must make use of them in faith and hope.

### 2.5.5 Excursus: The Exegesis of the Lectures

Luther's understanding of the continuity of the Church of both Testaments provides the necessary foundation for the examination of his exegetical method in the *Genesisvorlesung* which was promised at the start of this chapter (§ 2.1.3).

When Luther's use of scripture in the *Genesisvorlesung* is compared with that at the beginning of his career as an exegete in the *Dictata super Psalterium*, the differences which emerge are astonishing. The medieval four-fold scheme of interpretation is fully evident in the earlier work, even if the edifice is already under stress. Hardly a trace of it remains in the Lectures. The use of allegory is rare; Luther appears to have complied with

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his own cautious principles about allegorising. He articulates these in an excursus on the allegorical understanding of the Flood as baptism.<sup>178</sup>

In his excursus Luther draws a distinction between those allegories that are manufactured, and those which conform to the *analogia fidei*, which agree with the subject matter and convey godly comfort and instruction.<sup>179</sup> He does not discourage his hearers from using allegories; rather he insists upon the literal/historical sense as the first objective, and lays down the analogy of faith as the guide for those who wish to proceed. Doing this, even if the allegories are not perfect, they will ensure that foundation of the faith remains secure.<sup>180</sup> Having laid down these general principles, Luther embarks upon a sustained allegorical interpretation of the flood, the ark, the ravens, etc. However, most of the allegories discussed in the pages of the Lectures are not Luther's, but those of other commentators, which he either accepts, or, more typically, rejects. Acceptance is usually on the basis that the literal interpretation yields no useful sense.<sup>181</sup>

The concentration upon the literal sense is the most obvious difference which emerges from a comparison of the Lectures with the *Dictata*. The key to its significance and its essential foundation are one and the same; the continuity of the Church across the divide between the Testaments. Preus regards the 'discovery of the faithful Synagogue' as an essential element of Luther's hermeneutic. The New Testament people of God stands in exactly the same relationship to the promise of the End as the faithful synagogue stood to the promise of the Seed.<sup>182</sup> The dynamics of the believer's life are the same under both Testaments -- until the advent of Christ (whether the first or second advent) he lives by faith in the promise. The two Testaments no

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longer stand over against one another as law and gospel, flesh and spirit. These antitheses straddle the boundary between the Testaments — the struggle between the two churches which continues irrespective of a difference in the times is but one aspect of this.

The thrust of the medieval tradition was entirely in the opposite direction. The more the difference between the old and new covenants is magnified, the more the Old Testament is seen merely as a source book for New Testament typology, and the more inevitable it becomes that exegetes develop analogy, tropology and anagogy. Even the 'literal' sense is interpreted prophetically in terms of the coming Christ. Preus relates this to the medieval tendency to confine the promise and covenant of the Old Testament to matters temporal, emptying them of all matters eternal, or to relate the two covenants as promise and gift. "In both cases, the effect is to downgrade the Old Testament; its promise and its people, by and large, are 'carnal'."<sup>183</sup> The exegete is forced to escape, by one means or another, a text whose literal meaning is carnal. But Luther's abandonment of this approach, which Preus sees as commencing during the delivery of the *Dictata*, is bearing its full fruit by the time of the Lectures. The content of the covenant of circumcision is not temporal, but spiritual. The New Testament has not escaped from the realm of promise. For this reason Luther can step back into the world of the patriarchs and find himself at home.<sup>184</sup>

What is meant by a 'literal' interpretation? In the context of the *Genesisvorlesung* the term may be understood in its plain sense.<sup>185</sup> Luther was able to enter the world of Abraham precisely because of all the similarities and parallels between their respective times. In the Old

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Testament he found the same life under the promise, the same persecution from the false church, the same human nature. None of the intervening cataclysms, not the Incarnation itself, had removed that essential continuity. Because of this continuity, Luther was "firmly convinced that everything that people in the Bible did, said and experienced could be used as examples for life in his own day."<sup>186</sup>

Luther's handling of Gen. 27:46 will serve as an example. Jacob, even though he has received the blessing, is to be sent into exile. Luther's first comment is upon the contrast between the wonder of the promise and Jacob's actual situation, and the contrast with the apparent success of his brother Esau. What a blessing Jacob has received:<sup>187</sup>

Therefore this example should be set before men's eyes to show how Jacob is appointed king and priest, and how he is invested with his rule and priesthood. For such is the wretched pomp and ritual connected with anointing and investing this king. He is not clothed with a royal robe, is not adorned with a fillet or a royal crown. No sceptre is put into his hands. But he is equipped with a bag and staff and is driven into exile.<sup>188</sup>

Luther gives a christological interpretation of the passage, in terms of Isaiah 53.<sup>189</sup> But although Luther gives first place to the example of Christ, whose victory and coronation were the most deeply hidden of all, the most striking aspect of the Lectures at this point is the way in which the situation of the contemporary Christian completely dominates the exegesis. The Church, which lives from the promises, in hope, is the dominant *motif*:

. . . we are not Christians and have not been baptised in order that we may get possession of this land. Nor have we been baptised and born again into this life;

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we have been baptised and born again into eternal life. But what happens in regard to us too? Surely this, that when the church must be glorified and brought to those eternal joys which it awaits in the word and in hope, then it is subjected to countless persecutions of tyrants and devils; it is harassed and torn by false brethren in many most pitiable ways. This is not what being led to eternal life means, is it?<sup>190</sup>

Luther places himself and every other Christian directly in Jacob's situation and finds it utterly familiar.<sup>191</sup>

### 2.5.6 Church and Nation: Baptism and the boundary of the Church

Therefore the first gift is that Abraham will be 'a great nation' (*in gentem magnam*), that is, that his descendants will have a kingdom, power, wealth, laws, ceremonies, a church, etc. (*regnum, potentiam, opes, leges, caeremonias, Ecclesiam, etc.*) For that is what is properly called a nation.<sup>192</sup>

In the *Genesisvorlesung* it is difficult to distinguish between 'Church' and 'nation'. From the beginning, with his description of Adam and his family as 'Church', Luther identifies the Old Testament Church with a discrete community, a *populus*. It may be a family, or a branch of a family, which is truly to be called 'Church' when division between the two churches breaks out afresh. But however he expresses it, Luther's mode of thought, permeated as it is by the medieval notion of the *corpus Christianorum*, appears to be irredeemably 'communal'. There are many ways in which this feature of the Lectures could be explored. It could be analysed as a reflection of sixteenth century Germany, and as an expression of the expediencies of

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Protestant politics. The *zwei Reiche* and *zwei Regimente* theme could profitably be applied to it. But it is the vexed question of what may be called Luther's 'individualism' that is of direct relevance to baptismal theology. Given the impressive continuity between the Church under the two Testaments, what implications does the identification in the Lectures of the Church with a visible group of people have for Luther's concept of the New Testament Church?

In contrast with the understanding of Church as 'nation', there are indications of Luther's 'individualism' within the Lectures. Individuals born into the line of the false church were undoubtedly saved.<sup>193</sup> Luther also contemplates the reverse possibility; and members of the community of faith could wander away from the Word of promise, and from the appointed places of worship. These individuals might well 'depart' while appearing to remain within the covenant, like Lot's sons-in-law who, though within the Church (in the *Ecclesiola* presided over by Lot himself), revealed their true character when they laughed at the Word.<sup>194</sup>

How are such statements to be reconciled with the identity of 'Church' and 'nation'? The question opens up a series of others, extending to the nature of faith itself. How consistent is Luther in his adherence to a view of faith as pertaining strictly to an individual, rather than to a community?<sup>195</sup> But the immediate difficulty is with the boundary of the Church, and with the relationship of baptism to that boundary. This is the question with which we began our investigation of the ecclesiology of the Lectures (§ 2.5.1); given the complexities the investigation has revealed, what answers can be given to it?



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On one level, baptism defines the Church's boundaries, and Luther makes unequivocal statements which imply the identity of the Church and the community of the baptised. But baptism is possessed by all who claim the name 'Church', whether falsely or truly. Against the background of this fundamental tension, there are several distinct lines of thought to be observed in the Lectures.

First, there is the insistence that baptism and the other appointed 'trusting places' are *despised* by the false church in all ages. Always, they choose their own more impressive signs and places of worship. Secondly, (and in apparent contradiction) there is the admission that the false church *boasts* of baptism and the other signs, but in the absence of faith they have no use of them. They have them without the word. Their use of them is of the flesh. Luther uses the example of Esau and the exchange of the birthright for pottage to illustrate his claim that a boasting in the ministry, the keys, the sacraments and in the name of 'Church' can and does co-exist with an actual despising of the same.<sup>196</sup> Baptism and the word (understood here as the text of the gospel) may also co-exist with the 'additions' and 'pomp' of the Pope. But the vaunted possession is indeed in vain, because "Christ and Belial are not in accord. For the bed is narrow. Consequently one of the two falls out, and the short cloak cannot cover both . . ."<sup>197</sup> Thirdly, the two churches are to be distinguished by the way in which the true church conforms to baptism in its very character -- in its own despised weakness, in its hiddenness, and in its suffering, in 'the holy cross'.

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Baptism, then, like circumcision, can appear on the one hand as the despised trysting place deserted by the proud, but on the other it can appear as 'flesh' when it is boasted of by them. Ishmael was circumcised, the papists are baptised and themselves administer baptism — validly.<sup>198</sup> But the Pope, like the ungodly descendants of Ishmael (who himself was saved) has not the same spirit, faith and promise as his forebears, without which, even though one may be a descendant, one cannot be a child of God.<sup>199</sup> It is in the difference between presuming upon baptism (or totally abandoning it) and attending to its promise in faith that the true boundary between individuals and between communities lies.

So in Luther's theology baptism *does* function as a boundary of the Church, as well as constituting one of the trysting places around which it is gathered. But the foregoing examination of the ecclesiology of the Lectures indicates that the relationship between baptism and the boundary of the *communio sanctorum*, the true Church, is highly problematic. The complexities of that relationship will be explored further in Chapter 6.

2.6 CONCLUSION

The picture of Luther's baptismal theology which has been drawn from the investigation of the *Genesisvorlesung* is a highly impressionistic one. A number of important *motifs* have emerged. But there has been no sustained attempt to analyse them, or to resolve the tensions which arise. This must await the very different approach of the next chapter, which will examine Luther's formal baptismal theology in the categories imposed by the four-fold pattern of the baptismal section of the *Grosse Katechismus*. (Some of the most useful material in the Lectures has been held over until chapter 3, because it falls naturally into one or other of these categories.) Indeed some loose ends will have to remain loose until the soteriological and ecclesiological issue which surround baptism are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

But many of the components of Luther's baptismal theology are already in view, even if they are not yet assembled into a coherent whole. Some preliminary judgements may be made. Thus, in accordance with the aims and method set out at the beginning of this chapter, it will be appropriate to conclude it by asking some very broad questions: Where is the centre of gravity in Luther's treatment of baptism in the Lectures? What is the overall impression conveyed by it?

The general impression conveyed by an examination of baptism in the Lectures is two-fold. First, the ubiquity of baptism, usually in the company

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of other means of grace, is striking. Secondly, the vast majority of the baptismal references in the Lectures occur when Luther is in some form or other addressing the question of where, and how, God is to be encountered, and his people are to be recognised. The centre of gravity of Luther's treatment of baptism cannot be detached from the wider theology of the means of grace, which is in turn linked to a cluster of other themes typical of Luther: God hidden under his opposite; *theologia crucis*; the life of hope in the promise; the struggle and testing of faith; the two churches.

In this chapter Luther's use of baptism in the Lectures has been approached from three angles. First, baptism has been considered as the 'trysting place' or the *porta Dei* appointed by God for his encounters with mankind (§ 2.2). Secondly, the nature of the theophany or of the encounter with God available in baptism has been described more precisely as the action of the God who promises the forgiveness of sins (§ 2.3). Finally, the role of baptism in distinction from the other means of grace has been considered. Baptism, like circumcision, is the sign of the covenant — the New Testament covenant *is* baptism. How are these different presentations of baptism to be related to one another?

It is the 'present tense' of baptism which is the key to seeing the baptismal theology of the Lectures as a unified whole. The encounter with God at the trysting place of baptism is not confined to the moment of administration; it is an encounter available in the present for all who approach in faith. In the same way, God speaks the word of promise, not just once, as the minister of baptism, but continually, to all who will hear.<sup>200</sup> The covenant of baptism is present because it has not been abrogated. In a

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sermon of 1537 on John 14:17 recorded by Cruciger Luther condemns the view that postbaptismal sin means that "baptism (and therefore Christ as well) is lost to him and no longer comes to his aid", so that a new baptism is required, whether this be a literal rebaptism or a substitute baptism of good works, penance or vows.<sup>201</sup>

As already indicated, the present tense of baptism will be a recurrent theme in this study. A number of other themes will be linked to it; the nature of justification, the 'shape' of the Christian life, the assurance of Christian identity and salvation are among them. But in the *Genesisvorlesung* baptism is 'present' above all because in it God is present, although hidden under that which is common and despised, and in it he addresses me at all times with his word of promise. To hear that promise at the trysting place of baptism I am continually called.

NOTES

1. WA 42, vii: *Postea suscipiam praelegendum Genesis, ut operemur quidquam et ita in verbo et opere dei moriamur.*
2. See § 3.1.1 below, pp. 114ff.
3. WA 42,310,9 = LW 2,68 on Gen. 6:15; WA 42,368,39-369,19 = LW 2,152f., "Concerning Allegories"; WA 42,607,9-11 = LW 3,82 on Gen. 17:1.
4. WA 42,72,5-12 = LW 1,94 on Gen. 2:9; WA 42,227,33 = LW 1,309 on Gen. 4:16; WA 43,17,29f. = LW 3,199 on Gen. 18:6ff.; WA 43,81,26-29 = LW 3,288 on Gen. 19:18ff.; WA 43,147,12f. = LW 4,16 on Gen. 21:8; WA 43,204,34-205,2 = LW 4,96 on Gen. 22:1f.; WA 43, 424,25ff. = LW 4,401 on Gen. 25:31-34; WA 43,531,13-16 = LW 5,149 on Gen. 27:34f.; WA 43,598,40-599,22 = LW 5,247 on Gen. 28:17; WA 44,105,26-32 = LW 6,141 on Gen. 32:27f.; WA 44,396,34ff. = LW 7,132 on Gen. 41:1-7.
5. See below, § 4.2.1 (pp. 201f.); Jetter, pp. 113,175f.
6. See below, § 2.2.1.
7. The development of the parallel with circumcision in Luther's exposition of Genesis 17 affords the most notable example; WA 42,601-673 = LW 3,75-175 *passim*.
8. Peter Meinhold, *Die Genesisvorlesung Luthers und Ihre Herausgeber*, (Stuttgart, 1936.)
9. WA 42,213,2ff. = LW 1,288. *Antonii Angli* is to be identified with Barnes. See footnote in WA. Meinhold lists a number of other such anachronisms, pp. 125ff.
10. WA 42,138,14 = LW 1,184 on Gen. 3:14; *Quaeso te, amice Lector*; Meinhold, p.349.
11. Meinhold, pp.344ff., argues for the extensive use of a postille of *Lyra* in the redaction of Luther's lecture on Psalm 90:46.
12. W Ti. 4, No. 4869; Meinhold p. 238. Sometimes Luther could not recognise the result of the editing as his own. Meinhold, p. 45, quotes the example of Dietrich's edition of the Lecture on Psalm 51 (1539), WA 40,II,189. Dietrich failed to perceive the difference between recognition of sin as a secondary cause of justification (Luther) and as a condition *sine qua non* (Dietrich). The clear implication is that Dietrich must have been just as unreliable as editor of the *Genesisvorlesung*.
13. Eg. WA 42,20,3-10 = LW 1,25 on Gen. 1:6; WA 43, 480,25-37 = LW 5,74-75 on Gen. 26:24f.; WA 42,562,20f. = LW 3,19 on Gen. 15:6.
14. Meinhold, p. 44.
15. Meinhold, p. 389. But a striking feature of the references to the sacraments in the Lectures, as we shall see, is the lack of order and consistency. The more undisciplined, inclusive, language of signs and 'places' is more typical of the Lectures than the exclusive language of sacrament; see § 2.2.1 below (p. 40). Also, Meinhold's

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choice of the confessional documents as the appropriate bench-mark for the sacramental theology of the Luther of this period is questionable. These sources themselves are by no means 'pure Luther'.

16. Meinhold, pp. 389f.; WA 43,305,13 = LW 4,236 on Gen. 24:1-4. The emphasis upon this symbolic character of the sacraments in the Lectures does not appear in fact to be as great as Meinhold implies. Nor is the effect of sacraments on the human psyche a pervasive theme.
17. Meinhold, p. 386: "*Man sieht auch hier wieder, wie es zu der Einführung nicht genuin Lutherisches Gedanken in die Genesisvorlesung gekommen ist; der Bearbeiter fand die Äußerungen Luthers von der Verborgenheit der Kirche vor; in dem er die auszuführen und zu gestatten sucht, dringen mit der Formgebung auch seine eigenen theologischen Gedanken in die Sache ein: Die wahre Kirche ist, wo die reine Lehre ist und wo die Sakramente rein verwaltet werden.*" WA 44,111,25-28. Yet this is essentially the teaching of the *notae*, which can be substantiated from other sources, notably, *Wider Hanswurst*, WA 51,469-572 = LW 41,179-256. This is so central and recurrent a theme in the Lectures that on Meinhold's hypothesis the editorial adjustment would have had to have taken place on a large scale.
18. Meinhold, pp. 427f.; "*Das sachliche Kriterium für sein Authentie bildet hier die Theologie des jungen Luther, die überraschend stark in all ihrer Grundgedanken in dem großen Alterswerk wiederkehrt.*" Pelikan, at LW 1,xii, rightly criticises him for so doing.
19. As Meinhold appears to recognise, *loc. cit.*
20. See below, § 2.2.5.
21. WA 44,93-116 = LW 6,125-155.
22. See below, §§ 3.2.4; 3.3.4; 3.4.4; 3.5.4.
23. WA 43,599,1-17 = LW 5,247 on Gen. 28:17. The 'poet' is Virgil, *Aeneid* 9,641.

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24. This is (rightly) the chief emphasis of a brief study centred specifically on baptism in the Genesis Lectures: P.D. Pahl's short but suggestive article, "Baptism in Luther's Lectures on Genesis", *Lutheran Theological Journal* (I,1, 1967), pp. 26-34.
25. For example WA 42,224,21 = LW 1,304 on Gen. 4:15; WA 42,227,34 = LW 1,309 on Gen. 4:16.
26. WA 43,265,1f. = LW 4,179 on Gen. 22:19; WA 42,668,35f. = LW 3,168 on Gen. 17:22.
27. WA 42,184,14-25 = LW 1,248 on Gen. 4:3. Compare also WA 42,401 = LW 2,197 on Gen. 10:8f.; WA 42,464,14-19 = LW 2,284 on Gen. 12:7.
28. See below, § 2.5.4. This is in sharp contrast to the Luther of earlier years; see § 4.2.2 below (pp. 204-207) for a comparison with the *Dictata*.
29. At § 2.3.2; see also § 3.2.2.

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30. See below, § 6.1.1, p. 297.
31. WA 42,636,35f.;41 = LW 3,124 on Gen. 17:8. The equivalence of *claves* and *ministerium verbi* here, by highlighting the polyvalence of *verbum*, adds further complexity to the relationship and priority between word and sacrament. See §§ 2.3.2 (p. 60) and 3.2.2 below.
32. WA 42,295,32-35 = LW 2,48 on Gen. 6:5f. For Luther's refusal to play the signs off against one another, see Aulén, *Reformation and Catholicity* (Edinburgh, 1962) tr. E.H. Wahlstrom, pp. 73f.
33. WA 44,768,22-31 = LW 8,258 on Gen. 49:11f.
34. WA 42,666,31-40 = LW 3,165 on Gen. 17:22.
35. WA 43,226,14-17 = LW 4,126 on Gen. 22:11: *Satis evidens et illustris apparitio est Baptismus, Eucharistia, claves, ministerium verbi, aequale, imo exuperans omnes omnium Angelorum apparitiones, quorum collatione Abraham guttulas tantum et micas habuit* — Abraham had only dregs and crumbs in comparison.
36. As we might expect from Luther. Torrance has argued that from one perspective "the Reformation must be interpreted as a great protest against the dominance of optical notions of form and thought, and as the insistence that these must be modified and corrected by notions of form and thought that are modelled upon *audition*." T.F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (London, 1969), p.22.
37. WA 42,658,39f. = LW 3,155 on Gen.17:17.
38. WA 42,514,29-33 = LW 2,353 on Gen.13:14f.
39. WA 43,32,20-23 = LW 3,220.
40. See § 2.3 below (pp. 55f.).
41. For instance WA 42,185,4-12 and 32-42 = LW 1,249f. on Gen. 4:3 (Cain's disregard of the means of grace); WA 42,434,24-27;435,31f. = LW 2,242;244 on Gen. 11:31f. (the new religion of Chaldea); WA 43,594,38-595,17 = LW 5,241f. on Gen. 28:16 (worship at Bethel).
42. WA 23,150,17-24 = LW 37,68f. "*That These Words of Christ, 'This is My Body' still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics*", 1527. The christological unity of the appointed definite places is shown in particularly sharp relief here.
43. WA 44,129,5f. = LW 6,173 on Gen. 33:10
44. WA 42,625,26-626,22 = LW 3,108f.on Gen. 17:3-6.
45. WA 43,264,13-36 = LW 4,178 on Gen 4:19.
46. WA 43,264,39-265,2 = LW 4,179 on Gen. 22:19. The reference to St. James concerns pilgrimages to the saint's tomb at Santiago di Compostella.
47. WA 42,72,20ff. = LW 1,95 on Gen. 2:9. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was Adam's church, altar and pulpit, and perhaps we may add, font. (For the baptismal reference see WA 42,72,5-12) See also Headley, *Luther's View of Church History* (Yale University Press, 1963), p. 63; "The real church began with God's command not to partake of the tree of knowledge". The chief difference between the



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tree and the New Testament appointed 'places' is that the word attached to it is a threat, not a promise. The principle, however, is the same.

48. WA 42,72,28-31 = LW 1,95 on Gen. 2:9.
49. WA 42,666,25-28;667,12f. = LW 3,165f.
50. See WA 43,457,32-459,14 = LW 5,42ff. on Gen. 26:9. Here Luther warns against attempts to penetrate to the hidden God in their injudicious enquiries into his predestinating decrees.
51. WA 43,457-459 (esp. 459,7-20) = LW 5,42ff. on Gen. 26:9. *Quia scrutator maiestatis opprimetur a gloria.* (459,19f.)
52. Luther is convinced that the call of Abram recorded in Gen. 12:1 was not direct, but was mediated to him by 'the ministry', possibly of Shem. WA 42,439,16-20 = LW 2,249.
53. WA 43,71,25-28 = LW 3,274 on Gen. 19:14; *Sed in Babylone in medio igni Danielis socii incolumes vivebant. Haec fuit potentia Dei absoluta, secundum quam tum agebat, sed secundum hanc nihil nos iubet. Vult enim nos facere secundum ordinatam potentiam.*
54. Luther, however thinks that the terminology is misleading, because the *voluntas beneplaciti* should really refer to the Gospel; WA 42,295,39-296,5 = LW 2,48 on Gen. 6:5f.
55. WA 42,295,29-32 = LW 2,48 on Gen. 5:5f.; *Ambulant enim in nudo sole et deserunt umbraculum, quod liberat ab aestu, Esa.4.* (Isaiah 4:6) *Nemo igitur de Divinitate nuda cogitet, sed has cogitationes fugiat tanquam infernum et ipsissimas Satanae tentationes.*
56. WA 43,72,6f. = LW 3,275 on Gen. 19:14. Luther is referring here to a story about St. Anthony.
57. WA 43,71,20-24 = LW 3,274 on Gen. 19:14; *Potest Deus salvare sine Baptismo . . . sed nobis in Ecclesia secundum ordinatam Dei potestatem iudicandum et docendum est, quod sine Baptismo illo externo nemo salvetur.*
58. WA 42,10,3-7 = LW 1,11 on Gen. 1:2.
59. WA 44,685,19-22 = LW 8,145 on Gen. 47:31; *aqua est velum seu instrumentum medium, sicut etiam verbum, quo velatur Deus. Da stehet unser Herr Got hinder, et sunt facies divinae, per quas nobiscum loquitur et operatur Deus in particulari seu singulari et individuo.*
60. WA 42,227,30-35 = LW 1,309 on Gen 4:16.
61. WA 42,294,18-21 = LW 2,46 on Gen. 6:5f.; . . . *non sit vox, non columba, non aqua, non panis, non vinum. Et tamen hisce visibilibus formis se nobis offert . . .*
62. WA 43,237,36-39 = LW 4,142 on Gen. 22:16. The holy esteem baptism, the eucharist, absolution, calling, obedience to parents and superiors, *quae omnia Papistae fastidiunt, quia sunt vulgaria et quotidiana.*

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63. WA 44,555,20f. = LW 7,344 on Gen. 43:50; *Contempserunt enim verbum, Baptismum et sacramenta, propterea quod minus splendida essent et non incurrerent in oculos hominum.*
64. See below, § 2.5.2, p. 80; § 2.5.5, pp. 89f.
65. WA 43,599,23-25;37f.; 600,19-25 = LW 5,247ff. on Gen. 28:19. The 'external place' is the place of Jacob's dream, but Luther extends this to cover all those places where God speaks with us, where the approach to heaven is open, namely, to what we have called the trysting places. Here, says Luther, is the Church itself. WA 43,598,40-599,22 = LW 5,247.
66. WA 43,600,7-17 = LW 5,248. Luther echoes Paul's language of an inner battle (Romans 7).
67. See § 3.4 below.
68. WA 44,96,15ff. = LW 6,129 on Gen. 32:24.
69. WA 44,104,13-17 = LW 6,139.
70. WA 44,104,28-33 = LW 6,140; *Id enim est summum sacrificium, non cessare orando et quaerendo, donec vincamus ipsum. Iamque ipse sese nobis dedit ut de victoria certi esse possimus: quia alligavit se promissionibus, et obstrinxit fidem suam iuramento. 'Amen, amen dico vobis . . . '.*
71. WA 44,105,26-32 = LW 6,141.
72. Most notably when discussing Jacob's ladder; see note 65 above.
73. See below, § 2.3.1, p. 58..
74. See above, § 2.1.2, p. 35.
75. See above, § 2.2.2, p. 43.
76. WA 42,658,39f. = LW 3,155 on Gen. 17:17.
77. WA 43,32,23 = LW 3,220 on Gen 18:19; *ipse Deus revera adest, baptisat et absolvit.*
78. WA 43,443,13f. = LW 5,21 on Gen 26:2-5; *Apparet tibi in Baptismo, et ipse te baptisat, te alloquitur ipse.*
79. WA 44,685,20-24 = LW 8,145.
80. WA 44,685,27-34 = LW 8,145; *In Baptismo sonat vox Trinitatis, nec aliter audienda aut accipienda sunt verba Baptismi.*
81. Eg. WA 44,712,15ff. = LW 8,182 on Gen 48:20.
82. See above, note 78.
83. WA 42,667,31-34 = LW 3,167 on Gen. 17:22.
84. WA 44,272,14f. = LW 6,364 on Gen. 37:18-20.
85. The Greater Catechism, WA 30,I,214,14-17; see below, § 3.2, p. 119.
86. Eg. WA 42,184,14-18 = LW 1,248 on Gen. 4:3; *Hoc enim omnes sacrae Historiae comprobant, quod misericors Deus per superabundantem suam gratiam semper iuxta verbum constituit aliquod externum et visibile signum suae gratiae, ut homines externo signo et opere ceu*



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*Sacramento admoniti, certius crederunt Deum favere et misericordem esse.* See also WA 42,569,27 = LW 3,29 on Gen. 15:8; *Mos est sacrae Scripturae addere promissionibus signa.*

87. One indication of the complexity of the relationship between word and sacrament is Luther's lack of consistency about which is 'added' to which. Generally, he talks in terms of the signs being added to the word, but on occasion this is reversed, eg. at WA 42,636,29f. = LW 3,124 on Gen. 17:8.
88. WA 42,170,23 = LW 1,228. on Gen. 3:23f; *Hae sunt creaturae sed apprehensae per verbum.* Here Luther is in dialogue with Lyra's view, which he sees exemplified also in Aquinas and Bonaventura, about the inherent properties of such external things as the tree of life, the brazen serpent in the wilderness, etc., apart from any threat or promise of God.
89. Eg. WA 42,227,33f. = LW 1,309 on Gen.4:16; see above, § 2.2.1, p. 42.
90. WA 42,636,35f. = LW 3,124 on Gen. 17:8; see note 31 above.
91. WA 42,170,4-7 = LW 1,227 on Genesis 3:23f.; *Nec intelligunt omnia fieri idio, quia Deus vel promittit vel minatur.* The trees in question are the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Eden. See note 88 above; Luther clearly places the rabbis on the same side as Lyra.
92. WA 42,170,12ff. = LW 1,228 on Gen. 3:23f.; *Huic autem simplici aquae dicimus esse additum verbum promissionis:* [Mark 16:16].
93. Promise is a category central to Luther's thought, to his exegesis of scripture, and his sacramental theology. J.S. Preus, *From Shadow to Promise*, p. 2 and *passim*; Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, pp. 138f. The centrality of *promissio* is fully reflected in the Lectures. On the difference between the two dispensations with respect to threat and promise, law and grace, see WA 42,224,9-22 = LW 1,304 on Gen. 4:15.
94. WA 42,221,11-42 = LW 1,300f. on Gen. 4:14.
95. WA 42,515 = LW 2,353 on Gen. 13:14f.
96. WA 43,563,33ff. = LW 5,196 on Gen. 28:3ff. Luther compares God's action in baptism and the ministry of the keys with Isaac's immediately and automatically effective pronouncement of blessing on Jacob.
97. WA 43,570,10-16 = LW 5,205 on Gen. 28:10. Although Jacob has been blessed, he sees Esau's success, security and prosperity in contrast to his own need to flee; the Christian's situation is parallel.
98. WA 44,715,19f. = LW 8,186 on Gen. 48:20.; *Adhuc enim expectamus, nondum videmus rem.*
99. See § 2.2.5 above on the weakness of the signs, and § 2.5.2 below on the associated unimpressive appearance of the true Church.
100. WA 43,204, = LW 4,96,35f.on Gen. 221f.; WA 43,569,17f. = LW 5,204 on Gen. 28:10f.; WA 44,272,14f. = LW 6,364 on Gen. 37:18-20; see also below, § 3.3 4 (p. 138), for the full range of Luther's expressions.

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101. Eg. WA 42,184,21-24 = LW 1,248 on Gen. 4:3.
102. WA 43,563,33ff. = LW 5,196 on Gen. 28:3ff.; see note 96 above.
103. WA 44,508,17-20;27-31 = LW 7,281 on Gen. 42:29-34. See also H.G. Coiner, "The Inclusive Nature of Holy Baptism in Luther's Writings, *Concordia Theological Monthly* (St. Louis Mo.) XXXIII, 1962, p. 649.
104. WA 44,35f. = LW 7,234f. on Gen. 42:7; cf. Meinhold, p. 389.
105. Jetter, p. 170. see also A. Peters, 'Sakrament und Ethos nach Luther', *Lutherjahrbuch* (1969), pp. 41-79. "*Als 'Sakrament des Glaubens' steht die Taufe nicht lediglich am Eingang des Christenlebens, sie geleitet uns durch dasselbe hindurch*" (pp. 57f.)
106. It was impossible to repeat circumcision; it is sinful to repeat baptism. WA 42,620,11ff. = LW 3,101 on Gen. 17:3-6.
107. WA 44,773,26f. = LW 8,264 on Gen. 49:11f.; *et tamen nascuntur per hoc verbum, baptismum, communionem etc. filii regni aeterni*. See also WA 42,627,9f. = LW 3,110 on Gen. 17:3-6; "those who believe the promise and make use of these signs [baptism and the eucharist] become the people of God" (*his signes utentes fiunt Dei populus*).
108. WA 43,599,15ff = LW 5,247 on Gen. 28:17. The gate is in fact the church itself, identified by all the means of grace around which it is gathered.
109. WA 42,601-652 = LW 3,75-146 *passim*.
110. WA 42,636,17ff. = LW 3,123f.
111. WA 42,637,33-37 = LW 3,126.
112. See below, § 2.4.3, pp. 74f., for comment upon the authenticity of this theme.
113. WA 42,622,32-36 = LW 3,104; *Sicut autem Iudaeus per peccatum excidens ab isto pacto Dei non opus habebat denuo circumcidi, sed rediens ad pactum hoc, et promissione se confirmans receptus est in gratiam, sic excidentes per peccata a gratia non debent rebaptizari: promissione semel factae debent firma fide inniti, et per Christum sperare veniam.*
114. WA 622,16ff. = LW 3,104. The identity of the content of the promise of the two covenants has important implications for Luther's Old Testament hermeneutic; § 2.5.5 below. See also note 129 below; sometimes Luther goes further and implies that the two covenants are in fact one.
115. WA 42,610,24f. = LW 3,87. The context is Luther's reply to the Jewish argument that circumcision makes righteous; for Abraham, this was not so; he was already righteous, God was already his God. WA 42,609,40-610,36 = LW 3,86f.
116. WA 42,621,4-7 = LW 3,102; *non solum hoc sequitur, quod parvuli circumcisi, recepti in populum Dei et iustificati sunt; sed quod parvuli cooperante spiritu sancto habeant fidem.*
117. On infant faith see below, § 3.6.3. Luther's reference to *fides infantium* in a section of the Lectures which dates from the late 1530's supports the view that although it receded from the

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- forefront of Luther's defence of infant baptism in the later years, it by no means disappeared. Grönvik, p. 164; Brinkel, pp. 59-68.
118. WA 42,621,26-622,5 = LW 3,103; WA 42,626,26-32 = LW 3,110; WA 42,650,24-29 = LW 3,143f.
119. WA 42,650,3f. = LW 3,143.
120. Eg. WA 42,645,15f. = LW 3,136.
121. WA 42,670,3-671,2 = LW 3,170f. on Gen. 17:23-27.
122. WA 42,621,10ff. = LW 3,102.
123. WA 42,644,19ff. = LW 3,135; *Sic Ecclesiam cruce premit et occidit Deus secundum carnem.*
124. *Loc. cit.* For the *significatio* of baptism, see below, § 3.5.1.
125. Eg. WA 42,611,8f. = LW 3,88; WA 42,613,24-30 = LW 3,91f.; WA 42,631,6-11 = LW 3,116.
126. WA 42,607,12f. = LW 3,82.
127. WA 42,623,1-4 = LW 3,105; *voluit veteri signo seu pacto abolito novum signum instituere.* Luther's failure to talk of a 'new covenant' here may be significant.
128. WA 42,616,15ff. = LW 3,95.
129. WA 42,631,3f. = LW 3,116; *Sed Christus, author novae generationis, mutavit non pactum, sed signum pacti.* Although Luther is by no means consistent in the use of this sort of language, the implications of such a statement for Luther's understanding of the Old Testament are profound. The fact that Meinhold, p. 73, presents almost exactly the same statement from Veit Dietrich, must be noted, but it need not be taken as impugning the reliability of the text. The unity of the word of promise in the two Testaments is deeply embeded in the Lectures. See § 2.5.4 below (p. 84).
130. WA 42,616,7-11 = LW 3,95.
131. WA 42,624,14-19 = LW 3,106f.
132. WA 42,623,24ff. = LW 3,105f; see also WA 42,606,26-29 = LW 3,81, where Luther gives examples of uncircumcised persons who became members of the church; Job, Cyrus the Persian, the widow of Zarephath, and Naaman the Syrian.
133. WA 42,664,14-23 = LW 3,162 on Gen. 17:19-22. Here Luther seems to be distinguishing the covenant of circumcision from the covenant of promise, spiritual blessings from physical. Compare note 114 above.
134. WA 42,185,4-9 = LW 1,249 on Gen. 4:3.
135. See above, § 2.4.2.
136. WA 43,71,22ff. = LW 3,274 on Gen. 19:14.
137. LW 1,228 fn.; LW 3,103 fn.
138. See below, § 4.3.2 (pp. 230f.).
139. The particular understanding of 'covenant' implied by Luther's use is another matter. Although WA shows him typically using *pactum*

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rather than *testamentum* (or the other possible term, *foedus*, for that matter) we are not thereby forced to conclude that the covenant of baptism is seen in the Lectures as essentially bilateral and conditional, rather than as unilateral on the model of *testamentum*. Hagen would appear to see such bilateralism, implied by *pactum* as evidence of the influence of Melanchthon. See Kenneth Hagen, "From Testament to Covenant in the Early Sixteenth Century", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, III, 1 (April 1972), pp. 1-24. But the term *pactum* was available in the tradition, and its use would come naturally to Luther.

140. See above, § 2.3.1 (p. 58).
141. WA 44,6,26f. = LW 6,10 on Gen. 31:3; *Quomodo certo sciam me esse de populo Dei?*
142. Or, in this context, it would be more accurate to say that Luther answers his question in terms of the *notae*, the marks. See below, § 6.1.1 (p. 297).
143. WA 42,72, = LW 1,95 on Gen. 2:9.
144. WA 42,142,33ff. = LW 1,191 on Gen. 3:15.
145. For example, WA 42,183,34-40 = LW 1,247 on Gen. 4:3.
146. WA 42,194,16-20 = LW 1,262. This is an illustration of Luther's insistence upon the divine use of appointed means and agents, see above, § 2.2.4 (p. 48), and the similar example at note 52. Calvin regarded this insistence as speculation on Luther's part. CR LI,193; Meinhold, p.26. See also T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Edinburgh, 1986), p. 115.
147. WA 42,255,5ff. = LW 1,347 on Gen. 5:21-24.
148. See below, § 6.1; Paul D.L. Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (London, 1981) pp. 1-4.
149. WA 42,187,13-20 = LW 1,252 on Gen. 4:4. See also Headley, pp. 64f; M. Edwards, *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford 1975), pp.114ff. Luther's etymological interpretation of 'Abel' as 'vanity' is at WA 42,180,41-181,10 = LW 243 on Gen. 4:2.
150. WA 43,428,8-15 = LW 4,406 on Gen. 25:31-34; *Ac perpetua haec contentio est in mundo.*
151. WA 42,188,16f. = LW 1,253 on Gen. 4:4.
152. See below, § 6.1.1 (p. 297).
153. See the examples in WA 42,385,39-387,2 = LW 2,176f. on Gen. 9:26, (Ham and Shem), and WA 43,567,5-570,16 = LW 201-205 on Gen 28:10f. (Esau and Jacob).
154. WA 43,570,17f. = LW 5,205.
155. WA 42,221,16-32 = LW 1,300; WA 42,227,30-42 = LW 1,309 on Gen. 4:15f.
156. WA 42,411,30-38 = LW 2,212f. on Gen. 11.
157. WA 42,423,24-27 = LW 2,228f. on Gen. 11:10.

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158. Luther's pessimism bears some imprints of the medieval tradition. It is not confined to matters spiritual. The age before the flood was the golden age, and since then men and women, in their span of life, beauty and vigour; the climate; crops; the earth itself; have all shown an inexorable deterioration until the dismal circumstances of Luther's present, the last of the days, are reached. Cf. Headley, p. 118.
159. WA 42,270,36-271,5 = LW 2,12f. on Gen. 6:1f.
160. WA 42,424,12 = LW 2, p. 229 on Gen. 11:7ff.
161. For the conflict between the churches, see, for example, the case of Lamech, who prefigures the popes in the vigour of his persecution of the people of God; WA 42,236,26-237,27 = LW 1,321f. on Gen.4:23f.
162. WA 42,251,34ff. = LW 1,342 on Gen. 5:5; WA 43,400,20-32 = LW 4,367 on Gen. 25:23.
163. See above, § 2.4.2, also WA 43,571,34ff. = LW 5,207f. on Gen. 28:10f., the descendants of Nahor in Haran.
164. WA 42,401,21 = LW 2,197 on Gen. 10:8.; "Can we doubt that the godly family and descendants of Shem had had their gatherings and meetings (*coetus suos et conventicula sua*) . . .?"
165. WA 42, 270,15-18 = LW 2,12 on Gen. 6:1f.
166. WA 43,123,3 = LW 3,345 on Gen. 20:8.
167. WA 43,400,20-32 = LW 4,367 on Gen. 25:23.
168. WA 43,36,25-29 = LW 3,225 on Gen. 18:19. The immediate context is Luther's attack on the antinomian refusal to allow a place for the preaching of the law as opposed to the gospel in the Church.
169. See below, § 6.2.3.
170. See above, § 2.4.1.
171. See above, § 2.4.2, note 129.
172. See above, § 2.5.1, p. 77.
173. Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, tr. E.W. and R.C. Gritsch, Philadelphia, 1969 (from *Luther und das Alte Testament*, Tübingen, 1948), pp.208f.
174. Headley, pp. 101f.
175. According to Headley (pp. 108-155), Luther divides history into three epochs, with the dividing points at the Flood and at Pentecost, thus departing from the traditional medieval six-fold scheme. The Lectures show a rather more complex and less consistent pattern however, and the crisis of the Flood is followed by other events which also act to divide one period from the next; such as the call of Abraham, which Luther says begins a third age, WA 42,436,4 = LW 2,245 on Gen. 12:1.
176. R.A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 22-71. Augustine's sixth age of the world, the *senectus mundi* between the Incarnation and the parousia, "is a blank; a blank of unknown duration, capable of being filled

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with an infinite variety of happenings, of happenings all equally at home in the pattern of sacred history. None are privileged above others, God's hand and God's purpose are equally present and equally hidden in them all. On them all the old prophecies are silent, for their reference is to the Incarnation and to the final fulfilment. The interim is dark in its ambivalence." (p. 23).

177. WA 42,146,27f.;147,13-15 = LW 1,196f. on Gen. 3:15. In this passage Luther appears to see no difference between the situations of Adam and Eve and his contemporaries; they live *in eadem spe*, in the same hope.
178. WA 42,367-377 = LW 2,150-164. Contrast the unapologetic use of allegory as late as 1525; WA 14,719f. = LW 9, 250f.
179. WA 42,367,37-368,2; 368,14f. = LW 2,151.
180. WA 42,377,19-24 = LW 2,164; *Et moneo vos, quanto possum studio, ut in Historiis aestimandis velitis diligentes esse. Sicubi autem Allegoriis vultis uti, hoc facite, ut sequamini analogiam fidei, hoc est, ut accommodetis eas ad Christum, Ecclesiam, fidem, ministerium verbi. Sic enim fiet, ut, etsi Allegoriae minus sint propriae, tamen non aberrant a fide. Hoc fundamentum igitur stet firmum, stipulae autem pereant.* See also WA 42,173,41-174,5 = LW 1,233 on Gen. 3:23f.
181. Bornkamm, p. 94.
182. Preus, *From Shadow to Promise, Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge Mass., 1969), Chapter XIV, esp. pp. 217-221.
183. Preus, pp. 155f.
184. Preus claims that Luther's recovery of the Old Testament, its word and its faith for the Church is the distinguishing feature of his hermeneutic, p. 6.
185. Preus, pp. 180f. In talking of Luther's move towards a literal (in the plain sense of that word) interpretation from a literal/prophetic/christological interpretation he is at odds with other scholars, eg. Ebeling. Compare Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to his Thought*, tr. Wilson, London, 1970, pp. 104f., where Ebeling sees the interpretation of the Psalter in the christological sense (still however, the 'literal' sense within the four-fold scheme), with the 'I' of the Psalms as Christ himself, as the seedbed for the earliest form of Luther's doctrine of justification. Preus, by contrast, sees the same phenomenon as the final flowering of the medieval doctrine of justification, Preus, p. 227.
186. Bornkamm, p. 18.
187. WA 43,554,24f. = LW 5, 183.
188. WA 43,555,25-30 = LW 5,184.
189. WA 43,556,3-12 = LW 5,185. Luther also compares Jacob to David in flight from Saul after his anointing as king.
190. WA 43,556,25-32 = LW 5,185f. At first sight, Luther appears to be implying a difference between the spiritual promises of the Church



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and the carnal blessing of Jacob. That this is not so can be seen by comparing WA 43,522,31-34 = LW 5,137 on Gen. 27:28f.

191. The process also happens in reverse; Luther reads back the circumstances of the Church of his own day into the time of the patriarchs. Mark Edwards, *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford, 1975), p. 124, highlights the revealing exegetical principle outlined at WA 42,416 = LW 2,219: "Even though there is no written record of what they attempted against the true church, against Noah himself, the ruler of the church, and against his pious posterity, it can nevertheless be surmised by analogy if we carefully consider the action of our opponents at the present time. For Satan, who incites the ungodly against the true church, is always the same."
192. WA 42,445,13ff. = LW 2,257 on Gen. 12:2.
193. See above, § 2.5.3, pp. 81f.
194. WA 43,67,25-33 = LW 3,269 on Gen. 19:14.
195. This question will be taken up below, § 3.4.2..
196. WA 43,427,41-428,41 = LW 4,406f. on Gen. 25:31-34.
197. WA 43,598,20-34 = LW 5,246 on Gen. 28:17.
198. WA 43,158,29-32 = LW 4,32 on Gen. 21:12f.
199. WA 43,186,12-25 = LW 4,71 on Gen. 21:20f.
200. See above, § 2.3.1, p. 57.
201. WA 45,577,12-15 = LW 24,127.

## CHAPTER THREE

### WATER EMBRACED IN THE WORD : The Baptismal

#### Theology of the Older Luther

##### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Baptism, with the other means of grace, is close to the heart of the theological conspectus of the *Genesisvorlesung*. The nature of the book of Genesis itself is one reason for this; the variety of the patriarchs' encounters with God, and of the places and signs in which God revealed himself, posed the question, 'Where is God to be found today?'. Luther gave his answer to this question in terms of baptism and the other appointed New Testament signs. Because of the nature of the Lectures, and because baptism in particular figures so prominently in them, it has been possible to paint an impressionistic picture of baptism, which illustrates the 'use' he makes of it, into which contexts he typically introduces it, and the way in which the theology of the means of grace relates to a series of other crucial themes.

This impressionistic picture cannot stand on its own. The wealth of undoubtedly 'Lutheran' concerns and expressions which the investigation of Chapter 2 has culled from the Lectures goes a long way towards confirming the authenticity of the source, and the value of the picture itself. But there is an inescapably subjective aspect to such a judgement.<sup>1</sup> It remains

true that this is a source which, valuable as it is, must be used judiciously. For this reason, if for no other, the conclusions of Chapter 2 will require corroboration from other sources of appropriate date. There is a second reason, however. In the Lectures Luther does not by and large focus upon the *formal* issues of baptismal theology: baptism and word, baptism and faith, infant baptism, and so on. Even in the course of a ten-year lecture course on Genesis, a complete coverage of all the issues of baptismal theology is not to be looked for. Due weight must be given to those documents in which baptism is the specific subject matter, and where Luther is consciously seeking to present his baptismal theology.

A double approach is required. The insights into the mature Luther's approach to baptism gained from the Lectures must be shown to be earthed in his formal baptismal doctrine if they are to be credible. But it is equally the case that the formal doctrine on its own is but a bare skeleton without flesh. The ultimate objective of a fully rounded, three-dimensional model of Luther's baptismal theology necessitates the use of both approaches.<sup>2</sup>

Such a procedure requires that the examination of formal baptismal theology be restricted to the older Luther, so that discontinuities in the Reformer's theology of baptism over time are not permitted to distort the synthesis of the two halves of the investigation. A comparison with the earlier period, to identify and assess any such discontinuities, will be offered in Chapter 4. Meanwhile, an indispensable preliminary, and a matter of some complexity, is the need to identify the appropriate dividing line, the date at which, for these purposes, the 'mature Luther' can be said to begin.

3.1.1 Defining 'the Older Luther'

How is the 'older Luther' to be defined? There would be little value in adopting a convenient ready-made definition. Different aspects of Luther's theology developed at different rates, in response to the interplay of several sets of factors: the various crises of his life and work; his changing external circumstances; and the progress of his inner intellectual and spiritual struggles. The date at which his 'mature' baptismal theology first becomes apparent may be entirely different from that at which Luther may be said to have arrived at his mature understanding of justification, for example. For the purposes of this study, the definition of the older Luther must be specifically related to the development of baptismal theology.

*Prima facie* it would seem likely that as far as sacramental theology is concerned the break which marks off the 'mature' Luther should be located at some point during the middle 1520's. By this time Luther knew that he and his colleagues were grappling with the need to construct a new church order. By then they were well aware of the emergence of the 'second front' on which they had to fight, with the appearance of the radical reformation in its many guises. Further clarification of the timing and nature of the process by which the 'mature' baptismal theology emerged must await the detailed analysis of that theology in the following sections of this chapter, and the review of the developments of the earlier periods in the next. However, some preliminary support for the mid 1520's as the watershed period is readily available.

A comparison between the treatment of baptism in, for instance, the *Grosse Katechismus* (1529) and that in the *De Captivitate* (1520) is instructive. As one would expect, there are clear differences in the direction and polemical thrust of the argument in these two documents which relate to the different fronts upon which Luther is fighting. In 1520 the consistent emphasis is upon *fides* and *promissio* as the key terms of an enquiry into how the sacrament of baptism can be rightly used. By 1529 the burden of Luther's polemic has shifted; he now focuses upon the *signum*, (*Zeichen*), of baptism itself, which he insists, arguing against the *Schwärmer* and the *Täufer*, is by no means reduced to nothing in the absence of *fides*.<sup>3</sup> But can the watershed be located more precisely?

There are two criteria which must be employed in deciding where, for the purposes of baptismal theology, the 'mature Luther' can be said to begin. One of them is obvious: the presence or absence of certain theological themes, such as baptism's essential independence of faith. But the other is equally important. It is a matter of the profile of baptism in the writings of a particular period. The examination of the *Genesisvorlesung* in Chapter 2 was predicated on the way that Luther introduced baptism (albeit frequently accompanied by other means of grace) into a variety of contexts. It is typical of the later Luther that a whole range of different 'triggers', perhaps embedded in a biblical text, have the effect of provoking a digression on baptism in particular or on the appointed means of grace in general. This is most certainly not the case in the earlier period. The frequency of these 'ad hoc' references is a good indicator of the profile of baptism in Luther's thought at a given period. It is therefore a factor of no small significance in determining where to draw the notional dividing line.

### 3 WATER EMBRACED IN THE WORD : The older Luther

The letter to two pastors *Von der Widdertaufe* of December 1527 - January 1528, evinces clear signs of the same theological concerns as the 1529 catechisms.<sup>4</sup> So also do the *Lectures on Isaiah 40-66* (1527 - 1529).<sup>5</sup> In the *Lectures on Titus* (1527) Luther castigates the Anabaptists who cannot accept that an outward thing can profit or justify, and those who like Müntzer want to receive the Spirit directly, without means, apart from water and baptism.<sup>6</sup> In the previous year, when commenting on Habbakuk 2:2 (the divine command to write the prophetic message on stone tablets) he develops the theme of the outward features or signs which God adds to the word to strengthen faith, in the way that a seal is attached to a letter. In the Old Testament there were Jeremiah's wooden chair, his field (Jer. 32:8) and Isaiah's nakedness (Isaiah 20:2); in the New Testament we have baptism and the sacrament.<sup>7</sup> In Luther's 1527 *Lectures on 1 John*, we find that one of the results of his insistence that the Spirit, the water and the blood (1 John 5:8) belong together and must not be separated is the daily persistence of the water (baptism) through the word, or more precisely, through the Spirit who is in the word.<sup>8</sup> The water of baptism and the blood of Christ given to us through the word are not to be separated; against the 'new spirits' who invent new ways, and who blasphemously call baptism a 'dog's bath', Luther insists that baptism is the appointed way into the Kingdom.<sup>9</sup> The root principle of the mature Luther's theology of grace is perhaps nowhere more succinctly expressed than in a document from as early as 1525, in the tract *Against the Heavenly prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments*, where Luther rails against Carlstadt's denigration of the outward order of baptism and the oral preaching of the gospel: "With all his mouthing of the words, 'Spirit, Spirit, Spirit,' he tears down the bridge, the

path, the way, the ladder, and all the means by which the Spirit might come to you."<sup>10</sup>

On the criterion of theological emphasis, then, there is every reason for drawing the line as early as the middle 1520's. But what of the other criterion, the 'profile' of baptism in Luther's thought?

The contrast between the reticence of Luther of the *Dictata* (1513-15) and the abundance of baptismal references in the *Genesisvorlesung* is extreme.<sup>11</sup> The *Genesisvorlesung* is not alone in the high profile of baptism which it exhibits; a variety of other documents from 1535 and later reflect the same thing.<sup>12</sup> Where and how did the change take place?

Although from a cursory examination mid 1520's appear to belong to the later period, it is important to note that according to the test of the frequency and range of baptismal reference, this material fares very differently. Compared with the rich abundance available to us in the *Genesisvorlesung* and in other material of the 1535 onwards, the yield even well into the 1520's is scanty indeed. A prime example of this comes from the year 1525, and the *Lectures on Deuteronomy*.<sup>13</sup> Here, in the subject matter before him, there would appear to be no shortage of the sort of 'triggers' that would have elicited a remark — or, more likely, a lengthy discourse — about baptism or the means of grace from the Luther of 1535 onwards. A frequent refrain in the book of Deuteronomy is the divine prescription for worship at a given place. This 'Deuteronomic' command to seek God where he wills to be found is basic to the *Genesisvorlesung* and their theology of the means of grace. The *Lectures on Deuteronomy* are

searched in vain for this or for the other related themes. It is difficult to imagine the Luther of 1540, say, passing up the opportunity presented to him by Deuteronomy 12, which contains a command to break down all the existing altars in the Promised Land, and gather at the place "which the Lord your God shall choose." (Deut. 12:5) But Luther fails to make any reference to the appointed New Testament signs and 'places' in his exegesis of the chapter. One of the foundations of the theology of the means of grace is present — the command to worship in a commanded place, combined with a prohibition upon worship governed by human feeling — but Luther does not develop it.<sup>14</sup> Baptism does not appear when circumcision figures in the text, eg. at Deut. 10:16.<sup>15</sup> When an appointed outward form such as the Passover confronts Luther, for example at Deut. 16:8, the treatment appears rather two-dimensional and wooden in comparison with the standards of a later period. The bare statement that outward festivals were intended for instruction and nourishment in the word shows little sign of the later centrality of the theology of the means of grace.<sup>16</sup> There is no hint here of sacramental theology seen in relation to *theologia crucis*, to God hidden under his opposite, or to *Anfechtung* and the struggle of faith. The 'new spirits' are certainly already on the scene and commanding Luther's attention, but the reminting of his theology of the means of grace as a central *motif* in his theology has scarcely begun.

The movement of baptism and the other means of grace from the wings to centre stage in Luther's field of vision can have been neither sudden nor rapid. Although the emergence of the radicals in the 1520's clearly provided its occasion and initial impetus, this trend was a gradual one, continuing well into the next decade. It appears that far beyond the time when the



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direct requirements of the polemic against the *Schwärmer* and the *Täufer* were determinative, Luther's thought in this area was continuing to develop. Although the key emphases of his mature baptismal theology were present from the mid to late 1520's, it is only from 1535 onwards that it assumed its full prominence in his thought.<sup>17</sup>

In the context of this gradual process of development, extending over several years, the selection of a 'dividing line' to mark off the mature Luther is difficult. The drawing of such a line is not only a difficult, but a somewhat artificial enterprise, with an irreducible element of circularity. Any judgement about when the key change took place involves a prior judgement about precisely what constituted that crucial element of change. A selection of a watershed date must be subject to confirmation or correction by a detailed analysis of the contents of the mature baptismal teaching. Nevertheless, in order to proceed with the stated aim of this chapter — a presentation and analysis of the formal baptismal doctrine of the older Luther — a line must be drawn, however provisionally. 1527 will be treated as the earliest year from which material will be drawn for use in this presentation. This has the advantage of including the letter *Von der Widdertauffe*, which is a key document because of its sustained attention to baptismal issues, and the 1529 Catechisms. These are key documents for an understanding of Luther's baptismal theology.<sup>18</sup>

The year 1527 is plausible as a watershed for Luther's baptismal theology for another reason. It was in 1526 that the *Täufer* first appeared in central Germany, with the baptism in May of Hans Hut at Augsburg, followed by his preaching tour in northern Franconia. He was arrested and tried in

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1527, dying the same year in his cell.<sup>19</sup> The emergence of fully-fledged Anabaptism in a region where Luther would feel directly threatened by it in 1526-7 confirms that 1527 is the very earliest date at which we can expect the Reformer to have begun to digest this new problem and to formulate his response to it.

#### 3.1.2 Method

The two Catechisms and the letter *Von der Widdertauffe* will represent the foundation sources for this chapter. They are documents in which Luther is explicitly and deliberately setting forth his baptismal doctrine. However, in what follows, a variety of other post-1527 material will be used.<sup>20</sup>

The baptismal section of the *Grosse Katechismus* will also provide the structure of the chapter. There are four sub-sections, and an excursus on infant baptism. First, there is Luther's consideration of the word of God, upon which baptism is instituted and grounded. In the second sub-section Luther deals with the reason for the institution of baptism, that is, the use of baptism, what it conveys and accomplishes, "*was sie nütze, gebe und schaffe*"<sup>21</sup> Next there is the question as to who it is that receives the gifts and the use of baptism — here Luther interprets the relationship between baptism and faith. Finally, Luther turns to the *significatio* of baptism; "*was sie bedeutet*", and why God joined this particular outward sign to the sacrament which first receives us into *Christenheit*.<sup>22</sup>

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The four-fold structure of the *Grosse Katechismus* will be followed in this chapter (§§ 3.2 - 3.5 below). The excursus on infant baptism, which in the text forms part of the third sub-section on the receiving of the sacrament in faith, will, however, be treated separately (§ 3.6). In each of the five sections specific reference will be made to the *Genesisvorlesung* so that the formal baptismal theology and the insights gained from the survey of the previous chapter may be brought into relation with one another.

3.2 BAPTISM AND THE WORD

*Auffs erste mus man fur allen dingen die wort wol wissen, darauff die Tauffe gegründet ist . . .*<sup>23</sup>

Luther begins his treatment of baptism in the *Grosse Katechismus* with the word. The word must come first in all considerations of the sacrament. Without it, the outward sign remains nothing, mere water. But with the word, it is divine water (*ein Göttlich, hymnisch. heilig und selig wasser*).<sup>24</sup> The word is everything. Luther endorses the Augustinian formula:

*Daher hat es auch sein wesen, das es ein Sacrament heisset, wie auch St. Augustinus geleret hat: Accedit verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum, Das ist, wenn das wort zum element odder natürlichen wesen kömpt, so wird ein Sacrament daraus, das ist ein Heilig Göttlich ding und zeichen.*<sup>25</sup>

The centrality of word in Luther's understanding of baptism has a certain simplicity and indeed an inevitability about it. This doctrine forbids an *opere operato* view of the sacraments considered apart from the word of promise to be received by faith. It equally rules out any disparagement of baptism as something merely outward. Luther's answer to two sets of opponents is clear. The one word of promise, which is the gospel itself, the heart of the evangelical faith, unites all the sacraments. Aulén describes it as "nothing else than the 'justifying' Word which Christ himself speaks."<sup>26</sup> But the apparent simplicity of Luther's thought at this point is deceptive. Before the familiar interpretation of the relationship of word and sacrament

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as expressed by Aulén is accepted, a great deal more precision will be required. What precisely is the 'word' which is bound to the water of baptism?

#### 3.2.1 The word joined to the water

In the *Shorter Catechism* Luther himself poses the question. What is this word of God which is joined to the water?<sup>27</sup> In both Catechisms he answers simply in terms of the Dominical words of institution in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:16.<sup>28</sup> It is a particular word that is in question, the word of institution and command. In this context Luther repeatedly uses *wort*, *gepot*, and *ordnung*, (word, command, ordinance) in parallel.<sup>29</sup> He does so in contention with those who denigrate the water of baptism as something which is merely outward, and therefore of no spiritual use:

*die Tauffe sey ein eusserliche ding, eusserlich ding  
aber sey kein nutz.*<sup>30</sup>

*Was soll ein handvoll wassers den seelen helffen?*<sup>31</sup>

Luther makes use of a parallel; the command to honour one's parents, or the injunction to obey the authorities. What is it that distinguishes these from all other persons as requiring my honour or obedience, but the word of command which is added to them, and which parent or ruler wears like a gold chain around his neck?<sup>32</sup> When the command to honour father and mother is added, says Luther, "then I see another man, adorned and clothed with the majesty and glory of God. (*Weil aber das gepot dazu kömpt . . . so sehe ich*

*ein andern man, geschmückt und angezogen mit der maiestet und herlickeit Gottes.]) Just as parents or magistrates, who have nothing special about their appearance to distinguish them from other people, are to be honoured because of the word, so we are to honour the water of baptism which, although it looks like any other water, nicht ein blos schlecht wasser ist sondern ein wasser ynn Gottes wort und gepot gefasset und dadurch geheilligt.<sup>33</sup>*

When he uses it in this context, the meaning assigned to *verbum* by Luther is narrow; it does not extend to 'gospel', or even to 'promise'. In one sense this is only a notional distinction. The thought of the word of promise is not far away, and cannot be separated from the command to baptise — Mark 16:16 itself contains the promise of salvation, the forgiveness of sins.<sup>34</sup> But in the *Grosse Katechismus* Luther's *concentration* when he speaks of the word which embraces the water of baptism is upon the divine *command*. When he directs his opponents not to see mere water, but to attend to the word bound to it, it is not 'the gospel' to which he is directing them, nor is it to God's word in general, but he is calling for attention to a specific divine warrant to baptise and be baptised for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>35</sup> A full appreciation of this specificity is essential to a correct understanding of the relationship of word and sacrament, and it also has implications for Luther's theology of the means of grace in general.

3.2.2 Sacrament and Word

Luther's interpretation of the Augustinian *accedat verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum*, then, is strictly in terms of the dominical words of institution. The 'word' to which the water of baptism is joined is a particular word. It is but one member of an extensive group. There are many other such divine 'words', which are added to outward things or persons. The commands to honour parents and to obey the magistrate have already been mentioned. This is one of the roots of Luther's theology of vocation; the many different callings under which a Christian may live. One's husband, wife, parent, child, servant, lord, or subject — all these have a divine word of command attaching to them, which distinguishes them from others to whom this particular obligation is not owed. The 'words' which speak directly of Christ and of salvation are a small sub-set within this wider category of divine 'words'. Yet even here there is plurality. There is one command which relates specifically to baptism; there is another word which institutes the sacrament of the altar. There is yet another which relates to the forgiveness of the neighbour. The plurality of 'words' seems to be in tension with the essential unity of the word of promise to which they all relate, and in particular with the christological unity of the means of grace in the one 'Word'.

It is necessary to distinguish several senses of *wort*. There is *wort* over against the other means of grace, *wort* in distinction to sacrament, *wort* as the preached word, or the text of the bible (sense 1; in reality a complex of distinct, although related usages is embedded within this one 'sense'). There is the one *wort* of Christ, the gospel, without which *wort* (sense 1)

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remains lifeless, and all human preaching remains just that. This is the *wort* as that which unifies all the means of grace (sense 2). In this sense the word can be "nothing other than the declaration of the forgiveness of sins".<sup>36</sup> But *wort* in the sense that Luther uses it in connection with the water of baptism has to be distinguished from both. It is the particular word of promise or command attached to an individual sign (sense 3).

This is most certainly an oversimplification. Luther's usage resists neat and systematic categorisation. But the identification of three senses of *wort* has the merit of setting the issue of the relationship of word and baptism in its context. Is there a priority of word over sacrament? Sense 1 'word' has no necessary priority amongst the means of grace; *alongside* the other means of grace it conveys the same word of promise (sense 2).<sup>37</sup> Only in sense 2 could 'word' be said to have absolute priority. What about the many words of institution or command (sense 3)? Perhaps the best way of picturing the relationship between senses 2 and 3 is to say that it is where they are identical in content, ie, where the word of institution or promise attached to the *elementum*, is also the word of the gospel, of forgiveness, that there is a sacrament, or to use the less specific term more appropriate to this context, a 'means of grace'.

An interesting sidelight is thrown upon the relationship between word and baptism when Luther preaches upon Matthew 6:14f. ("If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you . . .") in his series of sermons on the Sermon on the Mount (1530-32). Here is another instance of a divine word of command (sense 3). To the work of forgiving is added the divine word, to make a sign on which faith depends.<sup>38</sup> Luther explicitly



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places this sign with baptism as one of the various means, ways and channels in which one may lay hold of grace and the forgiveness of sins. Prayer is another such channel. Luther goes so far as to talk of the forgiveness of the neighbour as a "daily sacrament or baptism". As Matthew 6:14 gives this promise, he appears to be saying: as the word is added to this particular external, "if you take hold of the promise through this work, you have the very thing that you receive in baptism."<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, to refuse forgiveness is to lose baptism, the sacrament, and everything else with them, as they are all linked together. There is a parallel with the comparison with the command to honour parents, but here Luther sees more; to the forgiveness of the neighbour there is joined a word (sense 3) whose content is gospel itself (word sense 2). Luther's demonstration of his readiness to extend sacramental language in this way accords with the lack of exclusivity in the group of the means of grace. There can be no precise enumeration of the means of grace precisely because there are so many 'words' of command whose content is gospel.

#### 3.2.3 Keeping word and water together

*Wie tharstu aber so ynn Gottes ordnung greiffen und das beste kleinod davon reiffen, damit es Got verbunden und eingefasset hat und nicht wil getrennet haben? (How dare you tamper thus with God's ordinance and tear from it the precious jewelled clasp with which God has fastened and set it, and from which he does not wish it to be separated?)<sup>40</sup>*

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In the great majority of Luther's references to baptism and the word in this period, his objective is transparent. To despise baptism is to despise, not mere water, but the word, and it is to separate that which God has joined. The water of baptism if separated from the word is no different from that with which a maid cooks.<sup>41</sup> The thrust of Luther's attack on the *Schwärmer* is apparent. External things are not to be despised merely because they are external; such an assessment divides what God has joined by leaving the word out of the reckoning.

In the *Lectures on Isaiah* Luther makes precisely the same point. But in his awareness of the errors of the *Schwärmer* he has not forgotten the equal and opposite mistake of magnifying the externals apart from the word, or crediting them with an inherent power to justify:

Therefore beware that you cling to grace alone and to faith, and do not ascribe righteousness to external creatures. In addition, I admonish you not to be deceived by the fallacies of the Anabaptists, who say that baptism is external water and nothing but water since they omit the words of God connected with the water.<sup>42</sup>

The burden of this, the first of the themes which Luther treats in the baptismal section of the *Grosse Katechismus*, is an affirmation of the holiness and preciousness of the water of baptism, and of the rite of baptism, against those who despise it. But it is important to note that in his reaction to the radicals Luther does not abandon his earlier emphasis upon the need for faith. Nor does he embrace a veneration of the external elements themselves — this would be idolatry. In fact there is a certain unity to be observed in Luther's opponents, at least according to his

perceptions of them. To despise the water as *blos schlecht wasser* is to consider it apart from the word which God has bound with it.<sup>43</sup> But to venerate the water, the baptismal act, or any of the other appointed signs as externals with inherent power in themselves, is to make precisely the same mistake, to leave the word out of consideration, to separate what must be joined.

There is yet another error, which equally arises from the separation of word and water. But here it is a matter of leaving the water, not the word, out of account. In 1528, lecturing on 1 Timothy, Luther used 1 Tim 2:6 ("Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time") to draw a distinction between two works or functions of Christ. On the one hand, there was the divine act of mediation and redemption, the cross. On the other, there was the work of testimony about that act, the application of its use. "Christ redeemed us once with a single work, but he did not pass out redemption with a single means."<sup>44</sup> Carlstadt, for instance, would have forgiveness known immediately in the cross alone, but for Luther the forms of testimony, baptism, the sacrament, the comfort of the brethren, the reading of the Book, are those essential means of grace without which "no one knows of the redemption except the Father and the Son."<sup>45</sup> The suggestion of an immediate knowledge of God is an attack on the very heart of Luther's theology.<sup>46</sup> The word of promise and the appointed externals to which it is joined must not be separated by either denigrating or worshipping the external sign or element apart from the word. But neither must they be separated by seeking for the pure word (sense 2) in abstraction from any appointed external sign or place.

3.2.4 Baptism and word in the *Genesisvorlesung*

On occasion the Luther of the *Lectures on Genesis* presents the fundamental principle of the joining of word and water in baptism in language almost identical to that of the Catechisms: "to the simple water the word of promise has been added, 'He that believes and is baptised will be saved.'"<sup>47</sup> The water of baptism, like the bread and wine of the Supper, is a *creatura*, but it is one which is *apprehensa verba*.<sup>48</sup> But more typical are less precise statements which stress the word, command or promise inseparably joined to baptism.<sup>49</sup> Frequently the same general principle is advanced for baptism alongside the other New Testament means of grace, and especially in parallel with the plethora of signs given under the old dispensation. God's way is always to join a sign to the word of promise.<sup>50</sup> Luther identifies the errors of his various opponents as attempts to separate what God has joined. The papists separate the word from the sacrament by failing to pay attention to the word; they make the sacrament an *opus operatum*.<sup>51</sup> The 'Sacramentarians' separate word from sacrament by making the uselessness of externals for salvation into a cardinal principle of their theology — they forget that some of these externals have been commanded by the joining of God's word to them.<sup>52</sup> The core of Luther's theology of the 'masks' and 'veils' of God is a warning against the dangers of separating word and sign in yet another way, by seeking the unveiled God apart from the appointed externals (among which the written and spoken word — sense 1 — must be included).<sup>53</sup>

The fundamental principles concerning the relationship of word and water in baptism are the same in the *Genesisvorlesung* and the *Catechisms*. But

there are clear differences of emphasis and presentation. The typical language in which the Luther of the Lectures relates the theme of word and baptism is in sharp contrast with the narrow focus upon the words of institution in the Catechisms. The category of promise is more typical of the Lectures than that of command.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, here *verbum* takes on a full-blooded dynamism. In baptism God's word of promise, far from being tied down to the moment of baptism, let alone to the dominical institution, is released into the present tense. God is active and present in baptism; his word is being spoken *now*. He acts, he is present, to be encountered — now. When every allowance is made for the difficulties in any comparison between two documents with such different purposes, styles and contexts as the *Grosse Katechismus* and the *Lectures on Genesis*, the gap between the two expressions of the theology of word and baptism remains considerable. What accounts for it?

It has already been suggested that, although the categories of promise and command are distinguishable in the context of the baptismal 'word', they are in practice inseparable. The importance of Mark 16:16 as a foundation text for Luther's approach to baptism ensures this. The alterations in the balance of Luther's emphasis between them at various times reflects, not a fundamental shift in his thought, but changes in his perception of the polemical needs of the debate in which he was engaged. Thus the prominence of 'command' in the *Grosse Katechismus* and the comparative eclipse of 'promise' show that in 1529 Luther's attention is fixed upon the attacks of those who denigrate the sign, rather than upon the need to assert the necessity of faith in the promise.<sup>55</sup> The markedly more even balance evident in the *Genesisvorlesung* suggests, perhaps, the rather greater sense of

perspective possible when the impact of Luther's radical opponents on his theology had had time to be thoroughly assimilated.

But the balance between 'command' and 'promise' is only one aspect of the difference between the Catechisms and the Lectures in this respect. The other is the contrast between the narrow focus of the catechisms upon the dominical words of institution (of command and promise) as against the dynamic picture in the Lectures of a baptismal theophany, of God speaking at the trysting place of baptism, now. This cannot be adequately explained in terms of the different opponents Luther faced at different times, although it is likely that the emergence of the radical theology was a stimulus for this development. The main impetus must have come from the very concepts themselves. As will become clear, Luther had established an understanding of the primacy of word in baptism as early as 1520, in the *De Captivitate*, although this came to its strongest expression in the catechisms of 1529. But also in *De Captivitate*, the theme of the 'present tense' of baptism is already powerfully expressed, in terms of the 'abiding ship'.<sup>56</sup> But it seems that the next step, the combination of the two themes, took Luther a number of years. Only in the 1530's does the concept of God's address to mankind at the trysting place of baptism come to its fullest expression.

One dynamic operating will have been Luther's pastoral concern. How are the baptised to think of their baptism? How should they 'use' it? In what way, precisely, are they to hear God's word in it? How can its vigour be recovered, where so much has overlain it and overtaken it, from the second plank of penance and the self-chosen vows of the monks to the rebaptism offered by the *Täufer*? They must return to the abiding ship of baptism.

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But once the concept of the divine word is primary, to 'return' to baptism must involve listening again to the word of God which is spoken there. Here there is God's speech, and therefore an act of God, and an encounter with God.

3.3 WHAT BAPTISM ACCOMPLISHES

Now that Luther has established what baptism is (water embraced in the word), in the second sub-section of his treatment of baptism in the *Grosse Katechismus* he proceeds to ask why and for what purpose it was instituted:

*das ist was sie nütze, gebe und schaffe* (what is its use, what does it bestow, what does it accomplish).<sup>57</sup>

Luther answers his question in the simplest and most unqualified language. Here above all the simplicity is deceptive; Luther's unqualified claims for the use, purpose and accomplishment of baptism conceal one of the most intractable problems facing those who seek to interpret his thought, namely, the issue of baptismal regeneration.

3.3.1 Salvation through Baptism

Luther returns to Mark 16:16 for the answer to his question. He who believes and is baptised will be saved. To put it in the simplest terms, the one power, work, use, fruit and end of baptism is salvation: *das dis der Tauffe krafft, werck, nutz, frucht und ende ist, das sie selig mache*.<sup>58</sup>

To be saved is nothing less than to be released from sin, death, and the devil into the Kingdom of Christ and to life with him for ever.<sup>59</sup> It is in



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the magnitude of the treasure which it conveys that the glory and precedence of baptism consists — how can it be inferior, ordinary (*schlecht, lauter*) water that conveys such treasure? It is indeed not the *lauter* water which does it, but the word joined to it. The name of God rests in the water, and through the word it receives power to become a bath of rebirth, to be *Göttlich, selig, fruchtbarlich* and *gnadenreich*. Where the name of God is, there will also be life and salvation.<sup>60</sup> Luther believes that part of the difficulty experienced by the 'new spirits' and 'know-alls' (*klüglinge*) in accepting what is claimed for the water of baptism lies in the magnitude of those claims. This leads him straight back to the burden of the previous section, to the joining of command and word to the bare water, and to Mark 16:16.<sup>61</sup>

Alongside this second section of the *Grosse Katechismus* belong all those texts where Luther is prepared to speak equally vigorously and unreservedly about what is accomplished in baptism. Baptism makes Christians. In the introduction to the baptismal section of the *Grosse Katechismus* Luther had already assumed this; without the sacraments *kein Christen sein kan*; baptism is the sacrament *dadurch wir erstlich ynn die Christenheit genomen werden*.<sup>62</sup> Through baptism men and women are reborn, and transformed into *newen menschen*.<sup>63</sup> In baptism men and women come from the first Adam to incorporation in the Second.<sup>64</sup> They have 'put on' Christ;<sup>65</sup> and they enter the Kingdom.<sup>65</sup> Their awakening from the sleep of death is by means of "that new miracle, baptism".<sup>66</sup> Baptism adorns the baptised with holiness;<sup>67</sup> with righteousness;<sup>68</sup> and even with wisdom.<sup>69</sup>

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A particularly striking example of Luther's unqualified praise of the sacrament comes from the year 1535 when Luther is lecturing on Psalm 110:

You can see the water of baptism as you can see the dew . . . but you cannot see or hear or understand the Spirit, or what he accomplishes thereby: that a human being is cleansed in baptism and becomes a saint in the hands of the priest so that from a child of hell he is changed into a child of God. Nevertheless this is truly and actually accomplished. One has to say, in view of the power which attends it, that the Holy Spirit was present at the event and was making believers by means of water and the word.<sup>70</sup>

There can be no doubt about the range and depth of Luther's statements about what God accomplishes through baptism. For all his objections elsewhere to an *ex opere operato* view of baptism, on the face of it there is little in this sort of language to distance him from it. Nor can there be any doubt that Luther's words imply baptismal regeneration, rebirth through the water of baptism. The most telling evidence for Luther's acceptance of baptismal regeneration is his retention of it in his baptismal liturgy, both in its initial form in 1523 and in the more radical revision of the second *Taufbüchlein* in 1526. In the post-baptismal prayer, the words "who has regenerated thee" remain:

Der Almechtige Gott und vater unsers hern Jhesu Christi, der dich anderweyt geporn hat durchs wasser und den heiligen geist, und hat dir alle deine sunde vergeben, der stercke dich mit seiner gnade zum ewigen leben, Amen.<sup>71</sup>

But how can the theology of baptismal regeneration, or the simple yet powerful statement, that baptism conveys salvation, which the post-1527

Luther is prepared to express in such a variety of compelling language, be reconciled with justification by faith?

3.3.2 Qualifying Luther's 'Baptismal Regeneration' Doctrine

Luther spoke and wrote in a vigorous manner, seeking to drive home each point with as much force as possible. The nature of his argument and the direction of his polemical thrust at any given point are often largely determined by the opponents in view. We do not expect, by and large, to find Luther duly qualifying every statement, or taking care to present an argument which is complete on all sides.<sup>72</sup> Thus when he is speaking of what baptism achieves, as above, in the main he is speaking against those who belittle it, whether by exalting other signs of their own choosing, or by denigrating it as a mere external. That no qualifications to all that is said to happen at baptism are expressed in a given text does not prove that Luther does not admit any such qualifications. It merely proves that at the time in question they are not in focus.

The Luther of the same period is able on other occasions to speak with equal vehemence against those who presumptuously boast of baptism: "Even the Pope and his crowd boast, 'We are baptised Christians . . .'"<sup>73</sup> It is not only the papists who do this; Luther accuses the Anabaptists themselves of the same fault; like those who seek to be justified by circumcision, they declare that (their) baptism saves.<sup>74</sup> The undoubted power of Luther's affirmations about what is accomplished by baptism must be balanced by the more qualified tone of statements like these. Although in the later period

Luther's perception of the needs of the day led him to a heavy emphasis upon the magnification of baptism and the other sacraments, and to a predominantly unqualified expression of the effects of baptism, the other strand of qualified statements persisted.

It is as if the unqualified statements about rebirth, salvation and sainthood "in the hand of the priest" all contain a suppressed premise. In the context of the 1530's, this premise becomes visible only sporadically, but its occasional appearance confirms its continuing existence and force. This suppressed premise, which must be taken as qualifying all Luther's remarks about what baptism effects and accomplishes, is the need for faith. In the *Grosse Katechismus*, it is close at hand in the next sub-section. But even where it appears to be totally lacking, it must nevertheless be assumed. Salvation and all the powerful effects of baptism are received when, and only when, faith is present.

Another way of approaching the problem of Luther's powerful and unqualified statements about the effects of baptism is to analyse the link between the effects of baptism (salvation, rebirth, incorporation in Christ, etc.) and the moment of administration of the rite of baptism itself. In many cases, although by no means in all, closer inspection of Luther's choice of words reveals that effect and moment of administration are not strongly linked at all.

In 1537, preaching on John 3:6, Luther makes an unequivocal identification of baptism and the new birth. Christians are "born anew through baptism, in which the Holy Spirit is active, making new persons of them . . . they must

be born anew by water and the Holy Spirit, not by cowl and tonsure."<sup>75</sup> The second half of this quotation has the effect of placing baptism, and the regeneration it effects, not back in the past with the administration of the rite, as an accomplished fact, but in the present, as a continuing demand for response. On another occasion Luther insists that it is the times of trial which will show for certain whether "you are truly in me and I in you, that is, whether your faith is firmly established (*gewis*), whether you have received baptism and the sacrament in earnest (*mit ernst*)."<sup>76</sup> The question as to whether an individual's baptism has been truly received (and thus has been truly effective in terms of salvation and true Christian identity) cannot be answered by reference merely to the moment of administration. It is a question which has to be asked, and answered at all times. One of the strongest indications of the fact that Luther's understanding of 'baptismal regeneration' does not tie the new birth completely to the moment of administration comes from the *Genesisvorlesung*. Luther refers to the parable of the Good Samaritan, and uses the man placed half dead on a donkey as an illustration of the position of the baptised Christian. He is still only *semivivi*, although "oil and wine have been poured on [his wounds], and the gift of the Holy Spirit has begun (*donum Spiritus sancti coepit*)", and the baptismal healing of his nature is a daily, lifelong process.<sup>77</sup>

The force and vigour with which the older Luther proclaims the splendour of baptism and the wonder of all that it conveys tends to blind his readers to two important qualifications which must be placed upon his words. First, when baptism effects salvation, faith must be present. Secondly, not everything that Luther predicates of baptism is to be unquestioningly referred to the moment when the water of baptism is poured.

3.3.3 The Indivisibility of Grace

The 'present tense' of baptism has a vital part to play in the interpretation of Luther's apparently unqualified language about the efficacy of the sacrament. The other side of the same coin is the Reformer's understanding of the new birth, or the beginning of the Christian life. This may be at the root of much of the difficulty about his doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

The medieval *homo viator* entered the Christian life through the portal of baptism. In baptism the Christian received the new birth, the forgiveness of sins, and the removal of original sin. But the path of pilgrimage led him or her onwards from this beginning, from one sacrament to another, from one degree of grace to another. The new birth of baptism was left behind. There were new sins to be dealt with, new requirements for new grace. The *prima gratia* of baptism was not enough.<sup>78</sup> It is all too easy to import this model of the Christian life and the concomitant understanding of the new birth into the interpretation of Luther.

But the new birth is *not* something that can be confined to the past. In this it exactly resembles the sacrament of baptism which effects it. The need for new birth continues to stand, not behind the individual Christian at the beginning of his pilgrimage, but *before* him. He does not stand in need of the grace of penance, or that of confirmation — he stands in need of the *prima gratia* of baptism. This is the only sort of grace there is.

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Luther is able to express himself about the effects of baptism so powerfully and unreservedly precisely because he places neither baptism, nor the new birth exclusively in the past tense. To put it another way; if the new birth cannot be confined completely to an event which occurs at the time of administration, nor can the meaning of baptism itself be restricted in this way. Luther is indeed capable of making expansive statements about what happens "in the hands of the priest".<sup>79</sup> The new birth cannot be detached from the moment of the pouring of the water. But it is not a closed past event, and Luther cannot be credited with a view of 'baptismal regeneration' which implies that this is so.<sup>80</sup>

#### 3.3.4 What Baptism accomplishes: The *Genesisvorlesung*

*Baptismus habet promissionem, quod cum Spiritu sancto regeneret . . .* (Baptism has the promise, that, with the Holy Spirit, it regenerates.)<sup>81</sup>

The variety and vigour of the language in which Luther describes what baptism conveys or effects is fully reflected in the *Lectures on Genesis*. Luther does not limit himself to the language of new birth, or the forgiveness of sins. Baptism sets right and cleanses the heart.<sup>82</sup> It justifies;<sup>83</sup> readmits to Paradise;<sup>84</sup> delivers from the hand of the devil and brings to God.<sup>85</sup>

In the *Lectures*, as elsewhere, Luther sometimes qualifies his statements about the effects of baptism by reference to faith, sometimes he does not. The same combination of the suppressed premise concerning faith and the

present tense of baptism serves to complicate and weaken the connection between the administration of baptism and its effect. Another aspect of the same phenomenon is the prevalence in the Lectures of the language of promise.<sup>66</sup> Luther sometimes enfolds his references to the benefits and effects of baptism within the category of promise, but on other occasions he omits the category of promise altogether. This is exactly parallel to the appearance and non-appearance of the requirement for faith.

The category of promise, the suppressed premise concerning faith, and the present tense of baptism are all pointers to the eschatological tension which affects Luther's concept of regeneration, as so much else in his theology. The apparent simplicity of the statement at the head of this section is deceptive. The statement that baptism regenerates is governed by the overarching category of promise. Christians are brought to new birth in baptism, but Luther's doctrine of 'baptismal regeneration' does not imply that the new birth is over when the rite is ended.<sup>67</sup>



3.4 BAPTISM AND FAITH

In the third sub-division of the baptismal teaching in the *Grosse Katechismus* faith is presented as the right, and only, way to the use (*brauch*) of baptism. A considerable portion of the sub-section consists of an excursus on infant baptism. Although the issue of infant baptism cannot be completely disentangled from the issues surrounding the relationship of baptism and faith, it will be dealt with in a separate section below (§ 3.6). Yet much of the content of the excursus is directly relevant to the *general* question of baptism and faith, and it will be used freely in what follows. The same goes for the letter *Von der Widdertaufe*, another document primarily concerned with a defence of infant baptism.

The question of baptism and faith is the point at which the difficulties surrounding Luther's doctrine of baptism reach their greatest notoriety.<sup>88</sup> But paradoxically the difficulties here are more readily resolved than elsewhere. The chief reason for this is that Luther himself confronts the issue of baptism and faith 'head on'. The exploration of other aspects of the relationship between his view of baptism and his wider theology, such as regeneration, conversion, the true Church, so often involves the asking of questions never framed in quite the same form by Luther. But here his opponents on two fronts forced the Luther of 1529 to a precise formulation of the question: What is the relationship between baptism and faith?

3.4.1 A Double Principle

*. . . der glaube macht die person allein würdig, das heylsame Göttliche wasser nützlich zum empfahe . . .  
On glauben ist es nichts nütz, ob es gleich an yhm  
selbs ein Göttlicher uberschwenglicher schatz ist.<sup>89</sup>*

At the start of his third sub-section on baptism in the *Grosse Katechismus*, Luther asks who it is that receives baptism and all that it conveys. Yet again he answers in terms of the dominical authority, Mark 16:16. It is the person who has faith. Baptism is in itself a divine, inestimable treasure, but without faith there is no use of that treasure, no receiving of it, no laying hold of it:

*Denn damit das du lessest uber dich gieffen, hastu sie nicht empfangen noch gehalten, das sie dir etwas nütze. Aber davon wird sie dir nütze, wenn du dich der meinung lesst teuffen ab aus Gottes befehl und ordnung, darzu yn Gottes namen, auff das du ynn dem wasser die verheissene seligkeit empfahest. (In merely allowing water to be poured over you, you have not received or laid hold in order that it may be of use to you. But it will be of use to you if you suffer yourself to be baptised as after God's command and ordinance, in God's name, in order that you may receive the promised salvation in the water.)<sup>90</sup>*

What is the relationship of faith and baptism, *fides* and *promissio*, *fides* and *signum*, in the mature Luther? There is a double principle to be observed. While it is abundantly clear that the treasure of baptism has to be received, grasped and held fast in faith, an emphasis in the *Grosse Katechismus*, not evident in the works of an earlier period, is that the worth of the treasure itself does not depend on faith: "*. . . es mangelt nicht am schatz, aber da manglets an, das man yhn fasse und feste halte.*"<sup>91</sup> In his

excursus on infant baptism Luther insists that faith does not make baptism, but receives it. Baptism is not *unrecht* or valueless in the absence of faith.<sup>92</sup> God's word and ordinance, comprehended in the water, cannot, even by our misuse of them, be rendered void.<sup>93</sup>

The simple formula from Mark, "whoever believes", rules out all works done in order to win salvation.<sup>94</sup> But Luther's next remark reflects that fact that by 1529 he has opponents on two fronts. He introduces one of these opponents, who asks the question, *Ist doch die Tauffe aber ein werck?*<sup>95</sup> Luther does not defend himself by immediately asserting the need for faith; nor does he join his opponent in a direct attack on an *opus operatum* sacramental theology. He does not answer directly in terms of *fides* at all. Instead he refers back to the nature of baptism. Luther does not dissent from the proposition that baptism is a work, but it is a divine work.<sup>96</sup> Luther insists that this view in no way compromises the evangelical preaching of faith, as some of his detractors have urged; baptism as God's work does not exclude faith but demands it.<sup>97</sup> The significance of Luther's emphasis upon baptism as God's work is important evidence that the environment in which the relationship between baptism and faith has to be worked out is a complex one, and a different one from that, say, of *De Captivitate*.<sup>98</sup>

The two sides of the relationship of baptism and faith are frequently brought to expression in other works of the years after 1527. They do not always occur together, however. Different opponents are uppermost in Luther's mind at different times. First, there are plenty of statements which emphasise the necessity of faith. It is all too possible, says Luther,

preaching on John 14:21 in 1537, to boast of baptism as the papists do, in a time of ease when "talk is cheap". But times of testing will come, when "it will be truly learned for sure whether you are truly in Me and I in you, that is, whether your faith is firmly established, whether you have received baptism and the sacrament in earnest."<sup>99</sup> Absence of faith can be expressed in terms of the desertion of their baptism by those who still bear the name 'Christian' and boast in this title, but are in reality the false church, who "make use of" baptism, the Holy Communion, and scripture but only outwardly, as they are nominal Christians who do not believe.<sup>100</sup> Faith is necessary, not only for the individual's use of baptism, but also for a perception of the glory of the baptism of another. Those who judge according to the flesh "will never acquire the skill to see baptism on a person's forehead. This is not discerned with the eyes; it is the heart that says 'If he is baptised, then he is adorned with the greatest holiness in the world . . .'"<sup>101</sup>

At other times the stress is upon the validity and inherent worth of the sacrament, even where faith is absent. The basis of this validity is the fact that God is the active subject of baptism: "God is actively at work in baptism without regard to my work or yours".<sup>102</sup> The error of the Anabaptists with regard to baptism is that they regard it as nothing unless a person believes, thus making the work of God dependent on the worthiness of man. This last is an error which they share with the Pope.<sup>103</sup>

In the excursus on infant baptism in the *Grosse Katechismus* Luther addresses the case of 'no faith' thus:

. . . *hastu nicht geglaubt, so glaube noch and sprich  
also: Die Tauffe ist wol recht gewesen, ich hab sie*

*aber leider nicht recht empfangen. Denn auch ich selbs und alle so sich tauffen lassen, müssen fur Gott also sprechen: Ich kome her ynn meinem glauben und auch der andern, noch kan ich nicht drauff bawen, das ich gleube und viel leute fur mich bitten, sondern darauff bawe ich, das es dein wort und befehl ist, gleich wie ich zum Sacrament gehe nicht auff meinen glauben sondern auff Christus wort.<sup>104</sup>*

This extraordinarily rich passage affords several possible lines of investigation. One of them is the reference to *fides aliena*; "*Ich kome her ynn meinem glauben und auch der andern*". Another is a clear indication of the nature of faith, which is directed away from itself towards God's word and command. These avenues of enquiry will be pursued below (§§ 3.4.2 and 3.4.3).

But the most obvious import of this passage is Luther's belief that faith in no way constitutes baptism. Where it has been lacking, all that is required is that faith now be supplied. There is also a pointer towards a theme which has already been mentioned, and which will be developed more fully below — the tense of baptism, or, to be more precise in this context, the tense of the faith for which baptism calls. If an absence of faith in the past is to be dealt with only by a call for it in the present, the implication is that the call to remain in the ship of baptism, or the call to return to that ship, as the case may be, persists though the whole of life.<sup>105</sup> Faith in regard to baptism can be no *einmalig* thing.<sup>106</sup>

An argument from the letter *Von der Widdertaufe* is relevant here. If the opponents' premise, that infants do not have faith, is correct (which Luther is by no means prepared to admit), what then? If faith appears ten years

after baptism, then all is well, and there is no need of rebaptism.<sup>107</sup> The case of a girl married without love is parallel. If after two years the affection for her husband comes, there is indeed no need for a second engagement and a second marriage ceremony, since now all is complete and in order. The same goes for an adult who comes falsely to baptism -- should he be baptised again a year later when he becomes *glewbig*? To admit the need for rebaptism is to make human error, human abuse, and human wickedness stronger than God's good and invincible order.<sup>108</sup> The opponents' argument also amounts in effect to saying that the abuse of a thing alters its nature; as if to say, for instance, that gold becomes straw merely because a thief steals and abuses it.<sup>109</sup> Luther gives another parallel, that with the Sinai covenant, which was not invalidated by those who failed to receive it rightly. Nor, when the same people came to faith, did it have to be repeated.<sup>110</sup> Like the covenant of Sinai, like marriage vows, like gold or silver, an individual's baptism remains, whatever his current state of belief or unbelief, whether at present he is using or abusing it. Anabaptists should be 'anabelievers', *widderglewbler* rather than *widderteuffler*.<sup>111</sup>

#### 3.4.2 Fides Aliena

*Ich kome her ynn meinem glauben und auch der andern.*<sup>112</sup>

The immediate context of these words is Luther's defence of infant baptism in the *Grosse Katechismus*. *Fides aliena* has its part to play in that defence.<sup>113</sup> But Luther's statement that the individual comes not only in his

own faith, but in that of others, has a significance which extends beyond the defence of infant baptism. It must be allowed to cast light on Luther's understanding of faith itself.

Elsewhere Luther insists upon the necessity of *fides proprium*. No-one can believe for another. Perhaps the sharpest expression of this principle comes from the year 1523, and the treatise *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*:

. . . every man is responsible for his own faith, and he must see to it for himself that he believes rightly. As little as another can go to heaven or hell for me, so little can he believe or disbelieve for me . . . <sup>114</sup>

The older Luther talked like this too, although here the evidence for his 'individualism' tends to be more indirect. It must be the Christian's concern, not to boast of baptism or of bearing the name, but that he or she believes.<sup>115</sup> Much of Luther's exegesis in the *Genesisvorlesung* implies the radical loneliness of the individual *coram Deo*. Perhaps the clearest example is Jacob's wrestling in Gen. 32:22-32. The definition of the believer as a conqueror of God, or a master of God (*dominus Dei*), and indeed all Luther's stress on the struggle of faith, underlines this individualism.<sup>116</sup>

But Luther's clear reference to *fides aliena* in the *Grosse Katechismus* reveals that there is a limit to his individualism. There are aspects of the ecclesiology of the *Genesisvorlesung* which have the same import.<sup>117</sup> How are these two strands in his thinking to be reconciled? Their co-existence betrays a certain looseness of thought on Luther's part about faith, a fact

which is important in itself. The mention of *fides aliena* in the specific context of baptism has the effect of underlining the primacy of the categories of word and promise over that of faith. Faith is not the basis of a *recht* baptism. The word of God is. By 1529 his concentration upon the foundation of baptism in the divine command is so pronounced a feature of Luther's baptismal theology that he can afford, as it were, to be less precise about the location of faith.

3.4.3 The Unselfconsciousness of Faith

. . . noch kan ich nicht drauff bawen, das ich  
gleube und viel leute fur mich bitten, sondern darauff  
bawe ich, das es dein wort und befehl ist . . . <sup>118</sup>

There are two sides to Luther's view of the self-awareness of faith, as there are on the question of its individuality. Does Luther believe, for instance, in the certainty or completeness of faith? At times, he vehemently insists that a faith which is uncertain is not faith at all. No profession of doubtfulness as to whether God is gracious to us is Christian: "After all, I know whether I believe . . . whether I remain true to my baptism, or fall away from it . . . " Uncertainty denies Christ, word and sacrament, is tantamount to blasphemy, and leads straight to hell.<sup>119</sup> Luther's call to faith is a call to shun doubt: "A Christian must not doubt that he is baptised, that he has heard the gospel, and has received, and should continue to receive, the sacrament."<sup>120</sup> But it is important to note that in this last passage the certainty and the absence of doubt are directed away from the self; they are focused upon the means of grace.



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On other occasions Luther appears to discount the possibility of a certain faith. Neither those who seek to baptise, nor those who seek baptism, can do so on the ground of a certain (*gewis*) faith.<sup>121</sup> Luther represents his opponents as basing their insistence that no-one should be baptised before they believe on his own key text, Mark 16:16: "whoever believes and is baptised . . . ". But, on this basis, how can they dare to baptise anyone without being certain of their faith? And, as they cannot in fact be certain of the faith of another, without being gods themselves, every time they baptise they contradict their own principles.<sup>122</sup> Luther's imaginary opponent comes back with the answer that it is permissible to baptise upon confession of faith, but Luther insists upon the text as written, which is not, *Wer da bekennet*, but, *Wer da glewbt*. To hear an individual's confession of faith is not to know his faith. As only God can see through the lies of men, to adhere firmly to the principle of requiring faith in the baptisand is to deny all possibility of baptising anyone; "*wer die tauffe wil grunden auff den glawben der taufflinge, der muss nymer mehr kein mensch teuffen.*"<sup>123</sup> The experience of the baptisand on these principles will be the same; there will always be a nagging doubt. Today, he may feel that he has a *recht* faith for the first time, but yesterday, when he was rebaptised, did he truly believe then? And so on, because the devil is quite capable of undermining (*anfechte*) a second, a third, and any subsequent baptisms based on faith.<sup>124</sup>

Having to his own satisfaction demonstrated the impossibility of the Anabaptists' interpretation of "whoever believes", Luther has to provide his own. He does so with an explicit denial that faith is either confident or certain in itself. To seek to build on faith is to repeat the errors that

Luther and others made in the cloister, when they sought to rely on a perfect penitence (*beichte*).<sup>125</sup> Indeed faith may well be unaware of itself, as in the case where one who thinks he does not believe, and is in despair (*verzweivele*), has in reality a greater faith than one who thinks he believes.<sup>126</sup> Luther's conclusion here is that the "whoever believes" of Mark 16:16 does not require those who administer baptism to know who has faith and who does not. The onus is upon the baptised individual, throughout his life, to recognise the need for faith, without which his baptism is not enough to make him a Christian. The text is not:

*Wer da weis, das er glewbt, odder wenn du weist, das ihener glewbt, Sondern: 'Wer da glewbt', wers hats, der hats. Glewben mus man, Aber wir sollen, noch könnens nicht gewis wissen.*<sup>127</sup>

The interpretation of the last sentence presents a difficulty; is it the believer (baptisand) or a third party (minister of baptism) who neither should nor can be certain of the faith? Although it is already clear that Luther is prepared to admit that the individual may be unaware or uncertain of his faith, the context of his argument against the *Täufer* suggests that it is the latter which is chiefly in mind. Whichever interpretation is adopted, the central principle remains the same. Faith is by its very nature directed to God and his work. It is therefore directed away from itself, there is a lack of selfconsciousness and selfconfidence about it.<sup>128</sup> This thought is perhaps best expressed by importing a phrase from another field; faith must not be *incurvatus in se*.

From the woman of Torgau who professed herself unable to believe, Luther extracted the statement that she did believe what she prayed in the Creed. "Then . . . you believe, and better than I do!" was his reply. A continual search for a better, more conscious faith is inspired only by the devil:

We are so constructed by nature that we desire to have a conscious faith. We'd like to grasp it in our hands and shove it into our bosoms, but that doesn't happen in this life. We can't comprehend it, but we ought to apprehend it. We should hold to the word and let ourselves drag along in this way.<sup>129</sup>

Faith is not self-directed, not even self-conscious; rather it is directed away from itself straight towards the divine word and ordinance. The question faith asks of itself, namely as to whether it is itself sufficient, complete and effective, is a question which is answered by Luther only in his refusal to be aware of it, or to allow it to be asked.<sup>130</sup>

To misunderstand the nature of faith is to overturn a fundamental principle of the Reformation, and to reverse the 'direction' of religion from God to man. In 1530 Luther expressed this particularly clearly when commenting on Psalm 117:

. . . the Anabaptists claim that baptism is nothing if one is not previously sanctified. They do not want to acquire holiness through and from baptism, but by their piety they want to make baptism holy and wholesome. As I see it, this is to lose the Cornerstone completely and to be justified, not through the grace of Christ in baptism but through one's own self, so that baptism gives nothing, creates nothing, brings nothing (*das die Tauffe nichts gebe, nichts schaffe, nichts bringe*). Instead we bring everything to baptism beforehand, so that it is nothing but an unnecessary symbol (*ein blos unnötig*)

*zeichen*) by which one is supposed to be able to recognise such pious folk.<sup>131</sup>

Faith, once it ceases to be completely other-directed (Christ-directed), becomes a self-conscious and self-reliant human piety, in other words, a work. Properly understood, however, faith "is a constant gaze that looks at nothing except Christ".<sup>132</sup>

#### 3.4.4 Faith and baptism in the *Genesisvorlesung*

Baptism must be received by faith; but faith is not constitutive of a *recht* baptism. These two central pillars of Luther's understanding of the relationship between baptism and faith are fully reflected in the *Genesisvorlesung*. It is possible to possess the sign, but have no use of it in the absence of faith.<sup>133</sup> In the Lectures Luther typically uses the double vocabulary of boasting and despising to depict the absence of faith. The false church boasts of its possession of the sign, while at the same time despising it as weak and common.<sup>134</sup> But a lack of faith casts no doubt upon the validity of the signs. Luther concedes that the church of the Pope has baptism, although it is "altogether dead amongst them". A faithless minister does not compromise the validity of baptism; even Judas's baptisands were truly baptised.<sup>135</sup>

Although the picture of the faith-baptism relationship in the Lectures is broadly continuous with that of the Catechisms, there are some distinctive features. First, the Lectures place faith in the baptismal promise in its

human context. The subjective aspects of this faith are highlighted with parallels from the lives of Seth, Noah, Abraham, Jacob and others. Faith is a struggle to believe what is contrary to appearance. It is no less than a victory over a God who appears in hostile form.<sup>136</sup> The nature of this struggle points back to the identity of baptism as one of the 'faces' or 'masks' of God. It is incomprehensible to the world that God should be encountered and heard here, in the common vulgarity of this unimpressive sign. The struggle of faith matches the weakness of baptism and the other signs, as compared with the temptations of the glorious self-chosen worship of the false church.<sup>137</sup> The eschatological tension which is built into Luther's formal baptismal theology finds one of its sharpest expression in the Lectures. Like Jacob going into exile, the true church has received the promise, but sees nothing of it.<sup>138</sup> The struggle for faith in the promise is life-long; there is the likelihood of many a wandering away from the trysting place of baptism, and the possibility of many a return to it.<sup>139</sup>

A second distinctive feature of the Lectures in this context is the hint of a corporate or communal element in Luther's understanding of faith. This is something of a paradox; the radical loneliness of the struggle of faith is nowhere more sharply expressed than in these Lectures. When Luther talks about the failure of the faith-baptism relationship, or of the despising or boasting that goes with it, again and again it is about whole groups of people, nations, tribes and, most typically of all, 'churches' that he is talking about. The two churches theme pervades the Lectures from the murder of Abel onwards. Both in the text of Genesis itself and in the circumstances of his own day Luther sees the question of the right use of the sacraments and the right use of the name of God as an issue which

divides churches.<sup>140</sup> Faith itself is present or absent — in churches.<sup>141</sup> That there is a haziness and porosity about the precise boundaries of the two churches is not to be denied. The question of the salvation of an individual cannot be definitively resolved in terms of his or her membership of a particular church, family or nation.<sup>142</sup> But the degree of Luther's concentration upon the *community* of faith in the Lectures must be fully taken into account in an appreciation of his understanding of faith itself.

When Luther encounters those who doubt, or who fail to appreciate the wonder of God's grace, his pastoral response calls them to attend to the signs, places and means of grace. That is where they are to look, not at themselves, and at their faith or lack of it. The unselfconsciousness of faith is fully maintained in the Lectures. There is also a hint of a move in the direction of a minimalist understanding of what faith entails:

. . . on the authority of Christ we are told: 'I baptise you; I extend to you the body and blood of Christ; I tear your soul from the power of the devil; I set you free from eternal death and damnation; and I make you a child of God and an heir of eternal life.' These words which God speaks to us are so grand, eternal and infinite that we cannot grasp them; for my nature is too weak to be able to endure them. . . But we should listen with grateful hearts and believe at least weakly (*credamus saltem infirmiter*). Only let us not fight against it, blaspheme, persecute, reject, and deny.<sup>143</sup>

It is the sin which deprives an individual of faith, baptism, and salvation which appears to be the positive act. There is a way in which faith itself has a negative aspect in the Lectures; sometimes it is presented as a remaining in the community of faith and salvation by not denying, not

rejecting, not blaspheming.<sup>144</sup> On the basis of such passages, Wheatley is prepared to argue as follows: "Reacting to the extreme scrupulosity and studied doubt cultivated in the Church of his day, Luther urged that each person should consider himself a saint insofar as he holds with the common faith in God as Creator and Saviour."<sup>145</sup>

Indications of this negative definition of faith must be balanced against passages, in the Lectures and outside them, where an individual's unwavering, struggling, active faith is essential to the Christian life. If believers are victors over God, this has implications for faith — God cannot be conquered passively.<sup>146</sup> There is tension, and probably inconsistency, between some of Luther's statements concerning the nature of faith. Yet again Luther's situation as he faces opponents on two fronts is demonstrated; shifts in the balance of his argument reflect circumstances in which different opponents are uppermost in his mind. But the apparent tensions and inconsistencies in Luther's notion of faith also confirm that it is not at the centre of his attention. It is that to which faith is to be directed which is the true focus of his thought. Faith must not attend to itself but to the word and the means of grace; only here is true certainty to be found.

3.5 SIGNIFICATIO Baptism as Death and Resurrection

The fourth and last subdivision of the baptismal section in the *Grosse Katechismus* concerns the significance of the sacrament, and the fittingness of the particular sign God has joined to the Word:

*. . . was die Tauffe bedeutet und warumb Gott eben solch eusserlich zeichen und geberde ordnet zu dem Sacrament, dadurch wir erstlich ynn die Christenheit genomen werden.<sup>147</sup>*

The distinction between the *significatio* of baptism, and its use, benefits and power (*was sie nütze, gebe und schaffe*, § 3.3) is neither obvious nor straightforward. The two closely approach one another. Baptism not only signifies the new life; it also effects it. Power and significance are only separated by the absence of faith, when there is a bare sign, mere signification without effect.<sup>148</sup> But although they must not be separated, there is a conceptual distinction between the two. The second and fourth sub-sections of the *Grosse Katechismus* examine baptism from different angles. It is perhaps not too much of an over-simplification to say that one is concerned with content, effect and result, the other with manner and mode. The *significatio* of baptism is predicated upon the nature of the sign of baptism -- why has God chosen *this* sign to be joined with the word in preference to all others? In what does its appropriateness consist? What does the water of baptism and the manner of its administration have to say about life under the covenant of baptism?



3.5.1 Baptism as Drowning: The Double *Significatio*

There are two parts to the sign of baptism. The baptisand is plunged beneath the water (at least symbolically) and is raised up from it.<sup>149</sup> Luther repeatedly uses the traditional language of the killing of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new as the double *significatio* of the double sign:

*Das werck aber odder geberde is das, das man uns yns wasser sencket, das uber uns her gehet, und darnach widder eraus zeucht . . . deutet die krafft und werck der Tauffe . . . die tödtung des alten Adams, darnach die aufferstehung des newen menschs, welche beyde unser leben lang ynn uns gehen sollen, also das ein Christlich leben nicht anders ist denn ein tegliche Tauffe, ein mal angefangen und ymmer daryn gegangen.*<sup>150</sup>

The right use of baptism is signified by the sign; Luther brings *braucht* and *bedeutet* together. A life-long, daily, putting away or killing of the old man, and all the hatefulness, wrath and unbelief associated with him, in order that all that belongs to the new may come — this is the *rechte brauch der Tauffe unter den Christen, durch das wasser teuffen bedeutet*.<sup>151</sup> Conversely, to leave the old man unchecked is to fail to use baptism rightly, and represents a resisting (*gestrebt*) of baptism; and those who are thus outside Christ (*ausser Christo*) can only grow worse as the old nature rages unchecked by the power of baptism. It is only when we become Christians (*wo Christen sind worden*) that the process of submerging the old man begins.<sup>152</sup> Luther presents the case of the baptised individual in whom this process is not a reality as a separation of that which belongs together. The power (*krafft*), meaning (*deutung*), and the use (*brauch*) of baptism all converge in the *significatio* of this daily dying and resurrection. But without faith the

bare unfruitful sign (*blos unfruchtbar zeichen*) remains alone.<sup>153</sup> Where faith is present, the *significatio* of baptism stamps its character upon the whole life of the Christian, who has to learn, experience, and practice what the slaying of the old Adam means.

But if the *significatio* of baptism determines the *character* of the Christian life, it also gives that life its *shape*. There is a journey, a process of dying, which begins at the instant of baptism, and which is not completed until physical death. "This journey begins in baptism (*Welcher gang sehet sich an inn der Tauffe*). And as long as there is faith, man continues on this course (*der selbigen strasse*) until he completes it through death."<sup>154</sup> ". . . in baptism all Christians begin to die, and they continue to die until they reach the grave (*inn der tauffe alle Christen anfahren zu sterben bis inn die gruben*."<sup>155</sup> Baptism is death; they are interchangeable terms in Scripture.<sup>156</sup> Rather, since the double *significatio* is death and resurrection, we should say that the process is not complete until the resurrection of the dead.<sup>157</sup> The act of baptism is a thrusting into death (*gestossen in tod*).<sup>158</sup> So there appears to be a definite beginning, a certain end, and a continuous process which occupies the time between them: "A Christian is a person who begins to tread the way from this life to heaven the moment he is baptised . . . And he holds to this way until his end."<sup>159</sup>

The 'shape' and the 'character' of the Christian life as governed by the *significatio* of baptism merit further exploration in turn.

3.5.2 Significatio and the shape of the Christian life

The *significatio* of baptism paints the Christian life as a two-fold process of dying and being raised to new life which begins at baptism, and which ends with death and the resurrection at the last day. But there are difficulties about such a model of the Christian life in the wider context of Luther's thought.

The chief of these difficulties lies with the concept of identifiable — even measurable — progress which is irresistibly suggested by the life-long process of dying and resurrection. At any given moment, it would appear that there should be more of the new man and less of the old than there has been before. But the notion of a journey towards holiness, unexceptionable almost everywhere else, is nowhere more objectionable than in Luther's theology, in which all claims to human spiritual worth and achievement are so radically undermined. At each point in the life of a Christian, the whole of the past, very much including the religious past, must be considered as flesh, to be turned away from in repentance, as the individual looks to Christ in faith.<sup>160</sup> There is no possibility of identifying a stratum of achieved, empirical piety in the individual Christian from which visible accumulation of spiritual capital his or her steady progress can be demonstrated. This is the notorious problem of sanctification in the context of Luther's soteriology.<sup>161</sup> The baptismal shape of the Christian life, determined by the *significatio* of death and resurrection appears to be in head-on collision with the doctrine of justification by faith.

It is not only the possibility of progress between the beginning and end points of the process that faces virtual annihilation by a rigorous application of Luther's soteriological principles. The notion of the start of the Christian life itself seems to fall under the same ban. If at every moment the whole past of the whole man is designated as 'flesh', how can the Christian life ever be said to have begun at all?

The 'shape' of the Christian life is a problem for the interpreter of Luther. A linear model, with a definite beginning (baptism), a clear end (death and resurrection), and progress in dying to sin in between is strongly suggested by the *significatio* of baptism. Such a linear model was most certainly available in the tradition. It has always been the most 'natural' model for the Christian life. There are indeed occasions where Luther seems to accept it, or parts of it, uncritically. There is indeed a progress to be expected in the Christian life. There must, for instance, be progress in understanding, in faith, in the will:

*Quotidie autem proficimus a claritate in claritatem, tanquam a Domini spiritu, subinde enim clarius intelligimus de die in diem, et tamen nihil aliud discimus, sed in eandem imaginem transformamur.*

*Idem fit in mutatione voluntatis nostrae, quae etiam proficit quotidie, cum paulatim magis magisque discimus sperare, confidere et patientes esse. Incipiens ergo proficiens, et perficiens fides una eademque est. Semper enim in eandem imaginem transformamur. Verbum autem est datum exerceatur et te exercat singulis diebus et horis, donec crescas in virum perfectum . . . 162*

But the weight of the evidence militates against an uncritical acceptance of the linear pattern. Progress in the Christian life can never be progress

away from the beginning of baptism, but a repeated return to it. Thus Luther interprets the sacrament of the keys, not as a new stage in the Christian pilgrimage, or as a dispensation of new grace, but as a continual return to baptism:

*Also ist die busse nicht anders denn ein widdergang und zutretten zur Tauffe, das man das widder holet und treibt, so man zuvor angefangen und doch davon gelassen hat.*<sup>163</sup>

Luther imposes a circular shape upon the Christian life. The Christian must never presume to claim any achievement or progress which places him beyond the call for a continual repentance of the past *in toto*, and a repeated return to the promise of righteousness in Christ — to the promise of baptism itself.<sup>164</sup> The 'circular' shape of the Christian life and the present tense of baptism are inextricably linked; baptism, even though it is administered only once, does not lose force after post-baptismal sin, as has for so long been held.<sup>165</sup> Again and again, within the few pages of this subsection of the *Grosse Katechismus*, Luther repeats this belief in the abiding reality of baptism, which always remains available for human recourse:

*Darumb bleibt die Tauffe ymerdar stehen, und ob gleich niemand davon fellet und sundigt, haben wir doch ymmer ein zugang dazu, das man den alten menschen widder untersch werffe. Aber mit wasser darff man uns nicht mehr begieffen.*<sup>166</sup>

Although the drowning in water can never be repeated; without a continual return to baptism, the old man can never be drowned. But in baptism, there

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is available a daily bath for the old man.<sup>167</sup> The permanent availability of an abiding baptism is nothing less than the very presence of Christ on his mercy seat.<sup>168</sup>

#### 3.5.3 Baptism as *teglich kleid*: the character of the Christian life

*Darümb sol ein yglicher die Tauffe halten als sein teglich kleid, daryn er ymmerdar gehen sol, das er sich alle zeit ynn dem glauben und seinen fruchten finden lasse, das er den alten menschen dempfe und ym newen erwachse.* (Thus one should keep baptism as his daily garment, which he should wear evermore, so that at all times he may be found in faith and its fruits, and so that he may put the old man to sleep and grow up in the new.)<sup>169</sup>

The constant wearing of the *teglich kleid* of baptism is as vitally important as the first 'putting on' of this garment in the rite itself. The *significatio* of baptism clarifies the nature of the complex relationship between the unrepeatable baptismal act and the abiding reality of baptism which follows. Baptism, at least in the most obvious sense, is the beginning of a process, but it also continues to determine the nature of that process as death and resurrection until it is complete. The sign of baptism itself, the drowning in water and the raising up from the water, stamps its character upon the daily life of a Christian.

The Christian has to die a daily death. But paradoxically he must never seek opportunities to put this into practice. If he continues in a life of obedience within his allotted callings these opportunities will come soon enough. Luther's theology of vocation is predicated upon the *significatio* of

baptism. The daily dying to the old man which is required must be put into effect within the matrix of particular human callings. All these callings offer ample opportunity for trouble, suffering, and the killing of the self. Each Christian is placed under a number of callings. He or she may be husband, wife, parent, child, master, servant, soldier, pastor, farmer, etc. There is no need to seek special opportunities for putting the baptismal killing of the old man into effect, no need to seek suffering or to manufacture a self-chosen cross, because there will be plenty of both cross and suffering in the life of a man or woman who lives out these callings.<sup>170</sup>

#### 3.5.4 The *Significatio* of baptism in the *Genesisvorlesung*

All the aspects of the *significatio* of baptism set out above are reflected in the *Lectures on Genesis*. Baptism and death are equivalent terms.<sup>171</sup> The double *significatio* of baptism as death and resurrection is reflected in the parallel with circumcision: "Thus God burdens and slays the Church according to the flesh. Yet through faith he justifies and revives it according to the spirit."<sup>172</sup> The availability and necessity of repeated recourse to baptism is underlined in the Lectures by the trysting place *motif*. But it is on the relationship of baptism and *vocatio* that the Lectures have most to contribute.

The callings share the weakness of baptism itself. Many despise them, and seek to be heroes, above the ranks of ordinary men. But, "if you see a baptised person walking in his baptismal faith and in the confession of the word and performing the works of his calling (*opera vocationis suae*), these

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works, however ordinary, are truly and admirable works of God, even though they are not impressive in the eyes of men."<sup>173</sup> The church of the Pope despises lowly baptism.<sup>174</sup> But equally they affect to deplore the involvement of the patriarchs in "carnal" matters, such as the callings of marriage, procreation and parenthood. Frequently baptism and callings occur together. Thus when Luther refers to the story of Anthony and the tanner of Alexandria, to whom the saint was sent to learn wisdom, he draws attention to the baptised status of the man humbly fulfilling his calling: ". . . this baptised tanner was just as pleasing to God when he did his work in faith, as Anthony was when he tormented himself and prayed."<sup>175</sup> A believer's carnal, physical, even animal duties are pleasing to God.<sup>176</sup> The story of the two wives of Jacob. Leah and Rachel, was frequently interpreted allegorically to exalt the contemplative life (Rachel) at the expense of the active (Leah).<sup>177</sup> Luther will have none of this, nor will he tolerate the papists' haughty view of scripture itself, when, for instance, the Holy Spirit occupies himself in its pages with such trivia as Leah's bargaining with mandrakes for the favours of her husband (Gen. 30:14ff.). If baptism and the word are set over our lives, we are in a spiritual calling "no matter how unimportant, servile, womanish, and full of wretchedness (*exilia, servilia, muliebria et plena miseriae*) our works are, we should nevertheless add this title: THE WORD OF GOD . . ."<sup>178</sup>

Whatever the external circumstances of a Christian's life; all is grist to the mill for the putting into effect of the *significatio* of baptism. The humdrum duties of domestic life provide one arena for the dying which is baptism. Extraordinary trials, suffering and physical death itself provide



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another. In such circumstances "we may encourage ourselves and say: 'Behold, here is your Red Sea, your Flood, your baptism, and your death.'"179

3.6

KINDERTAUFE

Karl Barth sets a series of tests for all theological justifications of infant baptism. Is infant baptism "an original element which is integral to baptismal doctrine", or is it a "foreign body" which requires to be assimilated into the wider baptismal doctrine, and thence into the rest of Christian teaching, probably at a cost to the whole?<sup>180</sup> Barth's distinction is that between what is genuinely integral to Christian theology, and that which arises in the manner of a supplement or appendix: "That which is truly important and correct declares itself from afar."<sup>181</sup> Luther's treatment of infant baptism, Barth appears to be saying, fails this test — although perhaps not as badly as those of Calvin, Melanchthon and Bullinger. Like the other reformers, Luther is engaged in what amounts to an exercise of integration and damage limitation.

Three further tests for defences of infant baptism are proposed by Barth. He looks for signs of irritability in argument as an indication that the proponents of infant baptism are uneasy and conscious of the weakness of their position. He also looks for actual inconsistencies in the position — in other words, for signs that the integration of the alien element into the whole is not entirely successful.<sup>182</sup> The fourth and last test is applied to the arguments used in support of infant baptism — do they support it by demanding the baptism of young children, or do they, considered in themselves, point in a different direction? If the latter, this is a sure sign of the required conclusion preceding the theological reasoning being

used to reach it.<sup>183</sup> While these further tests may be salutary reminders of the standards to be expected in theological argument, it is the first which is crucial. How naturally does *Kindertaufe* 'sit', first in the setting of Luther's wider baptismal theology, and secondly in the whole context of his theology? This must be the governing question in what follows.

The critical sources are the excursus in the *Grosse Katechismus*, and the letter *Von der Widdertaufe*.<sup>184</sup> But a full appreciation of the variety of arguments used by Luther in defence of infant baptism will require comparison with earlier and later material.

Luther's posing of the question in the first words of the excursus is interesting in itself. It is a question, he says, of *der Kinder tauffe, ob sie auch gleuben odder recht getaufft werden*.<sup>185</sup> Is Luther seeking to leave his options open? He has either to prove that infants may believe, or that they may rightly be baptised irrespective of their faith, but he has no need to prove both. Here, perhaps, there is a sign of the uneasiness Barth is looking for. The variety of arguments piled one on top of another seem to betray a lack of confidence in any one of them.<sup>186</sup>

In what follows an attempt will be made to disentangle the various defences of infant baptism which Luther employs, and to assess them in turn. At least five main lines of defence, all logically separable from one another, can be identified. Of these, two have already been discussed in some detail above (§ 3.4), and another figures prominently in the *Genesisvorlesung*. There are also some clearly identifiable subsidiary arguments bound up in Luther's presentation of the main defences.

3.6.1 Defence (1): The Existence of the Church

. . . und die Heilige Christliche kyrche nicht untergehet bis ans ende der welt, so müssen sie bekennen, das sie Gotte gefellig sey.<sup>187</sup>

With a preliminary discouragement to the unlearned to proceed further with this question, Luther in the *Grosse Katechismus* presents the first strand in his argument. *Prima facie* it is a simple, almost naive, appeal to God's blessing upon the Church which has practised infant baptism down the centuries, and upon those baptised in infancy. That infant baptism is pleasing to God is sufficiently proved by his own actions, *nemlich das Gott deren viel heilig machet und den Heiligen geist gegeben hat die also getaufft sind.*<sup>188</sup> It is the gift of the Holy Spirit which confirms the baptism of those who were baptised as infants, men of unimpeachable holiness such as Bernard, Gerson, and Huss.<sup>189</sup> If God did not accept (*annehme*) infant baptism, not only would these men have been excluded, but no man on earth could have been a Christian.<sup>190</sup>

It would be very easy to misunderstand this argument. It could be presented as an attack on the *Täufer* which is predicated upon their isolation in the context of Church history. There would be a heavy irony in the prosecution of such an attack by Luther, who himself, as the 'Saxon Huss', was forced to face the charge of an individual, isolated approach to Scripture and theology in defiance of Councils, Popes and Christendom itself.<sup>191</sup> Is Luther seeking simply to demonstrate the Anabaptists' error by calling attention to their isolation, as his own opponents had repeatedly done against him, or is he calling attention to the seeming impossibility of

God having permitted such a wholesale and universal error? Certainly it appears that there is an element of both these lines of argument in Luther's approach. But neither is at the focal point of his position.

Baptism has a particular place and importance. Without valid baptism, there can be no Church. Thus, on Anabaptist presuppositions, there can have been no Church for hundreds of years, as there has been no true baptism. So Luther's unwillingness to accept the possibility of God allowing heresy to continue for so long is more thoroughly theologically grounded than might at first appear.<sup>192</sup> Baptism, along with the scriptures and the sacrament of the altar, is a mark of the Church, and essential to it. Along with the creeds, the ten commandments, the ministry, the keys, and everything else which is Christian, they have come down to the present from the papacy.<sup>193</sup> Not only is it true that in the same way that gold remains gold even in the hands of evil men, these treasures continue as such even amidst the taints of the papists, it is also the case that the fact that the pope reigns amongst them, is in itself an indication of their worth. By definition, Antichrist reigns in the temple of God, amongst holy things. The holiness of baptism, and the way it has been administered, so far from being compromised by its preservation under the Pope is actually confirmed by it.<sup>194</sup>

For these reasons a denial of infant baptism, given the history of the previous thousand or more years, amounts to a denial of an article of the creed; "I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the community of saints . . ." The Holy Spirit could have been bestowed on no-one, there could have been no Church, no Christendom — by definition, without a true baptism.<sup>195</sup> But

there evidently has been such a Church; Luther's argument here is a *reductio ad absurdum*.

3.6.2 Defences (ii) and (iii): Baptism's Independence of Faith and

*Fides Aliena*

*Darnach sagen wir weiter, das uns nicht die grösste macht daran ligt, ob, der da getaufft wird, gleube odder nicht gleube, denn darumb wird die Tauffe nicht unrecht, Sondern an Gottes wort und gepot ligt es alles.<sup>196</sup>*

Luther's second and final argument in defence of infant baptism in the *Grosse Katechismus* is his denial that *recht* baptism is dependent upon faith. The presence or absence of faith, in minister or baptisand, is by no means a matter of the first importance in establishing whether a baptism is valid. The principle is one of general applicability; it is not confined to the particular case of infants.<sup>197</sup> This issue has already been discussed at length above (§ 3.4). Issues right at the heart of Luther's theology are engaged here; the nature of faith, the priority and all-sufficiency of God's word of command, the direction of religion from God to man, the identity of baptism as God's work, not man's.

Luther's declared intent is to demonstrate that infants believe, or that they may rightly be baptised.<sup>198</sup> The two lines of argument presented in the *Grosse Katechismus* are both concerned with the latter: infant baptism is true baptism, otherwise there would have been no Church since the earliest days, and, in any case, baptism and its validity can in no way be permitted

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to stand or fall with the faith or lack of faith with which it is received. But there is a third possible line of argument which seeks to demonstrate the validity of baptism independently of the hypothesis of faith in the infant baptisand. It is only hinted at in the *Grosse Katechismus: Ich kome her ynn meinem glauben und auch der andern*.<sup>199</sup> The reference to *fides aliena* is entirely general — there is no indication of the specific role of godparents.<sup>200</sup> It is not present at all in *Von der Widdertauffe*, and in general it has the aspect of an argument which Luther inherited from others, without making it fully his own. Although the defence from *fides aliena* is logically distinct from defence (ii), the independence of baptism from faith, these two defences have a similar import. One puts questions about the presence of faith into a secondary position; the other relegates questions about the location of faith.<sup>201</sup>

#### 3.6.3 Defence (iv): *Fides Infantium*

The fourth major line of argument employed by Luther in defence of *Kindertaufe* takes the other option tabled by Luther at the start of the excursus in the *Grosse Katechismus*, namely, the possibility that infants believe. In the Catechisms, however, *fides infantium* appears only in a very tangential way. By contrast, in the letter *Von der Widdertaufe* it is very much in the foreground.<sup>202</sup>

The core of Luther's argument in support of *fides infantium* is a shifting of the burden of proof. It is up to those who deny the possibility of faith in children to adduce the scriptural evidence.<sup>203</sup> Such clear scriptural

support is needed if the Church is to abandon usages which have come down from ancient times. A scriptural warrant was indeed available in the case of cloisters, mass-priests and clerical celibacy — otherwise it would have been right to let these things stand.<sup>204</sup> Yet another distinct argument is embedded here — a presumption in favour of traditional practice. Furthermore, the Anabaptists need to establish not that children do not believe, but that scripture shows that they *cannot* believe. But scripture shows that they can. Luther instances the innocent blood shed in the offering of children to idols by the Jews; the slaughter of the Holy Innocents; and the leaping in the womb of the unborn John the Baptist.<sup>205</sup> It is the children whom Christ bids come to him; it is children of whom he says, "of such is the kingdom of heaven"; it is children whom we are called to resemble.<sup>206</sup> If they were not holy, he would not have said these things. But there could be no innocence or holiness unless these infants had *geist und glawben*.<sup>207</sup>

A second argument for the possibility of infant faith is introduced in support of the first. In baptism we have the presence, the words and the activity of Christ: *Weil er denn da ist gegenwertig, redet und teufft selbs*.<sup>208</sup> Luther appeals to the nature of baptism as a divine word and work, and to the principle that such work will not be fruitless; the word will not return empty (Isaiah 55:11). Therefore the overwhelming presumption must be that infants do have faith, even though one cannot know how they believe, or how faith is created.<sup>209</sup> The implication is clear — faith itself is a work of God.<sup>210</sup> With this argument the support for *fides infantium* leads back to the general principles which govern the relationship of baptism and faith for adults as well as for infants.



On Luther's own admission, *fides infantium* has something of the nature of a hypothesis.<sup>211</sup> There is no unambiguous scriptural warrant for the assertion that children believe. But it those who propose the massive shift in Church polity who require the proof. *Fides infantium* cannot be the conclusive defence of infant baptism; ultimately the argument has to leave it on one side and return to the starting point -- the question as to whether or not the baptism of children has been commanded. Luther refers to the general commands to baptise the heathen (without exclusion of any category), to the New Testament instances of the baptism of households, and to early Christian practice as cited by Augustine.<sup>212</sup> The Anabaptists alter what has been established from the earliest days in proceeding with their rebaptisms, and they are far from having the certain and sure grounds needed for such an action.

#### 3.6.4 Kindertaufe in the Genesisvorlesung and Defence (v): The Covenant

Like other documents from the later years, the *Genesisvorlesung* exhibits a variety of arguments in defence of infant baptism. *Fides infantium* is deduced from the divine command to circumcise on the eighth day.<sup>213</sup> *Fides aliena* is present at least indirectly, in the emphasis upon the community of faith which pervades the Lectures; and the two-sided nature of the faith-baptism relationship, which releases baptism from any dependance upon faith for its validity, is also fully evident.<sup>214</sup> But the distinctive contribution of the Lectures is the argument from the nature of the covenant, based on the parallel with circumcision:

If [inclusion in the kingdom, justification] was brought about with the Jews in the Old Testament through the medium of circumcision, why would God not do the same thing with the Gentiles through the medium of the new covenant (*novo pacto*) of baptism? The command pertains to all (*praeceptum universale est*): "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them . . ." Hence whereas circumcision was commanded only to the descendants of Abraham, baptism is commanded to all the nations, with the promise of salvation if they believe.<sup>215</sup>

The argument from the covenant on the basis of the parallel with circumcision is inextricably entwined with that for *fides infantium*. It is also closely related to the hypothesis of *fides alienum*, via the solidarity of the people of God. But it is logically distinct from both. The covenant is with "all nations", and so the command to baptise is universal.

This defence is not restricted to the *Genesisvorlesung*.<sup>216</sup> It also occurs in *Von der Widdertauffe* where, however, it is embedded in the argument for *fides infantium*.<sup>217</sup> Luther's opponents had argued that the holiness of Jewish infants under the old covenant lay in their circumcision, whereas under the new, "our children are heathen".<sup>218</sup> Luther attempts to turn the Anabaptists' argument against them, by pleading the parallel between the two covenants — if God accepted children, both boys and girls, through the covenant of circumcision, why should he not do the same now through the *bund* of baptism?<sup>219</sup>

3.6.5 Kindertaufe: The Foundation of the Defences

The overwhelming impression gained from an examination of Luther's defence of *Kindertaufe* is the 'patchwork quilt' variety of the arguments he uses, without any obvious attempt to relate them to each other, or to ensure their consistency. Are not Barth's suspicions amply justified? The final verdict on Luther's defences will hinge on whether they can be shown to be organically related to one another, and upon whether they can be demonstrated to share a common foundation.

Is there one key element in all these defences? Certainly a major part of the argument centres upon a right understanding of the relationship between faith and that which faith has to grasp. This is most clearly seen in the denial that *recht* baptism is dependent upon faith (defence ii). But other strands in the argument also converge at this point. The hypothesis of *fides infantium* (defence iv) can be advanced precisely because the decisive place is not given to faith, but to the means of grace. Luther's declamations about infant faith reveal a degree of suggestion and conjecture about faith and its presence or absence which is only possible because he is clear that the sacrament rests on foundations other than faith. A related point, but conceptually distinct, concerns the nature of faith itself. Luther's opponents argue that children cannot believe because they are deficient in reason. Thus the hypothesis of *fides infantium* is advanced by Luther to protect faith as a divine possibility and creation in man, as opposed to a natural human possibility or work.<sup>220</sup> This links defences (ii) and (iv) yet more closely; both are intimately related to Luther's rejection of any understanding of the faith-baptism relationship which has the effect

of turning faith into a work. The defence which looks to the *fides aliena* of godparents or the whole Church to make good any supposed deficiency in the infant baptisand is also possible only because faith itself is not the guarantor of the sacrament (defence iii). Luther is free to speculate about the effect of *fides aliena* precisely because it is the word of promise and command upon which all else rests.

The argument from the practice of the universal Church, and from God's blessing upon those baptised as infants, which Pelikan calls the argument from continuity, but which is better described as the argument from the existence of the Church (defence i), appears to represent a separate line of thought.<sup>221</sup> The same goes for the covenant argument (defence v). It is not easy to demonstrate that either of these defences stem from the right understanding of the relationship of baptism and faith.

But at a deeper level still it can be shown that all the defences share a common root. They are all ultimately grounded upon the divine warrant for baptism in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:16. It is the divine word of command which establishes the covenant of baptism (defence v) and which constitutes the covenant people, the Church (defence i). It is the priority of this word which makes questions of faith secondary in consideration of the validity of the sacrament (defence ii). In turn it is the secondary position of faith in this context which frees Luther to hypothesise about the power of the divine word to create *fides infantium* (defence iv), or to use the traditional argument from *fides aliena* (defence iii).

The primacy of the dominical command for baptism in the older Luther forces all other questions concerning baptism into second position. The presence or absence of faith cannot affect the validity of baptism. Neither can the abuse of baptism under the papacy and its proximity there to evil of many kinds compromise its identity as the precious treasure which demarks and denotes the Church.

Barth's criteria for assessing a defence of infant baptism focus first upon the relationship between that defence and the wider baptismal teaching itself, and only secondarily upon its relationship to the theological context as a whole. Luther's treatment of infant baptism passes that first test with ease. As Barth somewhat grudgingly admits, Luther

managed with relative credibility, though not without some flaws, to integrate his doctrine of infant baptism into his doctrine of baptism (in the Greater Catechism, 1529) in an excursus on the receiving of the sacrament.<sup>222</sup>

There may indeed be problems in relating the baptismal teaching to its context. But the problem is related most emphatically to the whole of the baptismal doctrine. Luther's defences of infant baptism are predicated upon the utter primacy and unshakeability of the divine word of command and promise, which is at the heart of his theology of baptism. His defence of *Kindertaufe* and his wider baptismal thought are all of a piece.

3.7 CONCLUSION

The foundation of Luther's defence of *Kindertaufe* is the core of the whole of his baptismal theology; the water of baptism joined to the word which ordains, founds and establishes it.<sup>223</sup> The unshakeable, objective validity of baptism is grounded upon the dominical word of command and promise. The necessity of faith does not undermine its objectivity: it depends upon it. At each stage of Luther's treatment of baptism in the *Grosse Katechismus* he refers back to its foundation in the word.

A number of important themes have emerged from this study of the formal baptismal theology of the older Luther. They are not all *directly* baptismal themes, but they are an important part of the context in which Luther's theology of baptism has to function. Among the most important are the shape of the Christian life (§ 3.5.2), and the unselfconsciousness of faith (§ 3.4.3). Both will be pursued further in Chapter 5. But it is a baptismal theme which is the most striking of all.

The word of God to which the water is joined is a *present* word, which cannot be confined to the moment of administration, let alone to the dominical institution of the sacrament (§ 3.2.4). The examination of the *Genesisvorlesung* in Chapter 2 has illustrated the potency of this theme in the older Luther. God is to be met, encountered, and above all, heard — now, at the trysting places of baptism and the other means of grace. In the context of the *Grosser Katechismus* the Luther of 1529 restricts himself to a

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narrow understanding of the 'word' of baptism (§ 3.2.1), but the potential for the development of an emphasis on the present tense of this word is already clear. The present tense of baptism is made explicit at other points in the Catechism, however; to such an extent that this is a theme which pervades the entire section.

The *significatio* of baptism as a drowning of the old man and a resurrection of the new confirms the life-long aspect of baptism (§ 3.5.1). There is no need to seek any substitute, such as the *andere taffel* of penance; the good ship baptism abides.<sup>224</sup> There is no possibility of moving onwards to another stage in the Christian life in which the Christian is free from any further requirement for the 'daily bath' of baptism (§ 3.5.2).

The power and effect of baptism must also be set against its present tense. Baptismal regeneration (§ 3.3.1) cannot be referred entirely to the moment of administration (§§ 3.3.2, 3.3.3). The regeneration which baptism effects and the dying and rising which baptism signifies are one and the same in this. Baptismal regeneration not only stands behind the Christian as fact — it also stands *before* him as call.

The relationship between baptism and faith reflects the same principle. A lack of faith in the past can be answered by a call for it in the present precisely because baptism itself remains — in the present (§ 3.4.1) The call to return to baptism can and must be heard and heeded again and again.

Luther concludes the baptismal section of the *Grosse Katechismus* with precisely this theme. So long as we carry the *alten menschen* around with

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us, baptism remains available every day. If we sin, nevertheless baptism and all its treasures and gifts remain. The trysting place *motif* and the present encounter with God of the *Genesisvorlesung* takes its rise at this very point. The abiding of baptism is the constancy of the very presence of Christ on his mercy seat:

*Denn wie Christus, der gnaden stul, darumb nicht weicht noch uns wehret widder zu yhm zukomen, ob wir gleich sundigen, also bleibt auch alle sein schatz und gabe. Wie nu ein mal ynn der Tauffe vergebunge der sunden uber komen ist, so bleibt sie noch teglich, so lang wir leben, das ist den alten menschen am hals tragen.<sup>225</sup>*



NOTES

1. See above, § 2.1.2, p. 35.
2. As has been argued above, § 2.1.3, pp. 36f.
3. See Grönvik, esp. pp. 102ff.
4. WA 26,144-174 = LW 40,229-262.
5. WA 31,II,261-585 = LW 17.
6. WA 25,63,26-65,15 = LW 29,81-84 on Titus 3:5.
7. *Lectures on Habakkuk*, 1526, WA 19,390,3-23 = LW 19,192f.
8. WA 20,781,28-782,34 = LW 30,316.
9. WA 20,779,23-27 = LW 30,315.
10. WA 18,137,12-19 = LW 40,147.
11. See above, § 2.1.1 (pp. 30f.); and below, § 4.2.1 (p. 201f.).
12. For instance, *Sermons of St. John 14-16* (1537), WA 45,465-733;46,1-111 = LW 24; *Sermons on John 1-4* (1537,1540), WA 46,538-789;47,1-231; and the *Lectures on Galatians* (1535), WA 40,I,40-688; 40,II,1-184 = LW 26; 27,1-144. Not only do these documents contain an abundance of references to baptism; the themes culled from the investigation of the Lectures are reflected here too.
13. WA 14,489-744 = LW 9.
14. WA 14,644,9-647,3 = LW 9,123-126; esp. WA 644,11-13, 19f. = LW 9,123. Luther focuses upon the allegorical development of this *motif*; the one place signifies the one faith in which all share; "*Allegorium unius loci est ipse sensum fidei, in qua omnes sancti convenient et communicant*. WA 14,646,17f. = LW 9,126.
15. WA 14,639,8-30 = LW 9,110f.
16. WA 14,663,3f. = LW 9,156. Instead Luther says that the word must curb the propensity of the *rudem populum* to invent ceremonies.
17. The continuing evolution of Luther's baptismal thought will be discussed further below, § 3.2.4, pp. 127ff.
18. As far as the Catechisms are concerned, the importance that Luther himself attached to these documents is not to be overlooked. For instance, WA 30,I,126,14-21;127,14ff. = BC 359,7;360,11; cf. Bainton, *Here I Stand* (New York, 1950), pp.263f.
19. J.S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists* (The Hague, 1964), pp. 46f.
20. The Articles of Schmalkald (1537) must be given due weight, although in fact they do not contribute much that is distinctive to the particular issue of baptism. Of the other documents which with the Catechisms make up the Lutheran confessional corpus, the Augsburg Confession (1530) and the Apology (1530-1) are principally the work of Melancthon. Yet as such they have a limited, indirect relevance

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in an investigation of Luther's baptismal doctrine. Their baptismal sections are readily distinguishable in emphasis and vocabulary from Luther's own writings on the subject, but they are relevant because Luther expressed his approval of both documents. The evidence for Luther's view of the documents is marshalled by Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid Career*, pp. 677-682.

21. WA 30,I,215,5.
22. WA 30,I,220,14-16.
23. WA 30,I,212,13f. = BC 437,13. The BC translation will not always be followed.
24. WA 30,I,214,11 = BC 438,17.
25. WA 30,I,214,14-17 = BC 438,18.
26. G. Aulén, *Reformation and Catholicity*, tr. E.H. Wahlstrom (Edinburgh, 1962), p. 73. See also Prenter, pp. 130-140; the 'word of the sacrament' is the gospel itself.
27. WA 30,I,310,11f. = BC 349,7.
28. WA 30,I,310,13-17 = BC 349,8; WA 30,I,212,15-21 = BC 437,4f.
29. For example, WA 30,I,213,30; 214,5f.
30. WA 30,I,213,1f. = BC 437,7.
31. WA 30,I,213,36-214,1 = BC 438,15. This is a question which Luther elsewhere attributes to Carlstadt; WA 18,136,31f. = LW 40,147.
32. WA 30,I,214,21-27 = BC 439,20.
33. WA 30,I,213,29ff. = BC 438,14.
34. On the relationship between command and promise, see Grönvik, pp. 66f.; 94-99. Grönvik argues that for Luther, the baptismal command, word and promise (Taufbefehl, Taufwort, Verheissung) are inseparable (pp. 66f.), although they are certainly distinguishable. (He refers to the first two questions of the *Kleinen Katechismus* to illustrate this, p. 96.) The balance of Luther's emphasis between the two categories reflects the particular polemical requirements of the moment; in the *Grosse Katechismus* Luther's predominant concern is to establish the basis of the sacrament in the divine ordinance. See also the sermon Luther preached at the baptism of Bernard von Anhalt in 1540. Although he does not use the language of promise here, Luther does speak of two 'words' in baptism, one 'with the water', the other the word of institution. Both are needed. WA 49,124-139 = LW 31,315,329.
35. In one sense, of course, this word of command is the gospel — it certainly cannot be divorced from it. But it is the gospel in a specific form and context; "he who believes and is baptised shall be saved."
36. For example, WA 26,41,19ff. = LW 28,269; *Lectures on 1 Timothy*, 1528.
37. "Any attempt to establish a relationship of rank between the various means of grace is foreign to Luther." Aulén, pp. 73f.; an observation which is supported by the untidiness of Luther's references to the means of grace in the *Genesisvorlesung*, § 2.1.1 above.

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38. *Denn er nimpt solch werck und stellet eine verheissung drauff, das mans mit gutten ehren ein sacrament nennen.* WA 32,424,8ff. = LW 21,150.
39. WA 32,424,36f. = LW 21,151.
40. WA 30,I,214,2ff. = BC 438,16.
41. WA 30,I,214,37 = BC 439,22.
42. WA 31,II,350,20-23 = LW 17,113 on Isaiah 44:17. The immediate context is a warning against idolatry. Of particular interest are the examples Luther gives, against the Anabaptists, of external things connected to "the imperishable word". He speaks of baptism, the eucharist and the honour due to parents in the same breath (op. cit. 350,28f.) The distinction between divine 'words' (sense 3) which are joined to the word of promise of salvation (sense 2) and those divine commands which are not so joined has a certain fluidity about it.
43. WA 30,I,213,29f. = BC 438,14.
44. WA 26,41,3f. = LW 28,269; *Ergo Christus semel uno opere nos redemit sed uno uso non distribuit . . .*
45. WA 26,39,25-41,23 = LW 28,267ff.
46. Luther attacks Müntzer for the same fault; eg. WA 25,64,24f. = LW 29,82f., *Lectures on Titus*, 1527. See also note 10 above.
47. WA 42,170,12ff. = LW 1,228 on Gen. 3:23f.; *Huic autem simplici aquae dicimus esse additum verbum promissionis . . .*
48. WA 42,170,22ff. = LW 1,170.
49. For example: WA 42,369,22f = LW 2,153 (excursus on the allegorising of the Flood), *habent enim Baptismum coniunctum cum promissione vitae*; WA 42,622,24 = LW 3,104 on Gen. 17:3-6, *Baptismus praecipitur omnibus gentibus cum promissione salutis*, (reference to Matt. 28:19); WA 43,70,14f. = LW 3,272 on Gen. 19:14, *Aufer verbum de Baptismo, de Absolutione, de coena Domini, et nihil erant.*
50. See above, § 2.3.3; WA 42,363,20f. = LW 2,144 on Gen. 9:12-16, *Deus solet cum promissione semper coniungere signum.*
51. WA 43,388,3-6 = LW 4,349 on Gen. 25:21.
52. WA 43,70,11-42 = LW 3,272f. on Gen. 19:14.
53. See above, § 2.2.4, pp. 47f.
54. See above, § 2.3.3, p. 62.
55. See above, § 3.2.1, note 34.
56. See below, §§ 4.3.1 (pp. 225,228).
57. WA 30,I,215,5 = BC 439,23.
58. WA 30,I,215,8f. = BC 439,24.
59. WA 30,I,311,12ff.
60. WA 30,I,215, 14-18 = BC 440,26f.
61. WA 30,I,216,2f. = BC 440,31.

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62. WA 30,I,212,6-9; see also WA 45,661,28ff. = LW,24,220 on John 15:4.
63. WA 47,13,26-29 = LW 22,285.on John 3:5; WA 33,535,23-26 (Aurifaber) = LW 23,333 on John 8:14.
64. WA 33,535,7f. = LW 23,333.
65. WA 20,779,24f. = LW 30,314 on 1 John 5:6.
66. WA 46,573,27 = LW 22,44 on John 1:6.
67. WA 33,536,39-537,7 = LW 23,334; baptism also conveys beauty and piety. See also WA 45,616,8ff. = LW 24,169 on John 14:25f.; to deny this holiness is to deny baptism and the blood of Christ.
68. WA 40,I,381,26-382,16 = LW 26,241f. on Gal. 3:8.
69. WA 31,II,564,10 = LW 17, 389.
70. WA 41,166,22-30 = LW 13,303 on Ps. 110:3.
71. WA 19,541,14-17 = LW 53,109.
72. So James F. McCue, "Luther's Ecumenical Significance: *Simul iustus et peccator* and the *nova creatura*", *Luther's Ecumenical Significance* ed. Manns, Meyer (Philadelphia 1984), p. 203.
73. WA 45,594,6f. = LW 24,145 on John.14:21. See also WA 46,707,17-708,9 = LW 22,197 on John 1:46. There are many of the baptised who have deserted Christ and are 'false Christians'.
74. WA 26,15,21-24 = LW 28,233 on 1 Tim 1:8. Here Luther is not seeking to demonstrate the invalidity of Anabaptist baptism; he is seeking to show that their separation of the word from the water constitutes contempt for the word, and reinstates an *ex opere operato* efficacy of the water alone. See above, § 3.2.3, p. 126.
75. WA 47,14,19f.;15,5ff. = LW 22,286f.
76. WA 45,594,1ff. = LW 24,145 on John 14:21.
77. WA 44,508,21-30 = LW 7,281f. on Gen. 42:29-34; § 2.3.4 above, pp. 64f.
78. Jetter, p. 229: "*So geleitet ihn die Gnade — denn die erste, einmal empfangene genügt nicht, man muß lebenslang immer weiter fortschreiten. Non enim sufficit prima gratia sed proficere oportet magis ac magis. . .*". Jetter, pp. 228-234, makes a fundamental point about the nature of the new birth and about the 'shape' of the Christian life in Luther, although he has far less evidence to base this on in the *Dictata* than is available in later material. The new birth is not to be understood any longer primarily as a punctiliar beginning, to be followed by a life of progress, made possible by other, post-baptismal, means of grace; but as a new determination of being, which is never left behind.
79. See above, § 3.3.1, pp. 132f.
80. The issues raised here, especially that of the 'shape' of the Christian life, will be discussed below, in relation to the *significatio* of baptism, § 3.5.2, and at § 5.3 in the context of a review of the soteriological aspects of Luther's theology of baptism.
81. WA 42,170,26f. = LW 1,228 on Gen. 3:23f.

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82. WA 43,453,1f. = LW 5,35 on Gen. 26:8; *Christus primum vult nos baptisari, ut animus corrigatur et purgetur.*
83. WA 42,612,13 = LW 3,89f. on Gen. 17:1; *Nos per Baptismum, cum credimus promissioni, iustificamur.*
84. WA 43,424,25ff.= LW 4,401 on Gen. 25:31-34: *Sic Baptismi usus is est, et ex gremio matris et ex sepulchro transferar et reponar in paradisum, ex morte in vitam.*
85. WA 43,525,17ff. = LW 5,141 on Gen. 27:28f.; *Quando baptiso te in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti, perinde est, ac si dicerem: rapio te ex manibus Diaboli, et offero te Deo, idque vere et realiter.*
86. See above, § 2.3.3.
87. See T.F. Torrance, "The Eschatology of Faith: Martin Luther", pp.145-199, *Luther, Theologian for Catholics and Protestants*, ed. G. Yule (Edinburgh, 1985), p.181. The regeneration of baptism is not a *momentaneum negotium*, but a perpetuum, whose *res* stretches out to the future life. See below, §§ 3.5.2, 3.5.3; and Chapter 5 *passim*.
88. See above, § 1.1.2, p. 13.
89. WA 30,I,216,10f.;13-15 = BC 440,33f. "Faith alone makes someone worthy profitably to receive the healing divine water . . . Without faith there is no use, even though [the water of baptism] is in itself a divine, inestimable treasure."
90. WA 30,I,216,26-29 = BC 441,36.
91. WA 30,I,217,13f. = BC 441,40. Compare *De Captivitate*; see below §§ 4.3.3, 4.4.1.
92. WA 30,I,218-220.
93. WA 30,I,219,10f.= BC 443,55. How dare we say that *Gottes wort und ordnung darümb solt unrecht sein und nichts gelten, das wirs unrecht brauchen?*
94. WA 30,I,216,15ff. = BC 440f.,34.
95. WA 30,I,216,19f. = BC 441,35.
96. WA 30,I,216,24-37 = BC 441,35ff. That Luther does not feel entirely happy with the term *werck* is clear from the language he uses in referring to the christological basis of the sacrament. Baptism is no work of ours, just as Christ on the cross is no work, but a treasure comprehended in the word offered to us, to be received by faith. The omission of a second "of ours", however, in no way alters the logic of Luther's position.
97. *Gottes werch aber sind heilsam und not zur seligkeit und schliessen nicht aus sondern fodern den glauben.* WA 30,I,216,24ff. A variant reading has *födern* (= furthers) for *fodern* (= demands).
98. See below, § 4.4.1, pp. 423f.
99. WA 45,594,1ff. = LW 24,145.
100. WA 46,707,17-708,9 = LW 22,197, on John 1:46.

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101. WA 33,536,37-537,1 = LW 23,334 on John 8:14; see also WA 41,166,22-30 = LW 13,303 on Ps 110:3.
102. WA 46,688,10f. = LW 22,175 on John 1:32-34.
103. WA 40,I,36.1-3 = LW 27,148, *Preface to the 1535 Lectures on Galatians.*
104. WA 30,I,219,12-18 = BC 443f.,56.
105. WA 31,I, 250,11-23 = LW 14,31f. on Ps. 117, 1530.
106. Grönvik, p. 156; "*Das ganze Leben ist ein Leben in der Taufe und der Glaube darf immer von der Taufverheissung leben. Der Glaube im Zusammenhang mit der Taufe ist also keine einmalige Sache.*"
107. WA 26,160,1-6 = LW 40,246.
108. WA 26,160,17-19 = LW 40,247.
109. WA 26,161,22-26; see also WA 30,I,219,36; *Abusus non tollit sed confirmat substantum.* Cf. Grönvik, pp. 155ff.
110. WA 26,160,19-24 = LW 40,247.
111. WA 26,173,3; LW 40,261.
112. WA 30,I,219,15.
113. The *fides aliena* of the whole Church, or of godparents, as opposed to the *fides proprium* pertaining to the individual, had by Luther's time a long history as part of the explanation for the justification of infants in baptism. In the twelfth century both Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux concluded that children could be justified on account of the faith of others. See A. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A history of the Christian doctrine of Justification*, Vol. I (Cambridge, 1986) p. 92. The balance of Luther's emphasis as between the different elements in his defence of infant baptism shifted as time passed. But *fides aliena* is present in Luther's argument at the beginning of the 1520's in *De Capivitate* and at their close in the *Grosse Katechismus*. There is no formal inconsistency between *fides aliena* and other elements in Luther's defence of infant baptism, notably *fides infantium*. Cf. Grönvik, pp. 160f.; Brinkel, p. 165.
114. WA 11,264,11-15 = LW 45,108.
115. WA 46,707,17-708,9 = LW 22,197 on John 1:46.
116. WA 44,105,36-39 = LW 6,43; see above, § 2.2.6.
117. See above, § 2.5.6, p. 91..
118. WA 30,I,219,15ff.
119. WA 45,662,26ff.; 663,22-36 = LW 24,221f.; on John 15:4. See also WA 44,413,37-414,4 = LW 7,155 on Gen. 41:32.
120. WA 46,86,24ff. = LW 24,394 on John 16:23.
121. WA 26,155,7f. = LW 40,241.
122. WA 26,154,1-16 = LW 40,239f.
123. WA 26,154,22f.= WA 40,240.
124. WA 26,154,31-40 = LW 40,240.

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125. WA 26,155,1-4 = LW 40,240. See also Grönvik, p. 154.
126. WA 26,155,19-21 = WA 40,241.
127. WA 26,155,25-28 = LW 40,241.
128. Grönvik, p. 144, sees its God-directedness as an aspect of the theocentricity of faith; another is that faith itself is the work of God.
129. Table Talk (Caspar Heydenrich), 1542-3, W T1 5,5562 = LW 54,453.
130. "In self-reflection the Christian confronts him/herself not as a believer but as a non-believer, or in any case as one who does not know whether he/she believes. In this existential situation Luther's position is 'I do not know whether I believe; but I do know in whom I believe.'" (C. Lindberg, "Justice and Injustice in Luther's Judgment of 'Holiness Movements'", pp. 161-181, *Luther's Ecumenical Significance*, ed. Manns, Meyer (Philadelphia, 1984), p.168. See also Grönvik, p.154; ". . . wenn auf den Glauben gebaut werden muss, dann ist der Glaube selbst ausgeschlossen, denn dann ist kein Platz mehr für den angefochtenen Glauben. Der angefochtene Glauben wagt nicht, auf sich selbst zu bauern oder sich als sicheren Glauben anzusehen; er kann seine Hoffnung nur auf die Werke Gottes setzen, die ausserhalb des Menschen sind." For Luther the questioning of the *Täufer* and *Schwärmer* was the essentially the same as his own in the cloister. Then it was a question about the sufficiency of repentance; now it is a question about the adequacy of faith. Neither is admissible: "Luthers Auffassung von Taufe, Glaube und Christsein lässt sich nur dann verstehen, wenn man ins Auge fasst, das Luther die beiden erwähnten Fragen dadurch beantwortete, dass er sie bewusst abgelehnt hat." Grönvik, *loc. cit.* See also B.A. Gerrish, "Doctor Martin Luther: Subjectivity and Doctrine in the Lutheran Reformation", *Seven-Headed Luther: Essays in Commemoration of a Quincentenary*, ed. P. N. Brooks (Oxford, 1983), pp. 18f. Gerrish — wrongly, in my view — agrees with Paul Hacker (*The Ego in Faith: Martin Luther and the Origin of Anthropocentric Religion*, Chicago, 1970), in seeing a reflexive aspect to Luther's notion of faith, in "genuine continuity" with the liberal Protestantism of Schleiermacher.
131. WA 31,I,257,10-18 = LW 14, p.39. See also WA 31,I,239,17-240,20 = LW 14,21. In this case, however, the disregard of baptism springs from a desire for the 'superior' righteousness of monasticism.
132. WA 40,I,545,30f. = LW 26, 356, on Gal. 3:27f.
133. WA 42,626,29ff. = LW 3,110 on Gen. 17:3-6.
134. See above, § 2.5.6, pp. 92f.
135. WA 43,147,36; 158,34-42 = LW 4,17;32 on Gen.21:8, 12f.
136. See above, § 2.2.6, pp. 52f.
137. See above, §§ 2.2.2, 2.2.4, 2.5.2.
138. See above, § 2.3.3. (p. 62); § 2.5.5 (pp. 89f.).
139. WA 42,622,32-36 = LW 3,104 on Gen. 17:3-6.
140. WA 43,159,28f. = LW 4,33 on Gen. 21:12f.

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141. WA 43,157,5-14 = LW 4,30 on Gen. 21:12f.
142. See above, § 2.5.3, pp. 83f.
143. WA 43,587,5-11;24ff. = LW 5,229f. on Gen. 28:14f.
144. See also WA 42,626,29-32 = LW 3,110 on Gen. 17:3-6; *Quia autem adulti patiuntur sibi fidem excuti per peccatum, ideo, etsi baptisati sunt, quia tamen non credunt, non salvuntur. Tale nihil patiuntur infantes, igitur in salute accepta manent, et salvuntur.*
145. Wheatley, p.33.
146. See above, § 2.2.6.
147. WA 30,I,220,14-16 = BC 444,64.
148. Grönvik, p. 109.
149. Luther expressed his preference for the practice of total submersion in the 1519 sermon; not as essential to the validity of the rite, but as a complete expression of the sign of baptism. See below, § 4.3.2 (p. 229); WA 2,727,15-19 = LW 35,29.
150. WA 30,I,220,16-18;19-23 = BC 444f.,65.
151. WA 30,I,220.31f. = BC 445,68.
152. WA 30,I,220,34-221,6 = BC 445,68-71.
153. WA 30,I,221,11 = BC 445,73.
154. WA 45,499,16-19 = LW 24,42 on John 14:5f.
155. WA 45,507,3-12 = LW 24,51.
156. WA 42,369,3f. = LW 2,153; *Nam baptismus et mors in Scriptura sunt termini convertibiles.* Luther amplifies this statement in the allegorical interpretation of the Flood (and the crossing of the Red Sea) which follows.
157. There is a tendency on occasion for the double-sidedness of the sign and signification of baptism to be lost to sight, as Luther frequently speaks of baptism as death *tout court*.
158. WA 36,580,39 = LW 28,132 on 1 Cor. 15:26f.
159. *Ein Christen ist ein solcher mensch, der da als bald anfehlet aus diesem leben gen himel zu gehen von dem an, wenn er aus der tauffe kompt . . .* : WA 45,5-7,3-6 = LW,42,51 on John 14:6.
160. So Prenter, pp. 69f. Man on the way between baptism and the resurrection "constantly and anew takes refuge in Christ's alien righteousness. In this refuge of faith in Christ, man is Spirit, new man, and all his past life up to this moment is at once considered as flesh, old man."
161. "Luther has no room for any independently evaluated, divinely supported, and independently growing empirical piety." Prenter, p.97. Prenter sees Luther's concept of sanctification, not as growth in empirical piety, but as a continual leave-taking of it; pp. 70ff.
162. WA 44,401,30-33; 402,106 = LW 7,139 on Gen. 41:8. Luther is referring to 2 Cor. 3:18, "But we all, with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror



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the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit." (RV) Luther is talking of progress in faith and clarity of knowledge, not explicitly of progress in righteousness. And even here, there is a qualification to the notion of progress in the Christian life; there is no progress to new knowledge; *Wir lernen ne lenger ne mehr daran, und doch nichts anders.* (WA 44,401,33) There is no progression to a new stage, to the assimilation of new truths, or to a new level of faith; merely an ever clearer grasp of what is apprehended from the beginning.

163. WA 30,I,221,25ff. (see also 16 ff.) = BC 446,79.
164. The 'circular' element in the shape of the Christian life will be discussed more fully at § 5.3.2 below, where, however, it will be argued that a 'spiral' model more exactly reflects Luther's position.
165. WA 30,I,221,29-32 = BC 446,80; *die Tauffe were nu hyn das man yhr nicht mehre brauchen künde, nach dem wir widder yn sunden gefallen sind; das macht, das mans nicht weiter ansihet denn nach dem werck, so einmal geschehen ist.*
166. WA 30,I,221,19-23.
167. See also WA 33,531,18-30 = LW 23,330f. on John 8:14 (*und teglich in der Tauffe Christi gebadet bin durch den Glauben*); WA 44,776,31 = LW 8,269 on Gen. 49:11f.
168. WA 30,I,222,17. There is a close link here with the *motif* of the present trysting place so evident in the *Genesisvorlesung*, § 2.2.7.
169. WA 30,I,222,10-13 = BC 446,84.
170. See Wingren, pp.28ff. On self-chosen callings, see Luther's version of the legend of St Anthony and the tanner, WA 43,175,27-176,8 = LW 4,56f. on Gen. 21:17.
171. See above, note 156.
172. WA 42,644,19f. = LW 3,135 on Gen. 17:10f. The drowning of baptism and the cutting-off of circumcision both signify the killing of the flesh. See above, § 2.4.1, pp. 70f.
173. WA 42,516,9-12 = LW 2,355 on Gen. 13:14f.
174. See above, § 2.2.3.
175. WA 43.30,32ff. = LW 3,217 on Gen. 18:15.
176. WA 43, 612-620 = LW 5,266-278 on Gen. 29:1ff. *passim*; esp. WA 43,614,16-21 = LW 5,269; *Sic igitur tractanda et aspicienda sunt exempla Patrum in sublimi illo gradu, ne contemantur infima, carnalia et sordida exempla oeconomiae et politiae.*
177. WA 43,667,17-669,25 = LW 5,346-349 on Gen. 30:9ff.
178. WA 43,673,3ff. = LW 5,354.
179. WA 42,370,16ff. = LW 2,154f. in Luther's excursus on Allegories.
180. Barth, CD IV,4, pp. 166f.
181. Barth, CD IV,4, p. 169.

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182. Barth, CD IV,4, pp. 170f.
183. Barth, CD IV,4, pp. 175-178.
184. WA 30,I,218ff. = BC 442ff.; WA 26,144-174 = LW 40,229-262.
185. WA 30,I,218,3f. = BC 442,47.
186. "The various and fluctuating arguments with which Luther over the years defends infant baptism impress one less as an *embarras de richesse* than as a *testimonium paupertatis*." G. Wainwright, "Ecclesiological Tendencies in Luther and Wesley" *Luther's Ecumenical Significance*, eds. P. Manns and H. Meyer, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 141.
187. WA 30,I,218,17ff. = BC 443,50.
188. WA 30,I,218,7f. = BC 442,49.
189. WA 30,I,218,14ff. = BC 443,50.
190. WA 26,168,27-33 = LW 40,256f.
191. Notably at the Leipzig Disputation, by Eck. WA Br. No.192,472; WA Br I,422.
192. WA 26,167,19-35 = LW 40,255f..
193. WA 26,146-147 = LW 40,231f.
194. WA 26,147,27-31 = LW, 40,222; WA 26,169,3-7 = LW 40,257. See below, § 6.2.3, on the way that the presence of anti-Christ confirms the holiness of that amongst which he reigns.
195. WA 30,I, 218, 12ff.; 21ff. = BC 442,50f.; also J. Pelikan, "The Theology of the Means of Grace", in Kadai ed. *Accents in Luther's Theology* (St. Louis, 1967), pp. 133f., and J.Pelikan, "Luther's Defense of Infant Baptism", in *Luther for an Ecumenical Age*, ed. Meyer, 1967, p. 210.
196. WA 30,I,218,24ff. = BC 443,52.
197. It would also apply to the baptism of one who received it with evil intent. WA 30,I,218,33-36 = BC 443,54.
198. See above, § 3.6, p. 166.
199. WA 30,I,219,15.
200. Contrast the reference in *De Captivitate*, WA 6,533,12f.
201. See above, § 3.4.2, pp. 146f.
202. The emphasis in Luther's defence of infant baptism shifted over the years. In particular *fides infantium* first advanced, and later receded. Grönvik claims that it is in the foreground of Luther's defence of infant baptism from the outbreak of the difficulties with Carlstadt and the *Schwärmer* in 1522 until 1526. Thereafter the new challenges posed by the essentially different angle of attack of the *Täufer* caused Luther to lay more stress on the validity of baptism without faith than on the other arguments, and the stress on *fides infantium* gradually lessened. Grönvik, pp. 162-64. Here Grönvik is dissenting from Brinkel's view that Luther continues to deploy *fides infantium* in defence of infant baptism beyond 1527 (Brinkel, p. 59). Grönvik fails to make clear, however, precisely why the challenge represented by the theology and the rebaptising of the *Täufer* made

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*fides infantium* less valuable a weapon in Luther's defence. See also the evidence in the *Genesisvorlesung* in the parallel with circumcision; note 117 to chapter 2.

203. WA 26,156,3-5 = LW, 40,241f.
204. WA 26,155,32-156,2 = LW 40,241.
205. WA 26,156,8-15 = LW 40,242.
206. WA 26,157,7-23 = LW 40,243.
207. WA 26,156,13 = LW 40,242.
208. WA 26,156,38 = LW 40,242f.
209. WA 26,157,5f. = LW 40,243; WA 26,159,14-20 = LW 40,245f.
210. This is rightly one of the central emphases of Grönvik's book, p.144.
211. WA 26,166,12-14 = LW 40,254.
212. WA 26,158,28-159,4 = LW 40,245.
213. WA 42,621,4-7 = LW 3,102 on Gen. 17:3-6.
214. See above, § 3.4.4, p. 151.
215. WA 42,622,19-25 = LW 3,104 on Gen. 17:3-6.
216. This fact is particularly important in this context because of the suspicion of Melanchthon's influence upon the editors. See LW 3,103, fn.13. Meinhold, pp. 73f. discusses the one covenant which straddles the two Testaments as a distinctive of Viet Dietrich.
217. See also Schmalkald Article V, BC 311,4.
218. WA 26,157,24-26; LW 40,243.
219. WA 26,158,17-19; LW 40,244. Luther's reasoning has a doubled-edged aspect to it. He argues that girls must have been included amongst those "innocent" children offered to idols, and their innocence shows that they too participated in the covenant. But if girls could be included in the covenant people without receiving the sign of circumcision — why cannot infants be similarly included in the people of the new covenant, and thus be holy and blessed, without possession of the sign of baptism?
220. Grönvik, pp. 162-64.
221. Pelikan, *Defence*, p. 209.
222. CD IV.4, p. 169.
223. WA 30,I,213,2f. = BC 437,8; Grönvik, p. 145.
224. WA 30,I,222,1-6 = BC 446,82.
225. WA 30,I,222,15-20 = BC 446,86.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### REBOARDING AN ABANDONED SHIP: Baptism and the Reformation Struggle

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The baptismal theology portrayed from two very different angles in Chapters 2 and 3 is that of the older Luther. It is time to return to a question first posed in Chapter 1: To what extent is this mature theology of baptism a retreat from the radical reformation principles of an earlier period? How far is the strongly objective, 'sacramental' emphasis of his later baptismal teaching to be understood as Luther's reaction against the excesses of the radicals; or as the product of his naturally conservative temperament, borne down as he was by the necessities of establishing and defending a new church order?<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the sharpest way of framing the question is to consider the genesis of the older Luther's undoubted "respect and true appreciation" of the sacrament.<sup>2</sup> As will become clear, the high profile of baptism is something *new* in the later period. Jetter, in a picturesque adaptation of one of Luther's favourite baptismal analogies, asks whether the older Luther is fishing up and taking back on board with honour that sacramental teaching which had been the jetsam of his earlier, more radical days.<sup>3</sup> Where did this new, or revived, emphasis come from? Are its origins, logically and

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factually, *within* the cluster of central reformation doctrines, so that it can with justice be presented as an outworking of them, integral to the whole? Or does it bear the marks of an *ad hoc* accommodation to entirely extraneous factors, whether his own prejudices or his over-reaction to the teaching and practice of others?<sup>4</sup>

Such questions set the context for the present chapter. The fundamental issue to be addressed by a study of baptism in the theology of Luther concerns the relationship of the doctrine of baptism as it developed in the later period with the central reformation themes.<sup>5</sup> But only by looking at the subsidiary matter of the continuity — or lack of it — of Luther's baptismal teaching over time can a fully comprehensive answer to this central question be offered with confidence. In this chapter, then, the baptismal theology of an earlier period in the Reformer's career will be examined, and compared with the picture built up in Chapters 2 and 3. It will be important to compare the formal categories of baptismal theology in the different periods: baptism as word joined to water, baptism's *significatio*, the faith-baptism relationship, the justification of infant baptism. It will be equally important, however, to search the earlier periods for signs of the wider emphases of the older Luther's use of baptism, and, above all, for roots of its 'present tense'.

##### 4.1.1 The 'Early Luther'

The 'older Luther' has been defined as beginning, for the purposes of this study, in 1527.<sup>6</sup> Such words as 'older' and 'younger', 'early' and 'mature', are

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clearly being used here in a sense which is at once non-technical and highly idiosyncratic.<sup>7</sup> The justification of this departure from the standard use of these terms in the context of Luther scholarship is simple — it is not until 1527 that Luther's baptismal theology can be said to have reached something approximating to a final stage of development. This is true from the point of view of certain important emphases, such as the double principle involved in the baptism-faith relationship; but it is also confirmed by a consideration of the *profile* of baptism in Luther's writings; this increases dramatically after 1527. The 'mature' period itself is by no means homogenous<sup>e</sup>; after 1527 the process of development continues, and the frequency of references to baptism goes on increasing until it reaches its peak in the years of the *Genesisvorlesung*. But it is clearer still that the baptismal material of the pre-1527 'early' period must be sub-divided further if any sense is to be made of it.

*Prima facie* a sub-division at or about the time of the 'reformation breakthrough' seems logical. It would result in a three stage approach to Luther's theology of baptism. First, there is the pre-reformation Luther (1); next, the Luther of the years *after* the definitive reformation theology had emerged, but *before* the various crises of the 1520's connected with disorder at Wittenberg, the construction of a new church order, and the emergence of the radical reformation in its many guises had fully worked themselves through into his theology (2). Finally, there is the Luther of the period from 1527 onwards (3), whose baptismal theology has already been examined in Chapters 2 and 3. This is the method of division that will be adopted below.

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The dividing lines which separate these three periods are difficult to draw. The beginning of period (3) has been fixed at 1527 on the basis of baptismal doctrine and 'profile'. But the complex series of events which mark it off from period (2) began at least as early as March 1522, with Luther's return from his sojourn in the Wartburg, alarmed by reports of the activities of Carlstadt and his followers in Eilenberg and in Wittenberg itself.<sup>6</sup> With the relatively late emergence of the *Täufer* in central Germany, however, baptismal theology was not among the first areas in which the impact of the new complexities of Luther's situation made themselves felt.<sup>7</sup> The choice of 1527 has a certain logic about it, in that before this time, whatever other impacts the radical reformation and the exigencies of the process of building a new church order may have had on Luther's thought, it was only after 1527 that baptism became in itself a focus of theological contention. The dating of the watershed which marks off periods (1) and (2), the reformation breakthrough itself, continues to be the magnet of much scholarly attention.

One cannot presume to speak of the 'reformation breakthrough' without taking a position on its date and nature. As one of the aims of the investigation of the earlier periods will be to clarify the relationship of Luther's developing baptismal theology and the central impetus of that 'breakthrough', the ground must first be cleared by a (necessarily brief) consideration of this matter.

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##### 4.1.2 Excursus: The *Durchbruch* and the *Turmerlebnis*

In the debate about Luther's reformation breakthrough a number of issues are inextricably bound together. It is impossible to separate the question of date from that of content. What was the breakthrough? How is it to be defined? If there is disagreement as to precisely what is the paradigmatic concept which informs Luther's reformation theology, there can be no possibility of agreement as to the date at which that theology is first in evidence. There is the additional complicating question of the relationship of all this to the struggles of the nascent Reformer himself. In particular, the debate has concentrated upon the significance of Luther's recollection in 1545 of his *Turmerlebnis*, when he grappled with Romans 1:17 and Paul's understanding of the 'righteousness of God'.<sup>10</sup>

The course that the controversy has taken affords ample confirmation of the temptation, so pervasive in Luther studies, of identifying one paradigmatic theological concept to which all the other features of Luther's thought can be reduced and in terms of which they can all be expressed.<sup>11</sup> In his 1968 review of the literature, Hagen identified at least ten such putative 'keys' to Luther's thought which have been offered by various scholars, including: the 'sanative' and the 'forensic' theories of justification; the law/gospel distinction; the christological interpretation of *iustitia Dei*; a new hermeneutic; certainty of forgiveness; 'subjectivism'; the theology of the Word; the *zwei Reiche* doctrine.<sup>12</sup>

Luther's recollections twenty-five years later point to a central role in the 'breakthrough' for a new understanding of *iustitia Dei*. Taken at face



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value, they also indicate a date for the breakthrough somewhere in 1518-19, as Luther says that these new insights informed his second approach to the Psalter.<sup>13</sup> But Luther has often been held to have been mistaken at this point, and the *Turmerlebnis* has been transferred to a point during the first lectures on the Psalms, up to five years earlier. An early date for the *Turmerlebnis* was a commonplace of the scholarship of the 1930's to the early 1950's.<sup>14</sup> Thus by some scholars, the tower experience is seen as that breakthrough of theological insight which was the foundation of Luther's new thinking, the full implications of which took some time to work through.<sup>15</sup> But this general consensus was later challenged, above all by Bizer in his seminal work *Fides ex Auditu*. Bizer placed the final emergence of the full reformation doctrine of justification as late as 1518-19.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, other commentators view the *Turmerlebnis* not as the foundation upon which the theological revolution is built, but as the capstone which completes the process at its end. Among such scholars Luther's own version of the dating is likely to be accorded greater credibility.<sup>17</sup>

Despite this rather confused picture, a number of assertions may confidently be made. First, there can be no doubt that all the years between, say, 1513 and 1519 were formative years for Luther, in which his thought was undergoing rapid change. Secondly, it is clear that the experience recalled by Luther in connection with his reinterpretation of *iustitia Dei* in Romans 1:17 was one important event within this wider process, from which, however, it is to be carefully distinguished.<sup>18</sup> Thirdly, there is room for a range of opinions as to where this particular element fits into the whole process; at the beginning as the initial impetus towards the breakdown of the old theology and the synthesis of a new one; somewhere

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in the middle; or at the end as the completing insight which unified the whole and imparted a final clarity to Luther's thought.<sup>19</sup> Cargill Thompson is right to insist that the narrower question of the *Turmerlebnis* is of only secondary importance in comparison with the wider process of which it is but a part.<sup>20</sup>

The conflation of the *Turmerlebnis* issue and the wider question of the nature of Luther's intellectual progress towards his reformation theology in much of the literature has exacerbated the tendency of Luther scholarship to seek for 'keys', by encouraging the search for a precise moment of transition and illumination, at the exposition of a particular psalm in the course of the *Dictata*, for instance. The statement above that all the years between 1513 and 1519 were formative is of the greatest importance. It cannot be denied that there is a clarity and completeness about the expression of the reformation theology in the writings of 1519 and 1520 not evident to the same degree in earlier material. But if the tendency to seek for a single identifiable moment of transition is to be resisted, so is the desire to mark out a single theme as the heart of the breakthrough, and therefore at the centre of the reformation theology to which it gave rise.

It is, then, not a single over-arching 'key' concept, but a complex synthesis of a number of themes, developed in a gradual, organic fashion, over a number of years, that is the background to an understanding of the relationship of baptism to Luther's reformation theology.

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##### 4.1.3 Selection of Sources

Analysis, even at the most superficial level, of all the important writings of the 'early' years is clearly impossible in this context. Suitable 'bench-mark' documents must be chosen. The position adopted above with respect to Luther's reformation *Durchbruch* confirms the provisional division into three periods: the years of transition, before the reformation theology in all its strands is fully present (circa 1513-1518); the period when that clarity was finally achieved (1519 onwards); and the later period already covered in Chapters 2 and 3. The 'bench-mark' documents will represent the first two periods.

The *Dictata super Psalterium* of 1513-15 will be examined as the primary source for the years of development (in § 4,2).<sup>21</sup> The choice of this document has the advantage that it has received much attention in recent years, as a source which almost graphically reveals Luther in transition. Commentators have sought to trace the signs of the nascent reformation theology in its pages, and some of the more recent studies are of direct or indirect relevance to baptism.<sup>22</sup> Like the *Genēsisvorlesung*, this is an expository document without a definite baptismal focus. It will therefore require the same approach, with an analysis of the typical *foci* of baptismal interest, and the typical contexts and 'use' of baptism in Luther's thought.

One of the great manifestos of 1520, *De captivitate Babylonica Ecclesiae*, will be an essential source. With the 1519 *Sermon on the Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism* it represents Luther's earliest sustained treatment of baptism.<sup>23</sup> On any conceivable dating and interpretation of the breakthrough,

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*De Captivitate* belongs, almost by definition, to period (2), the first years of unquestionably evangelical theology. The same could be said with only marginally less assurance of the 1519 *Sermon*. These two documents will be examined (in § 4.3) as primary sources for the baptismal theology of the second period, the years of the reformation theology in all its completeness and clarity, but before the developments later in the 1520's had precipitated the development of Luther's baptismal theology towards its final form.

There will be two over-arching concerns in the analysis of these sources. One will be the assessment of the continuity of Luther's baptismal theology over time; the other will be the elucidation of the relationship between the principal *motifs* of the baptismal teaching of these early years with the central concerns of the emerging reformation theology.

4.2 DICTATA SUPER PSALTERIUM 1513-1515

Luther's *Dictata super Psalterium* has attracted much scholarly attention in recent years. A scholar's approach to this document will reflect his or her understanding of the nature and date of Luther's reformation 'breakthrough'. To some the *Dictata* is essentially a work of the pre-reformation Luther, although it may well be profitably trawled for those disturbances which betray the major upheaval to come. For others, the central reformation insights are already present, at least in embryo, although they are not expressed as yet with the full clarity of later years. Yet others, in their detailed analyses of his developing exegesis from one psalm to the next, believe that they can chart Luther's progress and pinpoint the all-important moments of illumination.<sup>24</sup> If the view taken above (§ 4.1.2) is admitted, namely that Luther's 'breakthrough' to reformation is best understood as a process which occupied several years, very much including the years of the *Dictata*; it is not surprising that all three approaches are sustainable.

There is a certain opacity about these lectures, which were delivered in Wittenberg between August 1513 and (probably) the autumn of 1515. An aspect of this opacity, and not the least important of the signs that Luther is still operating with scholastic categories, is the prominence in the *Dictata* of the four-fold interpretation of scripture. When this material is compared with the exegesis of a later period, such as that of the *Genesisvorlesung*, the radical difference in atmosphere and degree of clarity is largely attributable to this feature alone.<sup>25</sup> Yet the examination of the

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baptismal theology of the *Dictata* (and of other topics that bear directly upon it) which follows will confirm what is implicit in the position adopted above about the reformation 'breakthrough'. This is indeed a work of transition.

##### 4.2.1 Baptism in the *Dictata*

The first point to make about baptism in the *Dictata* is a simple one. It is hard to find. This is true for the whole of the early period, in sharp contrast to the years after 1527. The situation is precisely the reverse of that which obtains with the *Genesisvorlesung*. There Luther will often introduce a reference to baptism where *prima facie* the text does not warrant it. Here, in the *Dictata*, baptism is absent even where the language of the psalmist almost seems to demand a baptismal interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

Take, for instance, the 'watery' language in which many of the psalms abound: 'water', 'Jordan', 'seas', 'floods' and so on. Despite the typically discursive use of the four-fold interpretation of scriptural texts by the Luther of this period, baptism by no means figures in his exegesis of them all. When Luther interprets such texts as Ps. 1:3 (streams of water); Ps. 66:6 ("He turned the sea into dry land"; the crossing of the Red Sea); Ps. 69:1 ("the waters have come up to my neck"), he omits to make any reference to baptism.<sup>27</sup> When in his exposition of Ps. 68:4, although there is no direct 'trigger' for a potential baptismal reference in the verse, Luther offers an interpretation of the crossing of the Jordan; again, baptism fails to appear.<sup>28</sup>

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Yet there are several counter-examples, where Luther's exegesis of such words does include a baptismal reference. This is so, for instance, for 'Jordan':

Jordan is the river flowing through the midst of the Holy land, but mystically it denotes baptism (*significat autem mystice Baptismum*) in the Church and holy Scripture, in which all Christians are bathed . . .

So the apostles entered into the church from the synagogue through baptism as through the Jordan.<sup>29</sup>

The crossing of the Red Sea can also be interpreted baptismally. In his exegesis of the reference to the dividing of the waters in Ps. 78:13 Luther follows Paul (1 Cor. 10:2) in drawing the parallel with baptism: "He has led also us through and leads us through in this way in baptism."<sup>30</sup>

The fact that Luther sometimes develops a baptismal interpretation of such themes and sometimes does not is more telling than a total absence of baptismal reference would have been. Luther shows that he is accustomed to the baptismal interpretation of the crossing of the Jordan and of the exodus. But his frequent omission of a baptismal reference when handling them betrays the fact that baptism is far from the centre of his thought.

The single most striking fact to emerge from a survey of baptism in the *Dictata* concerns precisely this — baptism has a decidedly 'low profile' in Luther's thinking in these early years. This fact is in itself of much significance. It also demands explanation. Werner Jetter has investigated this question in some depth, and his conclusions will be summarised (and criticised) in an excursus below. (At § 4.2.4.) Meanwhile, the scarcity of

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material renders the task of reconstructing Luther's baptismal theology at this period a very taxing one.<sup>31</sup> It is possible, nevertheless, despite the very limited amount of material available to work on, to identify a number of ways in which the developments of later years are prefigured here.

##### 4.2.2 The Sacraments in the *Dictata*:

###### (1) The Means of Grace

The means of grace are central to the thought of the Luther of 1535-45.<sup>32</sup> This is evident not only in the frequency with which Luther adverts to the theme in the *Genesisvorlesung*, but also in the demonstrably close relationship it bears to a series of other important strands in his thought: God hidden *sub contrariis*; the 'masks' and 'veils'; the weakness of the appointed signs and places — all these are not only central to Luther's *theologia crucis* but also closely linked with baptism itself. At its simplest, the theology of the means of grace is predicated upon the command to seek God where he wills to be found.<sup>33</sup> In the *Dictata* this thought is already present, albeit in embryo.

A striking example occurs in the scholion to Psalm 91:1, "He who dwells in the aid (= shadow) of the Most High". Luther interprets the 'aid' or 'shadow' of the Lord as a figure of the way God wills to be approached and encountered, not immediately (*in nudo Deo*), but through means and medi<sup>a</sup>.<sup>34</sup> He remonstrates with those who

presume to dwell in God nakedly (*nude in deo habitare presumerunt*) and want to be directed to God



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immediately, so to say, rejecting all forms of his aid and protection . . . And so, since they make a shadow for themselves and choose the protection and aid for themselves by means of which they wished to be saved of God, they despise all other shadows and protection of God (*contemnunt omnia alia dei umbracula et protectiones*).<sup>35</sup>

The 'shadow' has precisely that role which is assigned to the appointed masks, signs and places in the *Genesisvorlesung*; to seek God in another way is to despise his command, and is to presume to approach the unapproachable naked deity. But baptism itself makes no appearance as one of the divinely ordained media. Nor does Luther make any reference to the sacraments in general. Instead, he speaks of scripture and the bishops and other ecclesiastical superiors as media through which God deals with his people. Both are offered as interpretations of the 'wings and pinions' of the psalm (v. 4). The two wings are the two Testaments; but they are also the bishops and officers of the Church. Thus Luther uses the example of the Arians as an example of the *hubris* of those who reject the 'shadow' and protection of God — they did this by rebelling against the bishops.<sup>36</sup> But although the despising of baptism itself is not yet an issue with Luther, a crucial element in the scaffolding upon which the later sacramental doctrine would be built appears already to be in position. God must be sought where he wishes to be found, not immediately, nor through ways chosen by men and women, but by use of the media he has appointed.

However, there are substantial differences between Luther's approach to the divinely chosen signs and intermediaries in the *Dictata*, and the teaching of a later period. Often, they are differences primarily of emphasis, as is the case with the scholion on Psalm 45:1 ("My tongue is the pen of a ready

writer"). Here Luther discourses upon the three modes, or stages, of the speaking and revealing of the Word of God:

. . . in ancient times God spoke in the prophets and fathers, and thus, by human mediation, there was created the veil of the letter and a middle wall (*paries medius*). Afterwards the word was spoken in the Son. This is still in concealment (*in velamento*) but is the second word, nevertheless. Finally the Father in heaven himself will speak to us in himself, when he will disclose his word to us without any intermediary so that we may hear and see and be blessed. And as the first speaking was wrapped in many figures and shadows (*figuris et umbris*), all of which were fulfilled and discovered in one Christ, because whatever is dealt with in the law in so many words and deeds, the one Christ has it all in truth (for the Lord there summed up and shortened the word (*sic enim verbum consummans et abbreviatum foecit Dominus*), that what is dealt with there in many things should here be fulfilled in one faith and love and that the burdensome host of laws should come to an end), so in the future there will be one and the same God, all in all. And so many things, which now under Christ we also use and need, namely graces and gifts, in ancient times were signified by many physical things (now there are few ceremonial things, in fact, by the necessity of the Gospel there are hardly any, except the seven sacraments, of which there were formerly more, but in a spiritual sense those remain, nevertheless, and there are still many); and then the Father will exhibit all of these to us in one word, for when his glory will have appeared, we shall be satisfied, and yet he will satisfy us with a single and most simple word of his. Thus only in the spirit he imparts by a single ceremony, namely, the sacrament, everything he once gave by means of many physical things and imperfectly, that is, by a sign.<sup>37</sup>

There is an assumption about the inferiority of the *mediated* divine Word here which is not encountered in the *Genesisvorlesung*. Luther sees the movement from the Old Testament to the New and to the glory which lies beyond as a summation and shortening of the Word, and as part of that process by which the crude, unpolished things of the former dispensation are

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refined and perfected.<sup>38</sup> There is an advance by stages from the many signs and laws of the old covenant to the one Word which will remain when the glory of the Father is revealed.<sup>39</sup> Within this pattern the new covenant is represented very much as an intermediate stage. Now, under the new covenant, there are only a few ceremonial things; seven, the number of the sacraments, represents a reduction as compared with the former number (*nunc enim pauca sunt ceremonialia, immo nulla fere de necessitate Euangelii, nisi 7 sacramenta, que olim erant plurima*). The concept of sacrament itself appears as an intermediate stage between the signs of the first stage and the direct encounter of the third. Luther's reference to the sacraments in this scholion is in parentheses, both metaphorically and literally.

This scholion betrays a mind-set fundamentally different from that of the older Luther, with respect to the valuation implied in it of external signs and of the means of grace. It lends support to Jetter's view that in the *Dictata*, the sacraments are in an ambivalent middle position. They belong to the *New Testament* because they pertain to the gospel, but they also share the nature (and handicap?) of the *Old Testament* ceremonies as physical, external signs and figures.<sup>40</sup> In later material, most notably in the *Genesisvorlesung*, the distinction between the two covenants is minimised; the physical nature of the signs and places is emphasised; and the role of media in the divine dispensation is celebrated, not deprecated as the necessity of a period of transition.<sup>41</sup> The contrast on all three points evident in the *Dictata* is striking. The external nature of baptism and the other sacraments, which would later act as the reliable, objective source of comfort and assurance in *Anfechtung*, is in the *Dictata* more of a handicap

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than an advantage. Their physical nature identifies the sacraments as temporary accommodations to the necessities of the time.<sup>42</sup>

But despite the radical differences in emphasis, it remains true that the later theme of the "givenness" of the sacraments among the divinely appointed signs and 'places' through which God reveals himself is prefigured even at this early stage in the Reformer's career. God must be sought where he wills to be found — the rudiments of this theme, so fundamental to the mature Luther's baptismal theology, are already in position, even if baptism itself has not as yet been brought into relationship with them.

##### 4.2.3 The Sacraments in the *Dictata*:

###### (ii) Hiddenness and Weakness

The hiddenness and weakness of baptism and the other means of grace as the 'veils' and 'masks' under which God is revealed is another important element in the baptismal theology of the *Genesisvorlesung* in particular and the later period in general.<sup>43</sup> The paradoxical weakness of the means of grace is a function of Luther's *theologia crucis*. Again, a study of the *Dictata* will reveal hints and signs of the later development.

One aspect of the embryonic *theologia crucis* in the *Dictata* is the weakness of the Church.<sup>44</sup> In the earlier sections of the *Dictata* Luther's chief purpose in his references to the weakness of the Church appears to be the encouragement of a proper humility. But increasingly the paradoxical double-sidedness of the Church's reality — unimpressive in the world, strong

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in the Spirit — begins to take shape. To the world it appears weak and despicable; the saints are "weak in the world", like a leaning wall, subject to death and suffering.<sup>45</sup> The Church has the aspect of a woman forsaken; its outward appearance, which belies its inner reality, is black: *Quia Ecclesia foris nigra est, et species eius abintus in Spiritu.*<sup>46</sup> The necessity of faith is consequent upon the scandal of the visible penalties and privations of the Christian life; in all such things the hidden reality is the reverse of the surface appearance, and faith is required to grasp it.<sup>47</sup> Luther's interpretation of the 'pelican of the wilderness' in the scholion to Psalm 102:6 portrays not only the loneliness of the Church in its weakness and in the contempt it suffers because of the cross it bears, but also the radical isolation of the man or woman of faith.<sup>48</sup>

Are the means of grace brought within the ambit of this incipient *theologia crucis*? Luther certainly refers to the word in this connection. It makes a poor showing to men, says Luther, in his scholion on Ps. 78:69; like the unicorn's horn, it is black: . . . *quia verbum dei nullius quidem speciei hominibus apparet et abominabile est, nec suave, sed potius stultia videtur; ipsis autem sanctis et virtus et sapientia Dei.*<sup>49</sup> It is clearly but a small step from this point to talk of the hiddenness of God under the masks of the sacraments. But it is not apparent that the Luther of the *Dictata* took such a step.

A passage from the early part of the *Dictata*, Luther's comments upon Psalm 18:11 ("the hiding place of God is darkness"), is particularly instructive with regard to the *theologia crucis* and its relationship to the sacraments.<sup>50</sup> Luther understands the darkness in which God hides in five

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ways. First, there is the riddle (*enygmate*) and darkness (*caligine*) of faith, in which God dwells. Secondly, there is the unapproachability of the light of God. Luther commends Dionysius and the theological *Via Negativa*, or ascent to God by denials. Thirdly, Luther speaks of the mystery of the Incarnation, of God concealed in humanity. Closely linked with this is a fourth kind of hiddenness; God is concealed in the Virgin Mary but also in the Church, which is dim (*obscura*) to the world but transparent (*manifesta*) to God. Lastly, there is the greatest obscurity of all; God is hidden in the bread and wine of the eucharist, *ubi est occultissimus*.

In a sense the building blocks of the *theologia crucis* and for its eventual impact upon sacramental theology are available here in close juxtaposition. But they are not yet in an organic relationship — the building blocks are to hand, but the process of constructing the complete building from this material is still at an early stage. Nor has the cross itself, as the sharpest and most paradoxical focus of God hidden under his opposite, assumed the centrality and control needed for this theology to be properly called a *theologia crucis*.<sup>51</sup> It must also be said that at least one element in Luther's exposition will ultimately be alien to the finished construction: the *Via Negativa* will fall foul of his later abhorrence of seeking God other than under the 'veils' and 'masks' he has appointed.<sup>52</sup>

The chief conclusions of this brief inspection of the themes associated with the *theologia crucis* in the *Dictata* must be exactly parallel to the those which emerged from the previous section concerning 'seeking God where he wills to be found'. In the *Dictata* the seeds of the future development of both are clearly visible. Two important caveats must be entered, however.

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First, there is a lack of clarity and completeness; the elements of the later doctrines are not yet definitively assembled from their constituent parts. Secondly, there remains in the *Dictata* much that is inimical -- both to the later theology of the means of grace with the value it places on the appointed physical signs, and to the *theologia crucis* with its prohibition of seeking the *Deus nudus*.

It is possible, despite these important qualifications, to demonstrate a fundamental continuity in Luther's thought in these areas which goes back into the early years of transition. (The same degree of continuity can be demonstrated in other areas where there is a direct impact upon baptismal theology. In the soteriological field, Luther's mature position on the 'shape' of the Christian life is already hinted at in the *Dictata*. There is also important evidence of continuity in aspects of Luther's ecclesiological teaching. To avoid repetition the evidence for these will be presented below, in chapters 5 and 6 respectively.) These themes would be crucial to the framework of the mature baptismal theology. But as yet there is no sign whatsoever that Luther has begun to see baptism itself in the light of either of them.

All attempts to investigate the role of baptism in the *Dictata* run up against the factor noted at the beginning of this section: the scarcity of references to baptism, which appears to indicate its absence from the centre of his thought. In the remainder of this section, we turn our attention to the difficult, and most pressing, task of examining this phenomenon. First, in an excursus, Jetter's attempt to find a convincing explanation for of Luther's reticence about baptism in the *Dictata* and other early material

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within Luther's intellectual and spiritual environment will be discussed (§ 4.2.4). This will clear the ground for a wider assessment of the significance of this phenomenon (§ 4.2.5).

##### 4.2.4 Excursus: Accounting for the early Luther's 'Baptismal Reticence'

It has already been urged that the most conspicuous feature of baptism in the *Dictata super Psalterium* is the scarcity of Luther's references to it. This scarcity is not confined to the *Dictata*, nor indeed to the years 1513-1515; it continues, albeit not always in quite the same degree, until at least 1525.<sup>53</sup> The significance of this phenomenon requires assessment; but first, there is the prior task of seeking an explanation for it.

Werner Jetter has made an exhaustive investigation of this question.<sup>54</sup> Every aspect of Luther's background which may conceivably be relevant — his intellectual and spiritual history, the theological climate in which he developed — is analysed as a potential source of the younger Luther's reticence about baptism. But at the end of his inquiry, Jetter is forced to admit, in effect, that he has drawn a blank; he can find no external factor operating in Luther's environment sufficient to explain the phenomenon in question. The most expeditious way to proceed will be to set out and comment upon the kernel of Jetter's argument, category by category. Jetter wrote in 1954, since when the young Luther and his medieval background has attracted much scholarly attention; it will be important in presenting Jetter's conclusions to make a judgement about how far they may be allowed to stand.



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The first potential explanation considered by Jetter is the *nominalistic theology* of the *Via Moderna*. In the *pactum* theology of the nominalists the sacraments have a purely contingent necessity; they are effective according to the *potentia ordinata*, not according to the unfettered *potentia absoluta* of God. Here, says Jetter, is a potential departure point for a reworking of sacramental theology which could lead ultimately to a devaluation of the sacraments. But it is one which, nevertheless, he has to exclude. For the Franciscan theological tradition of which the various forms of nominalism are manifestations, the sacraments, when considered according to the *potentia ordinata*, are in no way diminished thereby. Rather, such ordinances are to be received as flowing from the throne of God.<sup>55</sup>

Jetter's negative conclusion concerning the influence of nominalism as an explanation for the low profile of baptism with the younger Luther is confirmed by a comparison with the baptismal theology of the older Luther. Here it is most certainly true that to speak of an ordered, or contingent, power is in no way to diminish its importance for the Christian's encounter with God.<sup>56</sup> A search for God in himself (who paradoxically, at various times is described as the hidden God but also as the *Deus nudus*) is to be shunned. In a very real sense the whole structure of Luther's mature valuation of the sacrament of baptism is a powerful expression of the *pactum* theology, albeit in a thoroughly remodelled version. It has been argued above that baptism, for Luther, is the covenant — and all his baptismal thinking is predicated upon the divine ordinance of Mt. 28:19 and Mk. 16:16.<sup>57</sup>

Next, Jetter assesses German *mysticism* as a possible source of a devaluation of the sacraments in the younger Luther.<sup>58</sup> Did Luther learn to

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despise the outwardness of the sacraments, or to seek to go beyond them to an unmediated encounter with the Godhead from his knowledge of the mystics? Jetter gives a negative answer to this question; there appear to be three main strands in his reasoning. First, the matter of chronology: Jetter insists that Luther's encounter with the writings of the fifteenth century German mystics such as Wessel Gansfort dates from the 1520's, *after* his reformation breakthrough.<sup>59</sup> Secondly, Jetter asserts that the brands of mysticism which did exert a temporary influence upon Luther were not anti-sacramental at all. Jetter also argues the implausibility of a theory which would imply that Luther moved from a mystical indifference to the sacrament, via his reformation protest against its abuse, to the high esteem typical of his later years: *"Aber wer könnte sich dann den Weg von der mystischen Gleichgültigkeit gegenüber dem Sakrament zum reformatorischen Protest gegen sein Verfälschung und von dort wieder zur existenziellen Hochschätzung beim alternden Reformator erklären?"*<sup>60</sup>

This last statement of Jetter's is interesting. Not only has it the effect of undermining any other possible explanation of Luther's 'indifference' to the sacraments; its implication is that there can have been no such indifference in the first place, otherwise the vehemence of Luther's later protests against a deformed sacramental system is inexplicable. Although there is no need to dissent from his conclusions, Jetter's argument requires supplementation.

The complex issue of Luther's relationship with mysticism has been hotly contested in recent Luther scholarship.<sup>61</sup> In a sense the narrower question of precisely when Luther first encountered the *Theologia Germanica*, or the

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writings of such mystics as Tauler or Gansfort would seem to be decisive.<sup>62</sup> But the debate is in fact more elusive than that; it concerns the parallelism of terminology and thought between Luther and the mystics rather than the direct influence of the writings of the latter upon the former. The similarities of language and emphasis are real enough. Humility, suffering, trials, abandonment and the cross are all recurrent themes both in Luther and in Tauler, for instance. Luther himself appeals to Tauler and to the *Theologia Germanica* for support of his own position. But Von Loewenich has demonstrated that their interpretation and use of this vocabulary is markedly different — even diametrically opposite.<sup>63</sup> The mystical theology is at root a theology of glory, despite its superficial appearance of convergence with several themes in Luther's thought. The goal of Tauler's spirituality is an unmediated knowledge of God, immersion in the divine abyss, and the birth of God in the soul. Suffering, trials and the cross are merely a means to this end — there is no place for a *theologia crucis* alongside such an affirmation of the human potential for union with the Godhead.<sup>64</sup> Von Loewenich comes to much the same conclusions concerning the influence of the *Theologia Germanica* upon Luther.<sup>65</sup> If, then, the influence of nominalism is unlikely to have precipitated the young Luther's apparent disregard for the sacraments, neither is that of mysticism. Nominalism cannot have done so for the reason that the impulses of its thought are towards the covenantal signs of the *potentia ordinata* rather than away from them. Mysticism cannot have done so for the opposite reason that, although there are most certainly tendencies within it that could lead to a devaluation of the ordered means of grace, despite their superficial similarities and shared terminology the contrast between Luther and the

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mystics is too great to allow of much direct influence of one upon the other.

The third potential root of the younger Luther's apparent disregard of the sacraments examined by Jetter is the influence upon him in his youth of the *Brothers of the Common Life*, whose school Luther attended in Magdeburg. Jetter is prepared to allow that the development of the intensely inward piety of this lay movement amounted to an (unconscious) protest against the institutionalism of the medieval Church, but he disallows any idea that here, in this essentially conservative movement, there was a radical critique of the Church and its sacramental system.<sup>66</sup>

It is probably better to consider the influence of the Brethren under the rather wider heading of the *Devotio Moderna*, a term which encompasses a variety of groups and individuals in addition to the Brethren themselves.<sup>67</sup> That the *Devotio Moderna* was not in essence a theological movement is agreed both by its proponents and its critics. It has been described by some as the inevitable (and justifiable?) result of the over-intellectualism of thirteenth and fourteenth century scholasticism, but by others as a narrow, individualist, subjective pietism.<sup>68</sup> There is nothing markedly "anti-sacramental" about this movement — one of its most notable products, the *Imitation of Christ* of Thomas à Kempis has as the last of its four chapters a manual of instruction for those preparing to approach the mass. But the most compelling reason against ascribing elements of Luther's sacramental reticence to the *Devotio Moderna* must be the lack of evidence for any direct influence of the movement upon him.<sup>69</sup>

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Jetter proceeds, fourthly, to examine the influence of Luther's confessor and vicar-general *Staupitz*<sup>70</sup>. There can be no doubt in this case, says Jetter, about the profound influence upon the nascent Reformer.<sup>71</sup> But it is by no means clear to Jetter that this influence is *theological* rather than pastoral in nature.<sup>72</sup> Jetter discusses Staupitz's roots in the *via antiqua*, and the likely relative strengths of the Thomist and Scotist components of his theological inheritance, insofar as this would have affected his approach to sacramental theology. But he can find no evidence that in Staupitz Luther would have encountered anything resembling a new theological approach to the sacraments, or a new valuation (devaluation?) of them; sacramental theology can scarcely be said to have been an object of Staupitz's intellectual curiosity at all.<sup>73</sup> Rather, Staupitz is important because of the example he set Luther — an unquestioning, conservative acceptance of the sacramental system, which Jetter allows may be one reason why sacramental theology was untouched by the first impact of Luther's reformation breakthrough.<sup>74</sup>

Steinmetz, in his recent study of the relationship between Staupitz and Luther, lends support to Jetter's view that Staupitz's influence came through pastoral care and piety rather than by the imparting of an explicit theology.<sup>75</sup> But is the distinction between theology and spirituality a helpful one in this context? How can the struggles of these years about penitence, forgiveness and a gracious God have done other than have affected the very heart of Luther's theological development? Is it not sufficient, therefore, to adduce the undoubted influence of Staupitz in confessional, chapel and refectory at this crucial stage of the young Luther's development, in order to demonstrate the power of that influence also in classroom and library? The answer lies in Steinmetz's conclusions about the ways in which

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Luther's theological approach is already radically different from that of Staupitz. In the *Dictata* Luther shows his independence of the older man in a radically different hermeneutic, a sharply varying understanding of key terms such as humility and justification, of different interpretations of Paul, and of differing standpoints with regard to mysticism.<sup>76</sup> Staupitz's role was "to administer a therapeutic combination of traditional pastoral advice with sound Augustinian theology" — thus giving Luther the confidence to master his fears of the terrible hidden God with his awesome righteousness, and setting him free to work out his radically new theology.<sup>77</sup> Steinmetz's study tends to confirm Jetter's negative conclusion on the specific matter of sacramental 'reticence'; the differences between the two men extend to sacramental theology. For Steinmetz, Staupitz's theology is predicated, as Luther's is not, upon the sacramental communication of grace.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, Jetter considers *humanism* as a possible root cause of the apparent marginalisation of the sacraments in the early Luther.<sup>79</sup> Jetter recognises a dynamic in humanism which is potentially subversive of the role of the sacraments. He cites the concentration upon the exemplary-ethical at the expense of the sacramental/dogmatic categories in christology; the centre of gravity is shifting away from the sacramental system. But once again, Jetter is forced to disallow this as a potentially important influence upon Luther. A distinction must be drawn between humanism as that liberating climate which encouraged and enabled the scholarly handling of ancient texts, and humanism as a particular system of thought. Luther's use of the former is not in doubt; his position vis-a-vis the latter will become clear in the dispute with Erasmus of the 1520's.<sup>80</sup>

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Jetter is surely correct. The sacraments are indeed thoroughly marginalised by a system of thought whose central concerns are not soteriological at all, in complete contrast to the struggles of Luther with forgiveness and the righteousness of God.<sup>81</sup> It is difficult to see any common ground between the humanistic approach to the sacraments and Luther's at any period of his life.<sup>82</sup>

Nominalism; mysticism; the *Devotio Moderna*; Staupitz; humanism — all the factors examined by Jetter fail as possible explanations of the apparently marginal role of the sacraments in the *Dictata* and other early documents. Some fail because there is no dynamic within them capable of affecting Luther's sacramental views in this way (nominalism, Staupitz, *Devotio Moderna*); others because their influence upon Luther is questionable (mysticism, humanism, *Devotio Moderna*). A different approach to this problem is required.

##### 4.2.5 The *Dictata*: Baptism marginalised?

It is well to recall at this stage the simplicity of the phenomenon which requires explanation: the scarcity of references to baptism in particular and to the sacraments in general in the Luther of this period. There is a certain irremediably negative quality to the arguments that Jetter finds himself engaged in as he takes up and discards in turn each feature of Luther's background which may potentially explain it. There is also a certain oddness in the logic of such arguments; Jetter is, as it were, seeking to account for something which is not there. For instance, it is

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clear that neither Staupitz nor the Luther of the *Dictata* has fresh, creative thinking to offer in the realm of sacramental theology. But what can possibly be deduced from this doublet of negative observations about the influence of one upon the other?

It is more productive to look, not at the possible explanations for Luther's early baptismal 'reticence' in terms of the external influences upon him, but at what it may reveal about Luther himself, and about his stance towards baptism and the other sacraments. *Prima facie* there is a spectrum of possible interpretations. First (a), his comparative silence on matters sacramental might imply a (conscious or unconscious) 'down-grading' of the sacraments in the theological heirarchy of values held by the young Luther. Or (b), a more neutral view; their low profile might be taken as indicating that the sacraments are non-controversial, marginal to the theological debate not because they are peripheral in themselves but because they have not as yet been questioned. Finally (c), the fact that the sacraments are mentioned infrequently may, paradoxically, be a measure of their importance, in that Luther (and his contemporaries) would see no reason to treat of them and every reason to hesitate before making such sacred matters the objects of questioning and debate.

One observation already made seems to count against alternative (a). The general scarcity of baptismal references in Luther's writings continues until the middle 1520's, proving that 'baptismal reticence' is fully compatible with the powerful theology of baptism to which Luther gives voice in the *De Captivitate*.<sup>83</sup> This, of course, only shows that the 'reticence' is insufficient proof of a devaluation of the sacraments on its own — the



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latter may be established on entirely other grounds. For instance, the priority of word over sacrament may be urged.<sup>84</sup> But in the absence of other compelling evidence the scarcity of references to the sacraments cannot prove their 'down-grading'.

Concerning alternative (c), Jetter makes the interesting suggestion that Luther's reticence is explicable in terms of the holiness of the sacraments for the young Luther, to whom they were a territory that he would tremble to enter. Yet Jetter argues (paradoxically) that at the same time the sacraments were a territory that he inhabited as a matter of course, so that for the twin reasons of reverence and familiarity Luther could have no cause to speak of what was an 'inescapable prerequisite'.<sup>85</sup> Such a reconstruction of the young Luther's thought processes is not entirely convincing, however. It implies that theological concern and attention are directed away from that which is vital and central towards that which is less central and therefore contestable, and furthermore that there are certain 'no go' areas which may not be brought into the arena of discussion. This sort of reticence seems utterly alien to the Luther of all periods. Where the sacraments became the objects of debate, Luther showed no hesitation in entering — or launching — that debate; the indulgences controversy, after all, bore directly upon the sacrament of the keys.

It may be that alternative (b) is the most plausible, and that Luther's comparative silence about baptism and the other sacraments is neutral as far as their importance or relative unimportance to him is concerned. The sacramental system is part of Luther's inheritance; in 1513-15 there has as yet been no stimulus driving him to bring it into consideration. That

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baptism and sacramental theology are at the margins of Luther's interest in the *Dictata* does not prove that they were marginal in any more profound sense. There is clear evidence of a focusing of attention upon the word — the 'priority of the word' in this sense would lead, eventually, to a reformation of sacramental theology. But at this early stage baptism is most certainly not 'centre-stage'; and its theology has not as yet been 'reformed'.

Baptism is not alone in its apparent neglect in the *Dictata* — although the contrast in terms of frequency of reference between the younger and the older Luther is admittedly more striking with baptism than it is with some of the other sacraments. But that baptism should be particularly affected is unsurprising in view of its isolated position in the economy of salvation imposed by the medieval seven-fold sacramental system.<sup>86</sup> When beset by his *Anfechtungen*, the Luther of this period would far more naturally look to the 'second plank after shipwreck', the sacrament of the keys, than to baptism for aid. Baptism's force was effectively exhausted in the initial entry into grace and the removal of original sin. The discovery of the 'present tense' of baptism, of its abiding power in the life of a Christian, was the discovery of the Luther of a later date.

Luther's struggles in the monastery were focused upon the sacrament of penance because this was the link in the sacramental system which was expected to bear the lion's share of the weight. David Steinmetz, in an interesting analysis of the penitential traditions of the later middle ages, provides a valuable insight into the factors operating in the breakdown of penance for Luther.<sup>87</sup> He argues that two traditions are to be distinguished

in the penitential spirituality of the period, contrasting the 'maximalism' of men like the Observant Franciscan, Dietrich Kolde of MÜNster,<sup>88</sup> with the 'minimalist' position instanced by the Augustinian Observant, John of Paltz.<sup>89</sup> Steinmetz concludes that with Kolde the emphasis is upon the disposition of the penitent, which requires the more perfect *contritio* (penitence motivated by the love of God), not merely the lesser state of *attritio*, where penitence is at least partly founded upon a fear of hell. He underlines the need for rigorous self-examination, and the completeness and sincerity of the sinner's confession. It is not difficult to trace the influence of this sort of spirituality in the Luther of the cloister. By contrast, Paltz grounds assurance of forgiveness and salvation in the efficacy of the pronounced priestly absolution and of the sacramental system in general; he regards the rigour of men like Kolde to be totally unrealistic for the great mass of the people, from whom, for instance, only *attritio* can be demanded because that is the limit of their capability. Steinmetz contends that Luther's instincts did not permit him to rest content with the prospect of assurance and consolation along the lines outlined by Paltz.<sup>90</sup> If this argument be admitted (and there seems to be no compelling reason against it), a factor in the scarcity of sacramental references in the early years may have been identified; the scrupulous, struggling, young Luther's instinctive distrust of the false comfort of an *ex opere operato* understanding of sacramental efficacy.<sup>91</sup>

Penance was not in practice, of course, the only available 'second plank'. Monastic vows were another. Luther's entry to the cloister is in itself a symptom of the inadequate help the sacramental system as a whole offered to troubled consciences.<sup>92</sup> While his baptism, for Luther, remained shut up in

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the past as the static gateway to the Christian life, the initial conveyance of grace, there was indeed little prospect of it becoming a lively focus of his theological attention. But at the end of the years of breakthrough, when Luther had uncovered the abiding power and reality of baptism in his and every Christian's life, the vehemence of his fury against the putative 'second planks' and against the theology which had occasioned his struggle was all the greater.

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##### 4.3 AFTER THE BREAKTHROUGH: Baptism 1519-20

In this section two important documents will be examined: the *Sermon von dem heyligen Hochwirdigen Sacrament der Tauffe* of 1519, and one of the great Reformation tracts of 1520, *De captivitate Babylonica Ecclesiae*. As with the *Grosse Katechismus* and the letter *Von der Widdertaufe*, but unlike the *Dictata* or the *Genesisvorlesung*, baptism is the specific subject matter of these documents, or sections of them. The aim will be to set out, as concisely as possible, the picture of the 'post-breakthrough' Luther's baptismal thought available here. Two questions will need to be borne in mind throughout. The relationship of the baptismal thought of 1519-20 with what preceded it — the reformation breakthrough itself — must be considered (§ 4.3.4). But equally important is the question of continuity with what followed. This will be addressed by means of a comparison with the model of Luther's mature baptismal theology constructed in chapters 2 and 3. To simplify the comparison the two documents will be treated using the categories which provide the structure of Luther's approach to baptism in the *Grosse Katechismus* (§ 4.3.3).

But first, it is important to let the earlier sources speak on their own terms (§§ 4.3.1, 4.3.2). The object will be to present what is central and distinctive in the baptismal teaching of these documents, rather than to attempt a full analysis. The *De Captivitate* will be examined first, as the more 'focused' of the two documents.

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##### 4.3.1 De Captivitate Babylonica Ecclesiae

First among the themes of the baptismal section of the *De Captivitate* is the simple statement, *the ship remains*.

*Manet illa una, solida et invicta navis, nec unquam dissolvitur in ulla tabula, in qua omnes vehuntur, qui ad portum salutis vehuntur, quae est veritas dei in sacramentis promittens. Hoc sane fit, ut multi e nave temere in mare prosiliant et pereant: hi sunt, qui deserta promissionis fide in peccatum sese praecipiant. Verum navis ipsa permanet et transit integra cursu suo, quod, si qua gratia ad navem reverti potest, nulla tabula sed solida ipsa nave feretur ad vitam: hic est, qui ad promissionem dei stabilem et manentem per fidem revertitur.*<sup>93</sup>

Because of the abiding seaworthiness of the good ship baptism there is no possibility or need of recourse to any 'second plank' after shipwreck. As it is possible to desert the ship and leap into the sea to certain peril, it is also possible to return to the ship — and it is in such a return to baptism in faith, not in recourse to any plank (*tabula*), that the hope of life resides. The image of the ship of baptism was supplied to Luther in the tradition stemming from Jerome, which viewed the sacrament of penance as *secunda tabula post naufragium*.<sup>94</sup> But his creative reworking of this metaphor represents one of his earliest and most powerful statements of the 'present tense' of baptism. Sin cannot destroy its abiding power; *quam perniciosus sit error putare, per peccatum excidisse vim baptismi et navem hanc esse illisam*.<sup>95</sup>

Among adults, says Luther, Satan has done what he could not do among little children; he has put an end to baptism. The power of baptism is

altogether extinguished among those who do not recall their baptism, let alone glory in it: *in omnibus adultis extingueret, ut iam fere nemo sit, qui sese baptismum recordetur, nedum gloriatur . . .*<sup>96</sup> The clergy bear a weighty share of the blame; they ought to have recalled the people to the remembrance of baptism and the awakening of faith again and again.<sup>97</sup> Instead the people have been allowed to despair of the ship, and encouraged to seek the 'second plank' of penance. But the putative second planks do not stop with penance. This abandoning of the ship gives rise to vows, orders, works, satisfactions, pilgrimages, indulgences, monastic sects — and all the books, questionings, and doubtful opinions of a self-chosen, man-made religion:

*Hinc nata sunt votorum, religionum, operum, satisfactionum, peregrinationum, indulgentiarum, sectarum infinita illa onera et de iis maria illa librorum, quaestionum, opinionum, traditionum humanarum, quas totus mundus iam non capit, ut incomparabiliter peius habet Ecclesiam dei ea tyrannis, quam unquam habuit synagogam aut ullam nationem sub coelo.*<sup>98</sup>

For this reason the Church suffers under a wretched servitude that is 'Babylonian' indeed.

The pagan servitude of the Church introduces a second theme powerfully present in the *De Captivitate*, the *freedom of the baptised*. This freedom is visible in newly-baptised little children "who engage in no effort of works, but are free in every way, secure and saved through the glory of their baptism (*solius gloria baptismi sui securi et salvī*)."<sup>99</sup> Luther, in a postscript to the baptismal section of the tract, treats of the question of

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vows.<sup>100</sup> It is no accident that he chooses to do so in the context of baptism, because it is precisely the liberty of baptism that is compromised by the plethora of vows and orders and the human works associated with them in the religion of his day. Luther does not venture an absolute prohibition of the taking of vows (although it is clear that he is drawn to it), but, speaking "*pro libertate Ecclesiae et gloria baptismi*", he urges the leaders of the Church to refrain from extolling vows, and indeed to dissuade people from them. Those who would be assured of their salvation are to abstain from such vows, especially from those which are for life.<sup>101</sup>

Luther writes with great vehemence against those who, like the proselyte-seeking Pharisees before them (Mt. 23:15), travel land and sea to fill the world with priests, monks and nuns, imprisoning them all in their vows. This laying of new burdens on the people of God is entirely without warrant; for Luther, the vow of baptism is more than demanding enough, and needs no addition: "*Abunde enim vovimus in baptismo et plus quam possimus implere, sat negotii habituri, si huic uni intenderimus*".<sup>102</sup> It is already clear that Luther's adherence to the one vow of baptism will become the basis for his theology of vocation. The common calling of a servant, and the despised estate of marriage, have more claim to honour than the self-chosen piety of those who consider themselves the "heart of the Church".<sup>103</sup>

There are other strong emphases in the baptismal section of the *De Captivitate*, which will most naturally be dealt with below, in the comparison with the later period (in § 4.3.3). Most notable among them are Luther's stress on the word of promise to which baptism is added, and faith as the manner in which its benefits are to be received.



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When Luther writes of the abiding, invincible 'ship' of baptism, and when he rebukes those who have led the baptised into their Babylonian captivity, there is a vigour about his words that denotes the freshness of a recent discovery. The core of that discovery is *the 'present tense' of baptism*, which runs like a thread throughout the section. The metaphor of the unsinkable ship is the most powerful expression of it, but there are others. Baptism has abiding power against temptation and trial;<sup>104</sup> its *significatio* continues until complete at death and the final resurrection;<sup>105</sup> it never becomes useless, but is always available for recourse.<sup>106</sup> On the basis of baptism's life-long *significatio*, Luther can even say that Christians need to be baptised more and more, until the sign is fulfilled at the last day:

. . . *nunquam sine baptismi tam signo quam re ipsa sumus, immo semper sumus baptisandi magis ad magis, donec signum perfecte impleamus in novissimo die.*<sup>107</sup>

This theme, which is so central to an adequate understanding of Luther's mature baptismal theology, is already strongly developed in 1520.

#### 4.3.2 *The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism*

This treatise, published in November 1519, was the second in a group of three sermons for students on the sacraments.<sup>108</sup> There is much here that is closely parallel with the teaching of the *De Captivitate*, but there are, nevertheless, several distinctive emphases.

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Luther (in § 2) distinguishes three things in baptism: the sign, its significance, and faith.<sup>109</sup> The degree to which Luther develops the second of these, the *significatio of baptism*, is an important feature of the sermon. This is so from the start; in § 1 Luther makes his plea (justified from the etymology of *Taufe* and *baptismus*) for a complete immersion in the water of baptism, so that the sign itself should more adequately represent the drowning of the old man that it signifies.<sup>110</sup> The balance of the two parts of the *significatio* (§ 3) -- the drowning and death of sin and the sinful nature (§ 4), and the spiritual birth (*geystlich geburt*) and growth in grace and righteousness (§ 5) -- is perhaps rather more even than it is in the *Grosse Katechismus*.<sup>111</sup> As elsewhere, the *significatio* of baptism is the matrix for Luther's theology of vocation (§ 18). There is no one special estate in which the slaying of sin is accomplished.<sup>112</sup> Baptism turns all sufferings, especially death itself, to good (§ 16). Like the callings and estates of life,

they [sufferings and especially death] simply have to serve baptism in the doing of its work, that is, in the slaying of sin. For he who would fulfil the work and purpose of his baptism and be rid of sin, must die . . . <sup>113</sup>

The 'death' that Luther speaks of very much includes that of the body; it cannot be complete without it. The *significatio* of baptism is worked out in the ordinary course of life; the life-long process of slaying of the old man is not to be confused with a purely 'spiritual' exercise of the human will.<sup>114</sup> The Christian is always under the sentence of death; indeed Luther can speak of this death as having begun in baptism itself.<sup>115</sup>

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A second significant emphasis in the sermon is the degree of attention Luther pays to 'what happens' at *the moment of administration of the sacrament* itself. In some later material, it is not always easy to determine which of Luther's statements can be attributed in an unqualified way to the event of baptism.<sup>116</sup> But here he faces this issue directly. When "someone comes forth out of baptism, he is truly pure, without sin, and wholly guiltless (*sey reyn und an sund gantz unschuldig*) . . . he is sacramentally altogether pure and guiltless (*gantz reyn unnd unschuldig sacramentlich*)."<sup>117</sup> Yet in both §§ 7 and 8 a qualification is immediately supplied. There is a proleptic aspect to baptism in that although *sacramentally* the death and resurrection of baptism are complete the moment the baptised person comes forth, the sign itself testifies to its signification, still to be completed.<sup>118</sup> The flesh of the baptised remains truly sinful: "*unßer fleysch, die weyl es hye lebt, natürlich böß und sundhafftig ist*".<sup>119</sup> But although baptism does not remove sin, for the baptised it is no longer imputed (§ 11).<sup>120</sup> Thus the tension concerning what may, and what may not, be predicated of the moment of administration is answered in terms of the 'reformation' theology of justification.<sup>121</sup>

A third feature of the sermon is Luther's use of the language of *covenant* (§ 9). When Luther's imaginary questioner casts doubt on the value of a baptism which does not "altogether blot out and remove sin", Luther replies that "the blessed sacrament of baptism helps you because in it God allies himself with you and becomes one with you in a gracious covenant of comfort (*das sich gott daselbs mit dyr vopindet und mit dyr eyns wird eyns gnedigem trostlichen bunds*)."<sup>122</sup> But the interpretation Luther offers of the covenant of baptism is somewhat problematic.

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The human side of the covenant includes, first of all, the desire for baptism and what it signifies: "*du dich ergibst ynn das sacrament der Tauffe und seyner bedeutung, das ist, das du begerest mit den sunden zu sterben und am jungsten tag new gemacht werden . . .*"<sup>123</sup> Secondly, there is the pledge to continue in the same life-long desire and struggle against sin: "*vorpindest du dich, also zu bleyben und ymmer mehr unnd mehr zu tödten deyn sund . . .*"<sup>124</sup> The divine gift of grace and non-imputation of sins is predicated upon the pledge: "*Die weyl nu solch deyn vorpinden mit got steet, thut dyr got widder die gnad* (while your pledge with God stands, he in turn gives you grace) *und vorpindet sich dyr, er wolle dyr die sund nit zurechnen . . .*"<sup>125</sup>

There appear to be traces here of the theology of congruent grace; God accepts the desire to die to sin, and the gift of grace and the non-imputation of sin are at least partly predicated upon the individual's pledge (and his or her fulfilment of that pledge) to continue in the slaying of sin.<sup>126</sup> Later years would bring a sharper and more restricted understanding of the human side of the covenant, in terms of Mark 16:16, "He who believes and is baptised will be saved".

It is clear at this point that in a sense the sermon is still a transitional document. There is other evidence to support such a view, most notably the treatment of vows and orders. Here the overall framework is as in the *De Captivitate*; the single vow of baptism applies to all Christians, yet the arena in which the slaying of sin must be accomplished is different for each individual (§§ 17.18).<sup>127</sup> But although baptism remains the standard of the "spiritual order", Luther recognises its higher standing, and commends

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the chastity and greater discipline it offers. In turn, the order of bishops and priests are higher still.<sup>128</sup> In a document which is notably free from polemic it is nevertheless surprising to find, in sharp contrast with the *De Captivitate*, that Luther's criticism of pilgrimages and fastings is limited to the motive for which these things are done — to heap up merit, not for the slaying of sin.<sup>129</sup> All the ingredients of Luther's doctrine of baptism as the foundation for Christian freedom are present, but the absence of the vehemence shown just a few months later in the *De Captivitate* is, despite the differences in the potential audiences of the two documents, an indication that, as yet, the scandal of the loss of that freedom has not hit him with full force. In these few months, Luther's baptismal doctrine had been developing fast.

##### 4.3.3 A Comparison with the *Grosse Katechismus*

A full rehearsal of the baptismal doctrine of the two documents examined above has not been attempted; rather, a few themes have been highlighted, to allow that which is distinctive to stand out. Several important aspects have not been touched upon; particularly those where a direct comparison with the baptismal theology of the *Grosse Katechismus* is possible. The two documents will be assessed under the five section headings of chapter 3 so that, in conclusion, a summary of the main points of continuity and contrast between Luther's baptismal theology in these two documents and the 'mature' theology of baptism may be offered.

1. Baptism and Word In the *De Captivitate*, the promise (Mark 16:16) is Luther's starting point for the consideration of baptism.<sup>130</sup> In 1520, as later, when Luther calls for a repeated return to the abiding reality of baptism in the face of sin and trials, he grounds his call upon the unshakeability of the divine word of promise.<sup>131</sup> An important aspect of the relationship of the word and baptism in the later theology is strongly present here too — God as the minister of baptism:

Ascribe both [inward and outward parts of baptism] to God alone, and look upon the person administering it as simply the vicarious instrument of God, by which the Lord sitting in heaven thrusts you under the water with his own hands (*per quod dominus in coelo sedens te in aquam suis manibus propriis mergit*), and promises you forgiveness of your sins, speaking to you upon earth with a human voice by the mouth of his minister.<sup>132</sup>

But there are differences in emphasis and interpretation to be observed, when a full comparison is made with the mature baptismal theology. For instance, the divine word is the word of promise; there is no sign of the language of command so evident later. This tends to confirm the suspicion that the emphasis upon the word of 'command' so evident in the Catechisms and in other later material is a symptom of Luther's response to the radical denigration of the outward sign of 'mere' water. On the other hand the theme of 'promise' remains important in the later period; it experiences a new flowering in the *Genesisvorlesung*.<sup>133</sup>

Nor are the word and the water so thoroughly 'joined' at this earlier period as they would be later. There is nothing here to match the allusions

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in the *Grosse Katechismus* to the water in which God has set his honour, and to which he has given his strength and power.<sup>134</sup> In *De Captivitate* Luther explicitly distances himself from the ascription of a hidden spiritual power to the word and water of baptism which works grace in the baptisand: "*esse aliquam virtutem occultam spiritualem in verbo et aqua, quae operetur in anima recipientis gratiam dei.*" He equally rejects the traditional nominalist form of sacramental efficacy, which avoids the attribution of an inherent virtue to the element by means of the *pactum* theology: "*His alii contradicentes statuunt, nihil esse virtutes in sacramentis, sed gratiam a solo dei dari, qui assistit ex pacto sacramentis a se institutis.*"<sup>135</sup> Luther's insistence upon faith in the divine promise as a term of the *pactum* excludes a view of the sacraments which makes them effective signs of grace where faith is not present. Such a view turns the sacraments into a command, and faith into a work (*ex sacramento praeceptum, ex fide opus facere*); namely, the work of receiving the sacrament.<sup>136</sup> Thus Luther insists that baptism itself does not save or benefit anyone (*Ita baptismus neminem iustificat nec ulli prodest*); only faith in the promise to which baptism is added does so.<sup>137</sup>

2. What Baptism accomplishes It is even more difficult with these documents than elsewhere to separate the benefits of baptism, what it conveys, gives and achieves, from its *significatio*.<sup>138</sup> In the *Sermon* the *significatio* of baptism is so dominant a theme that it acts as a framework for the whole of Luther's interpretation. But as regards the benefit of baptism, there is no material variation from the later position. The promise to which baptism is added is simply that of salvation, the forgiveness of

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sins.<sup>139</sup> Baptism signifies the drowning of sin, and the receiving of "an eternal life of innocence".<sup>140</sup>

The only significant distinctive feature has been noted above; Luther's sharper focus in the *Sermon* upon the moment of administration, and upon the question of precisely to what extent the conveyance of the benefits of baptism is to be assigned to it. The answer Luther gives to this question is expressed in terms of the distinction between 'sacramental' purity and the complete slaying of sin at death, and the non-imputation as opposed to the absence of sin. This answer is fully consonant with the tendency observable in the later period for Luther's statements about the benefits of baptism to be only very loosely linked to the moment of administration.<sup>141</sup>

3. Faith In both *De Captivitate* and the *Sermon* the emphasis upon faith is the one major theme not so far explored. Luther's stress upon the necessity of faith for receiving the benefits of baptism is unqualified. Like the signs of the Old Testament (but unlike the works prescribed by the law), the New Testament sacraments are joined to a word of promise, which requires faith:

*Ad nostra et patrum signa seu sacramenta habent annexum verbum promissionis, quod fidem exigit et nullo opere alio impleri potest: ideo sunt signa seu sacramenta iustificationis, quia sunt sacramenta iustificantis fidei et non operis, unde et tota eorum efficacitas est ipsa fides, non operatio.*<sup>142</sup>

The entire efficacy of baptism, then, is to be ascribed to faith in the word of promise to which it is attached. In the *Sermon*, where the subjective



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dimensions of the struggle of faith are particularly apparent, the role of faith is equally crucial:

. . . if anyone has fallen into sin, he should all the more remember his baptism, how God has made a covenant with him to forgive all his sins, if only he will fight against them even until death. Upon this truth, upon this alliance with God, a man must joyfully dare to rely. Then baptism again goes into force and operation (*So geht die tauff widder yn yhrem werck und crafft*) . . . This faith a person must hold so firmly that he would cling to it even though everything and all sins attacked him. (§ 14.)<sup>143</sup>

Here the force and effectiveness of baptism seem to depend upon faith, in a way that the Luther of the catechisms could never have allowed. This exemplifies a major contrast with the Luther of later years; here, one half of the double-sided understanding of the faith-baptism relationship is missing. The heavy emphasis upon the necessity of faith for a receiving of the benefits of baptism is not counterbalanced as it would be later by an emphasis upon the validity of baptism which is independent of faith.<sup>144</sup>

4. *Significatio* The *significatio* of baptism as the controlling idea of the *Sermon* has already been discussed. In *De Captivitate* Luther repeats his preference to total immersion as a more adequate reflection of that which baptism signifies; it is not the washing away of sins alone — this is too mild and weak an interpretation — but death and resurrection.<sup>145</sup> There a close parallel here with the emphases of Luther's later baptismal theology.<sup>146</sup>

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5. Infant Baptism There is no sign in either *De Captivitate* or the *Sermon* of the controversy concerning infant baptism which would erupt in the next few years. When Luther mentions the baptism of children, he does so in anticipation of an argument that may be brought against his insistence upon the necessity of faith. The baptism of infants could be presented as a powerful counter-instance to the requirement of faith; implying either that Luther's argument is wrong, or that infant baptism is ineffective: "*parvulos frustra baptisari*". In the context of 1520, however, this second alternative is not really an alternative at all, rather a *reductio ad absurdum* put by Luther into the mouth of his imaginary opponent. Luther's answer to the challenge is in terms of *fides aliena*. In this connection he stresses the power of the Word of God to change a godless heart, the prayer of the believing church, so that the child may be cleansed and renewed by *fides infusa*. Indeed, such an infusion of *fides aliena* could avail for a godless adult too.<sup>147</sup> Perhaps only in the reference to the power of the word of God is there any hint of the wealth of arguments that Luther will employ after the challenge to infant baptism emerges from the ranks of the radicals.<sup>148</sup>

The significance of this brief comparison between Luther's baptismal thinking at the beginning and at the end of the 1520's will be assessed in the concluding section of this chapter (§ 4.4.1). Meanwhile, it is abundantly clear that the important differences lie in two areas: the faith-baptism relationship and the joining of water and word. In both, there is a duality of emphasis in the Luther of the later period which is missing in the younger Reformer. The older Luther continues to emphasise the centrality of the word in baptism, but also insists that the word is so thoroughly bound to the water that the water itself may be said to be *Gottlich, selig,*

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*fruchtbarlich* and *gnadenreich*.<sup>149</sup> He also maintains the requirement for faith, but emphasises the objectivity of baptism, which may truly be said to be *recht* whether faith is present or not.

##### 4.3.4 Baptism and the Reformation Breakthrough

What may be learnt from the *Sermon* and from *De Captivitate* about the relationship between Luther's developing understanding of baptism and the theological discoveries of his reformation 'breakthrough'? Such evidence as can be gleaned from the two documents alone would seem to confirm the view taken above (§ 4.1.2), that the breakthrough was a process which continued for some years, right up until 1519. The *Sermon* has been described above as a transitional document, mainly on the basis of the apparent remnants of the *quod in se est* in the interpretation of the baptismal covenant (§ 4.3.2). If this is correct, however, it is most certainly representative of a very late stage in the transition. The *De Captivitate*, written just a few months later, is one of the definitive reformation tracts. As these two documents, taken together, are so close to the final emergence of the reformation theology, there is every reason to expect them to portray the impact of Luther's theological revolution upon baptism itself.

The alien righteousness of God, imputed to believing sinners, and the non-imputation of sin are without doubt among the central tenets of this theological revolution. From one point of view it is clear that Luther's baptismal theology in 1519-20 *reflects* these doctrines. The radical emphasis upon the faith without which baptism is of no consequence, and may

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even become a hindrance<sup>150</sup>, or a source of false confidence<sup>151</sup> — this is unambiguous evidence of the reformation theology being applied to the sacraments. Luther's growing emphasis upon the centrality of the word in baptism, which at this stage has yet to reach its full flowering, is another sign of a reconstruction of baptismal theology upon new lines.

But this is only half the picture. From another point of view the *Sermon* and above all the baptismal section of the *De Captivitate* do not reveal Luther *adjusting* his teaching on baptism to meet the new requirements set by the reformation theology. In these pages, rather, we see nothing less than a *rediscovery* of baptism by Luther. God's gracious promise to the Christian believer that he will not impute sin is nothing other than the covenant of baptism. It had been buried under layer after layer of contrary teaching, spirituality and practice. Penance as the 'second plank', vows, monastic orders, the searchings of the mystics; all this, for the Luther of *De Captivitate*, is a tyrannous religion of works that sets aside baptism and the liberty of faith alike and destroys the Church:

*Hanc gloriam libertatis nostrae et hanc scientiam  
baptismi esse hodie captivam . . .*

*. . . At nunc, tacita fide, infinitis legibus operum et  
ceremoniarum extincta est Ecclesia, ablata virtus et  
scientia baptismi, impedita fides Christi.*<sup>152</sup>

The ferocity of Luther's language about the captivity of the baptised is on a par with that of his protest about the 'third captivity' of the mass, its interpretation as a sacrifice. His ferocity is a measure of the fact that for Luther, in their different ways, these themes touch the very heart

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of the gospel itself. It is a gospel which is being distorted and concealed by the works and inventions of human religion.

The error from which the concealment of the gracious covenant of baptism arises is the consignment of baptism to impotence and to the past "by those who have reduced baptism to such small and slender dimensions that, while they say grace is indeed inpoured by it, they maintain that afterwards it is poured out again by sin, and that then one must reach heaven by another way, as if baptism had become entirely useless. Do not hold such a view . . ." <sup>153</sup> To depart from baptism to "another way" is to depart from the gospel of grace; but a reboarding of the indestructible 'ship' of baptism is ever possible. The present tense of baptism emerges from the very centre of Luther's reformation theology.

4.4 CONCLUSION

It is time to take up again the questions posed at the start of this investigation of the 'early' baptismal theology of Luther. They can be divided into two main categories. The first look forward to the middle and later 1520's and the irruption of the radical reformation and the consequent shifts in Luther's patterns of thought. They concern the continuity (or lack of it) of Luther's theology of baptism across this period. The second group of questions look to the relationship between the earlier baptismal theology and that earlier and more radical 'break' in Luther's thought, the crisis of the reformation breakthrough itself. Both sets of questions impinge on the the fundamental concern of this study — the relationship of the *later* baptismal doctrine to the central tenets of Luther's reformation theology.<sup>154</sup>

To conclude this chapter, these two questions will be addressed in turn.

4.4.1 Continuity or Discontinuity?

The main conclusions to be drawn from the sources investigated in this chapter are as follows:

1. Some theological *motifs* which are important to the framework of the baptismal theology can be traced back to an early date, well before the reformation theology has reached its definitive shape. For example, the

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theme of 'seeking God where he wills to be found' is already present in the *Dictata* (§ 4.2.2), as are the elements of the *theologia crucis*, God hidden under his opposite (§ 4.2.3). But at this early stage neither of these embryonic themes has been related to the doctrine of baptism.

2. Many important themes within Luther's baptismal theology proper show almost complete continuity between the years 1519-20 and the later period from 1527 onwards. Luther's understanding of the benefits of baptism, and his emphasis upon its *significatio* as death and resurrection appear to show no appreciable change from *De Captivitate* to the end of his life. There is also no reason to suppose that his understanding of baptismal regeneration, with its reference to the rising again which is the second element of the double *significatio* as well as to the content of 'what baptism conveys', altered significantly over the years. This continuity of thought embraces the elusive relationship of regeneration to the administration of the baptismal water. In particular, Luther's stress upon the 'present tense' of baptism is as strong in the *De Captivitate* as it is in the later period.<sup>155</sup>

3. There is partial continuity in other areas. Throughout the years after 1519 Luther insisted upon the requirement of faith under the covenant of baptism for the receiving of the benefits of baptism. The centrality of the word of promise, to which the requirement for faith corresponds, is maintained from 1520 onwards, although there are variations in the balance of emphasis between the the word of command (institution) and the category of promise.

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The extent of the continuity is impressive. But the other conclusions to be drawn from this survey concern a number of shifts observable over time:

4. The most obvious alteration is in the profile of baptism itself. If the frequency of Luther's allusions to baptism in his exposition of scripture is a reliable guide, it is only after 1527 that baptism gains substantially greater prominence in the Reformer's mind.<sup>156</sup> In spite of the vigorous reworking of baptismal theology in the *Sermon* and in *De Captivitate*, the years 1519-20 belong on this criterion to the early period.
5. There is an important change in Luther's presentation of the relationship between baptism and faith. In 1519-20 there is no sign of his later teaching on the validity of baptism which is independent of faith. This is the most obvious symptom of a wider contrast, which also embraces Luther's understanding of the role of the sign itself. In 1529 the water and the word are so closely joined that there is, as it were, an exchange of attributes, a *communicatio idiomatum*, between them. But in the earlier period Luther emphatically refuses to ascribe to the external sign that which must be predicated of the word of promise to which it is attached.
6. This last apparent discontinuity points in turn to a sea change in Luther's attitude to the distinction between the subjective and the objective, between inward and outward things. There is little evidence in the earlier documents of the rejoicing in the despised physical externality of the appointed means of grace that would be such a marked characteristic of Luther's later sacramental theology.



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It is not difficult to identify the external factors which stimulated this change. In 1519-20 there had been no attack upon infant baptism, no attempts to ground the validity (as opposed to the effectiveness) of the sacraments upon faith, and no radical devaluation of the place of externals in religion. But the emergence of radical theology in its many guises meant that the Luther of the later 1520's was operating against two sets of opponents.<sup>157</sup> This new crisis elicited a refining of Luther's understanding of several key terms in his vocabulary, and the result in the field of baptismal theology was a clear shift in emphasis. The new stress upon the objectivity of the sacraments, upon the tight bond between water and word, and upon the validity of baptism in the absence of faith are the most obvious features of it. But a refinement of the understanding of faith, now more clearly depicted as an unselfconscious gaze upon Christ, is an integral part of the same development.

To some extent, the roots of these developments can be traced in the earlier period. For instance, baptism's independence of faith is prefigured in the way that the sign, like the invincible ship, remains, even while it is forsaken: "*aberrare quidem poteris tempus a signo, sed non ideo irritum est signum*".<sup>158</sup> The later valuation of the baptismal water and the inseparability of sign and word is foreshadowed in Luther's unwillingness to distinguish between inner and outer baptisms in the *De Captivitate*, when he attributes both sign and promise to God himself: "*Cave ergo sic discernas baptismum, ut externum homini, internum dei tribuas: utrunque soli deo tribue* . . .".<sup>159</sup>

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But the most telling evidence for the fundamental continuity and consistency in Luther's baptismal thought across the period of adjustment forced upon him by the new circumstances of the mid 1520's is the way that all the emphases of the *De Captivitate* are preserved in the later period. Above all, the Luther of 1527 continues to preach the necessity of faith, albeit a faith whose nature and role is articulated more precisely than before.

##### 4.4.2 Baptism and the Heart of the Gospel

It has been argued above (§ 4.3.4) that Luther's theology of baptism in 1519-20, and perhaps above all the powerful image of the unsinking ship, reveal, not so much an *adjustment* in baptismal theology occasioned by the reformation breakthrough, but the *rediscovery* of baptism to which that breakthrough led. This perspective must now be judged on the basis of the whole chapter.

The single most important conclusion to be drawn from an examination of the *Dictata* is that, at the earlier stages of Luther's development towards the reformation theology, he has little to say about baptism (§ 4.2.1). A search to identify the reasons for this (§ 4.2.4) yields only the negative thought that baptism was at the margin of Luther's interest because it was non-controversial. This unexciting conclusion is, however, preferable to the alternative hypotheses of a conscious devaluation of the sacraments in favour of the word, or of a reluctance to probe into 'holy mysteries'. But what can be added with confidence is that there are reasons for Luther's

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lack of attention in the particular case of baptism, which relate to its isolation in the medieval seven-fold sacramental system (§ 4.2.5).

It would be easy to lose sight of a simple fact. When Luther taught and wrote about baptism in 1519-20, he did not do so in response to controversy. There were no changes in the external situation which could result in the theological spotlight being thrown upon baptism. Luther's attention to baptismal theology of the *Sermon* and *De Captivitate* is fundamentally at his own initiative. But one has the impression, reinforced by a comparison of the two documents, that Luther was not entirely prepared for what he found when he began his investigation of baptism. In the *Sermon* he is beginning to grapple with the relationship of baptism and the orders, vows and works of human spirituality. But in *De Captivitate* his position on all this -- and on the relationship between baptism and penance -- is much sharper. It matches his much clearer perception of the abiding reality of baptism in 1520 than in 1519. The vehemence of his language in 1520 is a sign of a recent discovery of a truth, which a few months earlier was only half perceived -- the freedom of the sinner justified by God's grace in Christ is a *baptismal* freedom. Luther's vehemence also reflects his own personal history. His struggles in the cloister about the adequacy of his contrition and the state of his spirituality; further back, his preoccupations with pilgrimages, merits, and works; his entry into monastic life itself -- all these are now revealed to be symptoms, not only of his former ignorance of the gospel, but of his loss of the glorious freedom of the baptised.

To marginalise baptism by confining it to the past is to destroy the gospel, because the gospel of forgiveness through faith in Christ and the

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covenant of baptism are one and the same. Does this mean, then, that Goppelt is right in his contention that "the reformation of Luther began at this point", with the abandonment of the medieval belief that baptism is a "closed historical act"?<sup>160</sup> It would be all too easy to fall foul of our own warnings against the attempt to single out one theme as either the definitive element in Luther's breakthrough, or indeed as the 'key' to the whole of his theology.<sup>161</sup> It would also be historically incorrect to suggest that the breakthrough in Luther's thought was *occasioned* by his rediscovery of baptism. But once the Luther of the years immediately after the breakthrough had turned his attention to the matter, that rediscovery was the inevitable result. The image of the abiding ship of baptism and the rejection of all putative second planks is an image which emerges from the heart of the gospel itself. Furthermore, the strength of Luther's language betrays the fact that it was also an image of Luther's own experience. After his years of struggle, at sea, with one inadequate 'plank' after another, Luther himself, in his rediscovery of the gospel, had reboarded the abandoned ship of baptism.

NOTES

1. See above, § 1.1.2, p. 12.
2. See above, § 1.1.1; WA 42,666,31ff. = LW 3,165 on Gen. 17:22.
3. Jetter, p. 114: *Warf, im Bild gesprochen, der junge Luther das Sakrament erst einmal über Bord, als sein Schiffllein reformatischen Kurs nahm, um dann später, älter geworden, seine im ungestümen Meer der Kritik noch nicht ganz ertrunkenen Reste wieder aufzufischen und ehrenvoll an Bord zu nehmen?* In fact Jetter dismisses this possibility.
4. Barth addresses precisely this question to the doctrine of infant baptism; is it integral to the general baptismal doctrine, so that it arises from it by necessity, or is it to be defended *a posteriori*, on entirely other grounds? Here, of course, the same question is being asked about the wider doctrine of baptism and its context in Luther's general theology. CD IV,4, pp. 166f.; see above, § 3.6, p. 165.
5. As has been argued above, § 1.1.2, pp. 14f.
6. At § 3.1.1 above, p. 116f.
7. Contrast the customary use of these terms as presented by Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to his Life and Work*, tr. R. Schultz (Edinburgh, 1986), p. 144. The break is commonly placed at 1517-18.
8. Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid Career*, pp. 60-64.
9. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists: Luther, Melancthon and Menius and the Anabaptists of Central Germany* (The Hague, 1964) pp. 47f.; see above, § 3.1.1, pp. 116f.
10. *Preface to Latin Writings*, WA 54,179-187 = LW 34,323-338. There are also several references in the *Table Talk* to Luther's experience, which generally tally with the 1545 'autobiographical fragment'. This evidence is marshalled, and the secondary literature is reviewed, in W.D.J. Cargill Thompson, "Luther's 'Tower Experience' and its Place in his Intellectual Development", in ed. C.W. Dugmore, *Studies in the Reformation: Luther to Hooker* (London, 1980), pp. 60-80.
11. See above, § 1.1.1, note 5. See also H.A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1986), p. 40.
12. K.G. Hagen, "Changes in the Understanding of Luther: The Development of the Young Luther", *Theological Studies*, Vol. 29 (1968), pp. 478ff.
13. WA 54,156,21 = LW 34,337; "*Istis cogitationibus armatior factus coepi Psalterium secundo interpretari*".
14. The precise date was set anywhere between 1508-9 and 1514-5 by different scholars; Cargill Thompson, pp 63f.
15. This view has its modern adherents: Alister McGrath wishes to identify the "paradigmatic" element of Luther's breakthrough with his developing understanding of *iustitia dei*, which then (as the 'autobiographical fragment' itself implies) proceeds to exercise a

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creative role in Luther's understanding of other theological concepts. (Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford, 1985), p. 145.) He places the vital stage of this lengthy process in 1515, towards the end of the *Dictata* period, and identifies it with the rejection of faith understood as a human work. This vital event, says McGrath, represents the start, not the conclusion, of a the "long and painful process of revising his understanding of the manner in which God deals with sinful man in a sinful world" (pp. 146f.) Accordingly, the *Turnerlebnis* must be dated early. By the end of 1515 McGrath sees the break with the soteriology of the *via moderna* as complete; *iustitia Dei* and *fides Dei* are already understood as a divine work and gift within man.

16. Ernst Bizer, *Fides ex Auditu: Eine Untersuchung über die Entdeckung der Gerechtigkeit Gottes durch Martin Luther* (Neukirchen, 1961); Cargill Thompson, pp. 65f.
17. But it is more difficult on this view to account for Luther's recollection in 1545 of the *content* of his discovery. The new understanding of *iustitia Dei* as passive righteousness is already evident in the early pages of the lectures on Romans in 1515-16, as is Luther's familiarity with Augustine's *De spiritu et littera*, which is cited in the 1545 preface in close juxtaposition with the account of the tower experience (Cargill Thompson, p. 74). An instance of this second view is the treatment of the question by Marilyn Harran. She places the tower experience late, in 1518, as the climax rather than the start of the process of development, adducing the marked increase in the confidence and clarity of the writings of 1518 and 1519 in support. (M.J.Harran, *Luther on Conversion: The Early years* (Ithaca and London, 1983), pp. 180-187.) All the struggles of the previous years, such as those concerning the human and divine roles in *conversio*, the nature of the *facere quod in se est*, were resolved in what Harran portrays as Luther's 'new birth' itself, as he came to a final clarity of understanding that God himself gives the righteousness required, and Luther's works of the year 1518 betray a new clarity and assurance not seen before. (Harran, pp. 161,187f.)
18. So Cargill Thompson, pp. 67f.
19. Or, indeed, at both beginning and end: Cargill Thompson, p. 79.
20. Cargill Thompson, p. 80.
21. WA 3;4 = LW 10;11.
22. See above, § 1.2, pp. 19f.
23. *De Captivitate*: WA 6,497-573 = LW 36,3-126; 1519 Sermon: WA 2,727-737 = LW 35,23-43.
24. See above, § 4.1.2 (p. 196); Cargill Thompson, pp. 63f.
25. See above, § 2.5.5.
26. So also Jetter, p. 122. For the contrast with the *Genesisvorlesung* see above, § 2.1.1.
27. WA 3,21f. = LW 10,19ff.; WA 3,378,29-380,6 = LW 10,317ff.; WA 3,416-422 = LW 10,351-358.

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28. WA 3,393,6-23 = LW 10,327.
29. WA 3,236,17-19; 239,31-33 = LW 10,195;199 on Ps. 42:6f. See also WA 3,403,33 = LW 10,342 on Ps. 68:21; those 'beyond the river' are the Jews who remain beyond Jordan, beyond baptism.
30. WA 3,570,28-39 = LW 11,53.
31. This difficulty does not, however, dissuade Jetter from devoting eighty pages to the sacramental and baptismal theology of the *Dictata*; Jetter, pp. 175-254.
32. See above, § 2.2, pp. 39ff.
33. As has been argued above, § 2.2.2.
34. WA 4,64-66 = LW 11,208-212.
35. WA 4,64,28-33 = LW 11,208f.
36. WA 4,68,33f. = LW 11,214; WA 4,75,35-37 = LW 11,224.
37. WA 3,262,5-29 = LW 10,220f.
38. See, for example, WA 3,249,11-15 = LW 3,206f.; scholion to Ps. 44.
39. So also Jetter, pp. 184f.
40. Jetter, pp.191f., links the priority of word over sacrament with the evidence in the *Dictata* of Luther's struggle to set the two Testaments in the right relationship to one another. Once his understanding of this relationship was established, it was inevitable that the spotlight should be placed on the word of the gospel, but also perhaps, that the New Testament sacrament should be cast into comparative shadow: *Es hatte wohl, hauptsächlich, mit dem neutestamentlichen Wort gemeinsam seinen Sitz im Evangelium und damit seine spiritualitas, seine Herkunft aus Gott und seine verborgene Wirksamkeit durch Gott für den Glauben; aber es hatte doch auch, nebensächlich, mit dem alttestamentlichen Zeremonien das leibhaftig Figürliche gemeinsam.* Jetter appears to argue that the word has no such 'handicap', and is therefore more thoroughly 'New Testament' in its very nature. But cf. the scholion to Ps. 44, note 38 above, where the sacrament is not alone in its ambivalent position: the word as well as the sign requires 'polishing'. See also Jetter, pp. 188f. on Luther's hermeneutic and the radical distinction between the two Testaments it implies.
41. See above, §§ 2.5.4, 2.2.4, 2.2.5.
42. This discussion has a bearing on a broader characteristic of the *Dictata*, which is much urged by Jetter: the dominance of word over sacrament. Word is most certainly dominant in the *Dictata* so far as frequency of reference is concerned. 'Word' often appears without 'sacrament', and everything that Luther predicates of the latter, he is also prepared to attribute to the former (Jetter, pp. 192f.). But it is important to distinguish the matter of the low 'profile' of the sacraments from the conceptually separate issue of sacramental doctrine. As has been observed already, owing to the former there is very little material available to construct an adequate picture of the latter. Luther's reticence about baptism in this period may well be explicable on grounds entirely other than a theological 'demotion'

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of the sacraments. There are further points to be made about Jetter's emphasis upon the priority of word. First, in urging such a priority in the theological sense, it is important to consider the polyvalence of 'word'; see above § 3.2.2. It is not clear that Jetter gives sufficient weight to this. Secondly, some of Jetter's argument is based on inference rather than upon any explicit statement in the text. For instance he uses Luther's remark in the marginal gloss to Psalm 83:4, *Scripture inquam sunt altaria maxima, que de crucifixione carnis docent* (WA 3,640,35-37; Jetter p. 195), the description of scripture as the altar of Christ, to demonstrate a deliberate demotion of the mass to the second place, behind the word. But above all, the paucity of the material forces Jetter into the unsatisfactory position of having to argue from silence (see below, § 4.2.5).

43. See above, §§ 2.2.4.
44. See, for example, WA 3,334,15-30 = LW 10,278 on Ps. 59; WA 3,581,29-36 = LW 11,67 on Ps. 78.
45. WA 3,355,11f. = LW 10,299 on Ps. 62:3.
46. WA 3,361,4-7 = LW 10,304 on Ps. 63; WA 3,581,34f. = LW 11,67 on Ps. 78:30f.
47. WA 3,367,36ff. = LW 10,310 on Ps. 64:9; *Nam qui sensum tantummodo sequitur, in cruce Christi et in Ecclesie sue directione necessario schandalisatur, cum non, nisi penas et privationes huius vite in ea videat.*
48. WA 4,154-157 = LW 11,305-309.
49. WA 3,597,25-28 = LW 11,89.
50. WA 3,124,29-34 = LW 10,119f.
51. McGrath, however, sees a growing clarity on this through the *Dictata*. He places the full flowering of the *theologia crucis* in 1518 onwards with the *Heidelberg Disputation* and the *Operationes in Psalmos*, however. *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, pp. 155f.
52. See below, § 4.2.4 (pp. 212-215), for comment on Luther and mysticism.
53. For example in the 1525 *Lectures on Deuteronomy*; see above, § 3.1.1.
54. Jetter, pp. 115-135.
55. Jetter, pp. 115f.
56. In the same way, for later medieval nominalism, the contingent nature of the necessity of a habit of grace in justification does not diminish it as a necessity: "*De potentia Dei ordinata* the habit of created grace is the middle term between sinful man and his acceptance by God in justification: it need not have been so, but the fact remains that it is so." McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, p. 49. See also H.A. Oberman; "Wir sind peitler. Hoc est verum. Bund und Gnade in der Theologie des Mittelalters und der Reformation", *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 78 (1967), pp. 232-252; and *The Dawn of the Reformation*, pp. 64f.
57. See above, §§ 2.2.4, 2.4.3, 3.2.1, 3.7.



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58. Jetter, pp. 117ff.
59. Jetter, p. 119.
60. Jetter, p. 117.
61. For an indication of the broad lines of the debate since Holl, see David C. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Reformation* (Durham, North Carolina, 1980), pp. 126ff. See also H.A. Oberman, "Simul Gemitus and Raptus: Luther and Mysticism", *The Dawn of the Reformation*, pp.126-154; W. Von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, tr. H.J.A. Bouman, (Belfast, 1976), pp. 147-166; and Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform* (New Haven and London, 1980), pp. 239-244.
62. Tauler's name first begins to appear after the *Dictata*, in the lectures on Romans. Thus it appears that Luther's 'sacramental reticence' was well established before Luther had encountered Tauler.
63. See Von Loewenich, esp. pp. 157f. on the example of sufferings and trials. Tauler denies that self-chosen sufferings have any merit before God, and regards the sharpest pain as that which comes inwardly "when God comes with horrifying trials". There is surely a parallel with Luther's way of speaking in this. But when Tauler goes on to describe the result of this abandonment, as new birth after the travail of suffering into the abyss of the Godhead, it becomes clear how far he is from Luther. For Luther suffering and trial are enduring features of the Christian life, as God is always to be encountered hidden under his opposite, and he continually accomplishes his *opus alienum* of bringing the objects of his mercy to naught before they can receive the gospel. For the young Luther's reminding of the vocabulary of the mystics in the context of a very different theological framework, see also Steinmetz, pp. 128,137.
64. Cf. Steven Ozment, "Mysticism, Nominalism and Dissent", in Trinkaus, Oberman eds. *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion* (Leiden, 1974), pp. 67-92. Ozment argues (against Oberman) that mysticism and nominalism are diametrically opposed. For the mystics, the *similitudino* between God and man is the basis of an ontological relationship between them; for the nominalist a relationship between 'unlikes' is achieved by the covenant (pp. 77f.). The theology of the sacraments and means of grace is on this view a (thoroughly nominalist) challenge to the principle that only like can know like (p.79).
65. Von Loewenich, pp. 159-163.
66. Jetter, p. 119.
67. Including Staupitz; see below (pp. 216f.). Von Loewenich, pp. 163-166.
68. Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p. 97. Ozment quotes with approval the opinion of R.R. Post (in *The Modern Devotion: Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism* (Leiden, 1968), pp. 675-80), that the Brethren had neither the desire nor the equipment to offer formal education to the students who lodged with them. "Their scholarly interests remained rudimentary and subservient to practical piety."

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69. Von Loewenich argues for a radical contrast between the theology of à Kempis, for instance, and Luther's *theologia crucis*, in spite of the same sort of terminological convergence as observable between Luther and the mystics (pp. 163f.). Ozment allows more indirect links, such as the centrality of scripture for the Brethren, and their rather passive encouragement of humanistic scholarship (*loc. cit.*). Oberman also rejects the notion that Luther was "deeply influenced by the reform ideals of the Brethren"; *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, pp. 96f.
70. Jetter, pp. 121-124.
71. Luther's own testimony confirms this: *Ex Erasmo nihil habeo. Ich habe all mein ding von Doctor Staupitz*. (Table talk of the year 1532, WA Ti 1,173).
72. Jetter, p. 122: "Er hat wohl als Generalvikar seines Ordens auch für Luthers äußeren Werdegang viel bedeutet, aber mehr noch als Beichvater für sein inneren: nicht eigentlich durch seine Theologie im ganzen oder in einzelnen Stücken, sondern durch den beherrschenden Blickpunkt seiner Frömmigkeit . . .".
73. Jetter, pp. 123f.; "Von einer wirklichen geistlichen Aktivierung und Aktualisierung des Sakraments kann man bei Staupitz nicht reden, höchstens von Ansatzätzen dazu. Man kann aber bei ihm auch nicht von einer vorreformatorischen Hintansetzung des Sakraments gegenüber anderen Gnadenmitteln und Heilswegen sprechen."
74. Jetter, p. 124; "Insofern konnte der Staupitzsche Einfluß Luther allerdings als ein Bestätigung seines Weges erschienen, bei völlig intaktem Gehorsam gegenüber den kirchlichen Sakramenten den Durchbruch in einer anderen, tieferen, geistlicheren Zone zu suchen und das Sakrament hernach dem Strudel der Konsequenzen dieses Durchbruch zu überlassen."
75. Steinmetz, p. 30.
76. Steinmetz: pp. 66f. (on hermeneutics); pp. 68-92 (different understanding of key terms, which Steinmetz relates to the different content which Luther and Staupitz assign to the *quod in se est*, the necessary disposition for grace).
77. Steinmetz, p. 143.
78. Steinmetz, p. 66: "Staupitz's theology is oriented around love rather than around faith and hope. The Christian is justified, not by faith in a promise which is a witness to invisible realities, but by the communication of grace through the sacraments of the Church. Luther, of course, does not deny the reality of sacramental grace, but it becomes increasingly marginal to his thought in the *Dictata*. For Luther the Christian is one who strains towards the future and who stands in a dialectical relationship to the present."
79. Jetter, pp. 124ff. In this context, "humanism" can only be a shorthand term for a many-sided phenomenon.
80. But the Luther of the *Dictata* betrays no more evidence of a humanistic approach than do his later writings, if it is allowed that

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- a certain 'latitudinarianism', which limits the multiplication of 'assertions' are the hallmarks (Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, pp. 294f.).
81. Melancthon remarked that the Lutheran attack on the Mass pre-empted the far more vicious struggle which would have ensued if the Erasmian approach, which undercut the sacramental theology in a far more radical way, in effect by making the sacraments optional aids to salvation. (CR *Melancthonis Opera* I, No. 264, col. 1083f.)
  82. In contrast, it is possible to see evidence of humanistic influence in the sacramental theology of Zwingli; see below, § 7.2.3.
  83. See above, § 3.1.1.
  84. As by Jetter, see above, § 4.2.2, note 40. See also § 1.1.2, note 13. It is somewhat surprising that Jetter should emphasise the secondary position of the sacrament in the *Dictata* to such a degree, as he also appears to adopt an explanation of the paucity of sacramental reference in terms of the 'holiness' of the sacraments; alternative (c) above. See next note.
  85. Jetter, p. 128: "*Ist sie nicht damit ausreichend erklärt, daß ihm das Sakrament seiner Kirche unentwegt heiliges Land war, das er zitternd betrat und keineswegs antasten wollte, in dem zu leben ihm gleichsam selbstverständliche, auf lange hinaus unerschütterte Voraussetzung war, über die sich breiter zu äußern er keinen Anlaß hatte?*"
  86. So Jetter, pp. 127f.
  87. David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1986), pp. 1-11.
  88. Kolde published the *Mirror for Christians* in 1480, whose powerful influence on the spirituality of the time is attested by the forty-six further editions printed thereafter.
  89. Paltz lived at Erfurt; wrote *Coelifodina* (1502), and *Supplementum Coelifodinae* (1504), both influential manuals designed to assist parish priests in their pastoral ministry.
  90. Steinmetz, p. 7.
  91. It is a factor which points out the contrast with the later years quite sharply. Although it would be an anachronistic oversimplification to equate the mature reformer's own pastoral counsel in the matter of reliance upon the sacraments and the divine word of promise mediated through them with the all too 'easy' churchly comforts offered by Paltz and his like, the gulf between the later Luther and the theology underlying the exhortations of Kolde, which in practice grounds the salvation of sinners on human piety, is far wider.
  92. Jetter, p. 128.
  93. WA 6,529,24-32 = LW 36,61.
  94. The phrase comes from Jerome, *Epist.* 130,9. For the earliest medieval tradition the second plank was available only once during the course of a person's life; regular recourse to the sacrament of penance was

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- a later development. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, I, p. 91. WA 6,527,12-16; 529,22ff. = LW 36,58;61.
95. WA 6,529,23f. = LW 36,61.
96. WA 6,527,9ff. = LW 36,57f.
97. WA 6,528,8ff. = LW 36,59.
98. WA 6,527,18-22 = LW 36,58. Cf. 'Running to St. James' in the *Genesisvorlesung*, see above, § 2.2.3.
99. WA 6,538,1f. = LW 36,73.
100. WA 6,538,26-542,39 = LW 36,74-80.
101. WA 6,540,23-29 = LW 36,77; WA 6,538,36-539,1 = LW 36,74.
102. WA 6,539,2-5 = LW 36,74f.
103. WA 6,541,7-17 = LW 36,78. See also above, §§ 3.5.3, 3.5.4.
104. WA 6,528,30-35; 529,7-10 = LW 36,60.
105. WA 6,534,31-34 = LW 69: "*Hic iterum vides. Baptismi sacramentum etiam quo ad signum non esse momentaneum aliquod negotium sed perpetuum.*"
106. WA 6,535,8-10 = LW 36,69.
107. WA 6,535,14ff. = LW 36,69.
108. WA 2,727-737 = LW 35,29-43. The other sermons are: *The Sacrament of Penance* (WA 2,714-723 = LW 35,9-22) and *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods* (WA 2,742-758).
109. WA 2,727,23-25 = LW 35,29f.: "*das zeychen, die bedeutung unnd den glauben*". (Numbered section references are to Luther's own division of the text.)
110. WA 2,727,15-19 = LW 35,29.
111. WA 2,727,30-729,5 = LW 35,30f. Cf. § 3.5.1 above, note 157.
112. WA 2,735,36-736,1 = LW 35,41.
113. WA 2,734,15-17 = LW 35,39.
114. Ursula Stock rightly emphasises the *leibliche* nature of the *significatio* of baptism. U. Stock, *Die Bedeutung der Sakramente in Luthers Sermonen von 1519*, pp.152ff.: ". . . das Sterben im hier gemeinten Sinn ist mit dem Geschehen des Lebens selbst 'ohne Unterlaß' bis in den Tod identisch, nicht im Sinne von durch den Willen des Menschen bewirkten Einzelakten der *mortificatio activa carnis*, sondern wie das Ereignis des Todes als letzte Erfüllung dieses Sterbens zeigt, ein Geschehen, das insgesamt unter dem Wort der Verurteilung des alten Menschen zum Sterben steht . . ." (p. 153). Cf. WA 6,534,8-11 = LW 36,68: "*Hanc mortem et resurrectionem . . . non oportet alligoricè tantum intelligi de morte peccati et vita gratiæ, sicut multi solent, sed de vera morte et resurrectione. Non enim baptismus significatio ficta est . . .*"
115. WA 2,728,27ff. = LW 35,31. See also above, § 3.5.1, note 155.
116. See above, § 3.3.2, p. 135f.

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117. WA 2,729,19f.; 730,3f. = LW 35,32, §§ 7,8.
118. WA 2,729,34-730,10 = LW 35,32f.
119. WA 2,729,23ff.= LW 35,32.
120. WA 2,731,23ff. = LW 35,34f. Luther quotes Augustine's dictum to this effect from *de Nuptis et concupiscentia* (I, 25,28), Migne 44,429f.
121. So Stock, pp. 156ff. Associated themes are also implicit, such as the *simul* doctrine, and the eschatological tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet' of salvation.
122. WA 2,730,18-22 = LW 35,34.
123. WA 2,730,23ff. = LW 35,33. Stock interprets this as the human 'Yes' to baptism, p. 159.
124. WA 2,30f. = LW 35,33.
125. WA 2,731,3f. = LW 35,34. The LW translation, "So long as you keep your pledge to God", seems to go a little beyond the sense of the original.
126. There is a link here with the nature of justification itself. Althaus criticises Holl's thesis that God's justifying verdict on the sinner now is proleptically based upon his future righteousness; although justification and sanctification are not to be separated in that God has already begun his new creation in the forgiven sinner, future sanctification is not the basis of present justification — the alien righteousness of Christ is that basis. Althaus, p.241f.
127. WA 2,735,17-23;34-37 = LW 35,40f.
128. WA 2,736,12-19 = LW 35,41.
129. WA 2,734,34-37 = LW 35,39.
130. WA 6,527,33ff. = LW 36,58. In contrast, the theme is almost entirely absent in the *Sermon*; another indication of the substantial development of Luther's baptismal theology in a short space of time.
131. WA 6,528,10-13 = LW 36,59.
132. WA 6,530,27-31 = LW 36,62f.
133. See above, § 3.2.1, for the stress upon 'command'; § 2.3.3, on the stress in the *Genesisvorlesung* on 'promise', and § 3.2.4 for the relationship between the two.
134. WA 30,I,214,9f.
135. WA 6,531,31-34. = LW 36,64.
136. WA 6,533,14-24 = LW 36,66f.
137. WA 6,532,36f. = LW 36,66.
138. See above, § 3.5, p. 155.
139. WA 6,527,33f. = LW 36,58.
140. WA 2,728,38f. = LW 35,31.
141. See above, § 3.3.2.

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142. WA 6,532,24-27 = LW 36,65f.
143. WA 2, 733,16-24 = LW 35,37.
144. See above, § 3.4.1.
145. WA 6,534,18ff. = LW 36,68.
146. See above, § 3.5.1.
147. WA 6,538,4-12 = LW 36,73.
148. See above, § 3.6.
149. WA 30,I,215,17f.
150. WA 6,527,38-528,1 = LW 36,59.
151. WA 2,737,14-31 = LW 35,42f.
152. WA 6,535,27f; 536,4ff. = LW 36,70.
153. WA 6,535,1-4 = LW 36,69: "*Quare nobis cavendum est ab is, qui baptismi vim eo redegerunt tenuitatis et parvitatatis, ut gratiam in eo dicant quidem infundi sed postea per peccatum effundi, tum alia via, ac iam quasi baptismus penitus irritato facto, ad coelum eundem. Non sic tu arbitrabere sed intelliges . . .*"
154. See above, § 1.1.2 (pp. 12f.).
155. Grönvik, p. 127, makes the same observation, although he puts it the other way round: "*Nicht nur in De captivitate sondern auch in den Katechismen . . . Obwohl der Taufakt einmalig ist, umspannt sein Werk und seine Bedeutung das ganze Leben.*"
156. It has been argued above (§ 3.1.1, pp. 114ff.), that the prominence of baptism in Luther's thought continues to grow after 1527.
157. See below, § 7.2.2 for a comparison with the radicals.
158. WA 36,535,9f. = LW 36,69. Cf. Grönvik, p. 118: "*Auf dieselbe Weise kann Luther auch als von Glauben unabhängig schildern.*" For Grönvik, the idea of the abiding reality of the ship of baptism, never destroyed, and thus always available for recourse, already contains Luther's response to the sixteenth-century "Donatists" who would, in effect, make baptism a work of human spirituality (p. 121).
159. WA 6,530,27f. = LW 36,62. Grönvik, p. 124, quotes this passage in support of his assertion that both sides of the baptismal theology of the catechisms are already present in *De Captivitate*. He expresses these 'two sides' as: (i) the outward baptism as a work of God, independent of faith; and (ii) God's inner work in the baptisand, giving the faith without which the sign is profitless (pp. 110-126 *passim*). Yet against Grönvik it must be said that the 'double-sidedness' of Luther's teaching on the faith-sign relationship remains only implicit in *De Captivitate*. Luther's emphasis in 1520 is on the divine subject acting both outwardly and inwardly in baptism; not yet upon the value of the outward act in the absence of faith.
160. See above, § 1.1.1, note 2.
161. See above, §§ 1.1.1, 4.1.2.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SEMPER ES IN MOTU ET INITIO. Baptism and the Christian Life

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the relationship between Luther's baptismal thought and some important soteriological themes will be addressed. As the title of the chapter hints, it will be argued that due weight must be given to the 'present tense' of baptism for Luther in approaching the issues which arise. But first, it will be useful to set out the background to the discussion by means of a resumé of the main conclusions of the argument so far.

##### 5.1.1 Luther's Baptismal Theology and its Context

A picture of a powerful theology of baptism, which plays an increasingly important role in Luther's thought, emerged from the examination of the post-1527 Luther in chapters 2 and 3. Among the most impressive and distinctive aspects of this picture has been labelled 'the present tense of baptism', Luther's vigorous expression of the abiding reality and power of baptism in the life of a Christian. In chapter 4 an examination of some earlier material revealed the broad lines of continuity in Luther's baptismal thought from 1520 onwards, across the crisis occasioned by the emergence of the radicals.

But among the central concerns of the last three chapters has been the need, not only to expound Luther's baptismal teaching, and to demonstrate its continuity across time, but to ascertain the relationship of that teaching to the centre of his reformation theology. It has been argued that not only is Luther's baptismal thinking consistent with the main themes of his wider theology, but it is an expression of them.<sup>1</sup> Certainly Luther's teaching on baptism in the 1529 Catechisms and in the 1535-45 *Genesisvorlesung* shows many signs of his reaction against the *Schwärmer* and the *Täufer*, or at least his perceptions of them. But in its fundamental continuity with the teaching of 1519-20 it is shown to be intimately related to the chief concerns of Luther's reformation breakthrough. The charge that baptism, as understood by Luther, is a 'cuckoo in the nest' (§ 1.1.2), at odds with the theology of justification by faith and a host of other central themes, has been rejected.

It would be wrong, however, to rest content with the general observation that Luther's view of baptism does indeed fit into the wider context of his theology. There is a need to address the specific points of tension in more detail. A number of them have been hovering, unanswered, since chapter 1. For this reason a more detailed survey is required of the various 'frontiers', at which his Luther's baptismal thought impinges on other areas of his theology.

#### 5.1.2 Method

The areas which require study may be divided into two categories. First, there are those issues which may be loosely described as soteriological in



nature. They relate to the role of baptism in the individual Christian life: its relationship to such concepts as conversion, regeneration, and justification. The second category contains the ecclesiological dimensions of baptismal theology. It is clear that for any theologian the doctrine of the Church and the understanding of the sacrament of initiation and incorporation into the Church must be intimately related.

The two categories will be dealt with separately; the soteriological dimensions of Luther's baptismal doctrine will be explored in this chapter, and the ecclesiological issues will be considered in chapter 6. But the two inquiries will inform one another, as there are clear parallels between the role of baptism in the Christian life and its role in the Church. *Prima facie* it would appear that baptism must function as a boundary in both. As the sacrament of initiation it marks the beginning of the Christian life; by the same token, as the sacrament of initiation it also defines the extent of the Church, the community of the baptised. But, as will become apparent later, talk of baptism as a boundary is not at all straightforward in either case. In fact, it will become clear that in Luther's theology the very concept of a 'boundary' is problematic in itself. Because the two sides of the investigation are closely related in this and other ways, they will be drawn together at the conclusion of chapter 6.<sup>2</sup>

In both this chapter and the next, material from all periods of the Reformer's career will be used. This is justifiable on the basis of the overall continuity in Luther's baptismal thought which emerged in chapter 4. However, particular attention will be paid to the picture of the mature baptismal theology of the years after 1527 presented in chapters 2 and 3.

5.1.3 Baptism and the Individual: the Points of tension

'Baptism and the individual'; baptism in relation to conversion, justification, sanctification, faith; the 'place' of baptism in the Christian life: such topics can be pursued at different levels. On one level the attention is focused upon the sacrament itself. Given a particular understanding of salvation, and of the nature of the Christian life, a number of questions can be asked about the administration of baptism. When should it be administered, to whom, by whom, under what conditions and in what manner? But the inquiry can be pursued in the opposite direction. Given the baptismal theology expounded above, what implications are there for the understanding of conversion, justification and for Luther's soteriology in general? What constitutes the beginning of the Christian life? Can that life be said to have an identifiable beginning at all? Which is the key factor that separates the life in Christ from life outside Christ -- and thus defines the starting point of the Christian life, if such there be? Ultimately an investigation of baptismal theology cannot avoid asking the question, 'What is a Christian?' The fruits of an adequate understanding of Luther's baptismal thinking cannot be confined to the narrower questions of sacramental order and theology; of necessity they spill over into wider issues such as these.

Some of the issues in this field were clearly at the forefront of Luther's mind. The relationship between baptism and the doctrine of faith is the most obvious example. Here Luther is sharply conscious of the issue. He is aware of the attacks of his contemporaries at this point, and, although he employs a web of several distinct arguments which are sometimes in tension

with one another, it is entirely possible to determine the core of his position. Faith is essential to the reception of baptism; baptism remains baptism in the absence of faith. Baptism understood as water which is embraced in the divine word of promise demotes all questions about the presence or absence of faith to a secondary level. Faith is a constant gaze upon Christ, which attends to God's word spoken in him; and in any examination of baptism conducted according to Luther's principles, attention must be fixed on that word.<sup>3</sup> Luther confronts the arguments of his opponents, and his own position is refined as a result.

But the case is very different with some of the other themes in the realm of baptism and the individual Christian. The issue of baptismal regeneration is a case in point. In Anglican circles the vigorous debate on baptismal regeneration fanned into flame by the Gorham case of 1847 was focused upon what may, and what may not, be said to 'happen' at the moment of administration of the rite.<sup>4</sup> It is instructive to apply the same question to Luther. Although Luther's reform of the baptismal liturgy reveals no hesitation on his part about the traditional language of regeneration, it is by no means clear that it can be ascribed without qualification to the moment when baptism is administered.<sup>5</sup> To formulate the question in this way, by concentrating upon 'what happens' when the water of baptism is poured, is to seek answers to questions that Luther does not appear to have asked himself.<sup>6</sup> However, it is sometimes necessary to cut across the grain of Luther's own interest and concern by approaching his theology with such 'alien' questions.

The investigation will begin with the relationship between baptism and conversion (§ 5.2). The issues which surround this relationship are certainly 'alien' in the sense that Luther does not appear to have confronted them head on. But they are important, nevertheless. One to which reference has already been made is the problematic notion of Christian beginning. But this itself is one of a number of issues which concern what is best referred to as the 'shape' of the Christian life with Luther. Is the notion of a Christian life which begins at the new birth and continues with a process of steady growth acceptable in the context of Luther's theology? Another problem in this area is the difficulty of determining the place of sanctification in Luther's soteriology. It is a difficulty which extends to the notion of Christian progress in general. The argument will continue with an examination of the relevance of baptismal theology to the shape of the Christian life (§ 5.3). A final section will draw out the implications of the investigation, and will also raise the question of Christian assurance (§ 5.4).

5.2 BAPTISM AND CONVERSION

Conversion, like baptism, marks the beginning of the Christian life. Baptism and conversion must therefore be intimately related. But by the same token there is much potential for competition between them; John Baillie begins his study of this question with the observation that Christians are divided between those who look to the personal experience of conversion as the beginning of the Christian life and those who emphasise the role of baptism as sacramental initiation into the Church.<sup>7</sup> The relationship between baptism and conversion has an important ecclesiological dimension; is the membership of the Church prior to the possibility of any religious experience that can be called 'Christian', or is that experience the necessary qualification for true Church membership? For some, the reference of conversion is, in the context of western 'Christendom', entirely absorbed by baptism. For others, baptism is relegated to an entirely secondary role in their concentration upon the necessity of certain (sometimes stereotyped) patterns of conversion experience. It is clear that the two groups will have very different concepts of what constitutes and defines the Church. The uneasy relationship between baptism and conversion remains a potent source of debate and division amongst Christians. It is nowhere more so than with those who trace their theological roots via the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

Luther, with his powerful emphasis on the subjective dimensions of faith and experience, and his strongly objective sacramental doctrine, stands at

the fulcrum of this issue.<sup>8</sup> For this reason a study of the relationship of baptism and conversion in Luther is of particular value to the wider debate.

### 5.2.1 Conversio: The Background

Luther's understanding of conversion was not established in a vacuum; this is a concept with a rich and varied history. In examining Luther's distinctive use of *conversio*, it is important to be aware of the post-Augustinian tradition to which he was heir. A complex web of interlocking sub-divisions of meaning was attached to the word in medieval usage; the comprehensive survey offered by Marilyn Harran in her recent study of Luther's doctrine of conversion is of much help in identifying them.<sup>9</sup> There will be no attempt at completeness in what follows; the main layers of meaning attributable to *conversio* will be set out in the sequence that is suggested by the considerations of logic and of chronological order.

For Augustine, the possibility of human *conversio* is predicated upon the prior *conversio* of God himself (1). This took place first of all at creation when chaos was converted into form and order (when man at his creation received his first *conversio*); and secondly, and more particularly, in God's merciful *conversio* towards man at the Incarnation.<sup>10</sup> All the other senses of *conversio* relate to its human dimensions, but in theory at least, they are all predicated upon the divine *conversio* to mankind in Christ. Augustine's fundamental understanding of human *conversio* (2) relates to the fundamental spiritual state of an individual who is turned towards God in humble piety, as opposed to *aversio*, the state of being turned away from him in false

liberty, typified by the Fall.<sup>11</sup> To be distinguished from this spiritual state is a *conversio* to Christian faith such as Augustine's own; *conversio* understood as an event or an experience; most typically conversion from paganism or Judaism (3).<sup>12</sup> But "Augustine stood at the end of the period in which conversion preceded baptism for most Christians", and the development of new patterns of use for the term in the medieval Church reflected this fact.<sup>13</sup>

After the fifth century the most typical use of *conversio* was to describe a change occurring *within* Christianity (4). The layman's pledge to embrace a stricter form of discipleship was included, but as the middle ages progressed the act of abandoning the secular for the monastic way of life became increasingly central to *conversio* in this sense.<sup>14</sup> But a more subjective layer of meaning can be traced back at least as far as Benedict.<sup>15</sup> *Conversio* was also an inner process (5), which could not be confined to the single act of becoming a monk. It was to be a continuing feature of the life of discipline, exemplified in *compunctio*, the pain of the spirit in the context of penance. The subjective emphasis was strengthened in the teaching of Bernard of Clairvaux in the eleventh century.<sup>16</sup> Elements of it are present in the German mystics, notably in Tauler.

In the early middle ages Harran sees senses (3), (4) and (5) as important for the understanding of *conversio*. Away from the frontiers of Christendom, however, sense (3) was likely to be of only limited reference; and although there was a certain see-sawing of emphasis between the subjective and objective interpretations, it is sense (4), the outward act of embracing monasticism, that is dominant.<sup>17</sup> But in the later middle ages new layers of

meaning, some of them drawn from sacramental theology, complicate the picture.

In eucharistic theology, *conversio* and *transubstantio* were equivalents. The scholastic debates about the nature of the eucharistic *conversio* (6) mirrored the different interpretations of human conversion in the tradition. While Aquinas saw the *conversio* of the bread and wine as a turning into, the new being brought forth from the old, Occam and Biel saw it as a dual act, comprising the annihilation of the first substance and its replacement with the second. Is human conversion to be understood as one organic process, with the new emerging from the old; or is a radical annihilation of the old required before, in a separate process, the new can appear?<sup>10</sup> Here is yet another dimension to add to the complex web of meaning associated with *conversio*.

But sacramental models for conversion were not limited to those based on the eucharist. The sacrament of penance also provides a reference for *conversio* (7). Another set of issues emerges here. They concern the vexed issue of the extent to which *conversio* is to be understood as God's act on man, and how far it is man's responsibility, by way of *facere quod in se est*. For instance, Aquinas placed *conversio* on both sides; man turns to God by free will and by grace, but this requires a divine act upon the human heart. By contrast Biel places the divine element in *conversio* after the human element; *prima gratia* follows *facere quod in se est*.<sup>11</sup> The question of man's part in his own conversion was embedded in the traditions confronting Luther.



The sacraments of the eucharist and of penance contribute to the medieval interpretation of *conversio*. But there is also a baptismal *conversio* (8). Aquinas teaches that "perfect *conversio* to God is accomplished by those who are reborn in Christ through baptism".<sup>20</sup> Marilyn Harran treats the relationship between baptism and conversion as a sub-division of the general impact of sacramental theology upon the medieval understanding of *conversio*. This in itself is significant. It is symptomatic of the fact that, in much of Luther's theological environment, the relationship between baptism and conversion has little sense of exclusivity about it. It would be wrong to pass over this fact without pausing to reflect upon it. Baptism, the sacrament of initiation, plays a marginal role in the interpretation of *conversio*, the beginning of the Christian life. The complex layers of meaning attached to *conversio* mask the distinctiveness of the baptismal *conversio* which marks the unique boundary of the Christian life.

In summary, there appear to be three salient features of Luther's medieval inheritance as far as the understanding and use of the term *conversio* is concerned. First, there is the Augustinian insistence upon the primacy of God's *conversio* (1) to mankind in creation, and above all in the Incarnation. The second factor, however, is the effective submergence of that primary issue in the complexities of the medieval concern with human *conversio*, whether principally related to an external event like entry into the cloister (4), or to an internal experience such as the pain of the struggle of the mystics, or the inward requirements of the sacrament of penance (5,7). The medieval preoccupation with the human contribution to the preparation for *conversio* reinforces the impression that the primacy of the divine *conversio* has become blurred. But the third feature of the tradition

is the absence of, or at the very least the lack of stress upon, any effective 'special relationship' between baptism and *conversio*. Whatever the precise causes of this apparent divorce between baptism and conversion may be, it has an element of inevitability about it in the context of medieval Christendom, where the significance of baptism as a 'boundary' is eroded because the community of the baptised is virtually co-extensive with society and nation as a whole.

But the interplay between all three of these factors is of fundamental importance to the understanding of Luther's own understanding and use of *conversio*.

#### 5.2.2 *Conversio* and the early Luther

Given the multiplicity of interpretations of *conversio* in the medieval tradition, it is hardly surprising to find Luther, in his formative period, using the term in a variety of ways. In the writings of his later years, the word is less conspicuous.<sup>21</sup> But within the early period the *Dictata super Psalterium* are a particularly fertile source of references to *conversio*, largely because of the frequency with which it occurs in the Latin of the Psalter.

Luther speaks of *conversio* as the state of the soul which is turned towards divine and spiritual things (2), as opposed to the *aversio* of the ungodly who, having departed from the presence of the Lord, face towards themselves.<sup>22</sup> Occasionally he refers to the *conversio* of heretics and Jews

(3).<sup>23</sup> Luther is also influenced by the monastic associations of *conversio*

(4).<sup>24</sup> *Conversio* may be used of "the unrepeatable entrance into the Christian life, that is, baptism" (8); but there is also the "repeatable event, that is contrition or penitence" (7).<sup>25</sup>

Despite the apparent confusion of this picture, Luther's understanding of *conversio* in the *Dictata* is moving towards greater order and clarity. This is illustrated in the scholion to Psalm 85, an important passage in which *conversio* and its cognates occur frequently. The text before Luther is Ps. 85:7: *Deus tu conversus vivificabis nos; et plebs tua letabitur in te*. Luther, comparing Ps. 126:1, comments that God's turning away from a person is death, but his turning towards (*conversio*) is life. This is the first and greatest conversion; but Luther goes on to mention two others:

*Sed conversio ista dei maxima et prima est, qua unitus est nostra nature. Secunda, qua unitur spiritualiter spiritui nostro per fidem et charitatem. Tercia per claram visionem. Sic enim est nobiscum una caro, et nos cum illo unus spiritus. Verum secunda et tertia est potius conversio nostra, qua ad eum convertimur: prima autem est eius propria et ineffabilis, qua ad nos conversus est . . .*<sup>26</sup>

The turning of God to man at the incarnation is the first and principal *conversio* (1), which is becoming increasingly fundamental to Luther's understanding.<sup>27</sup> The second refers to the human conversion through faith and love, while the third introduces yet another reference for *conversio* — the clear vision of God in the life to come. Luther's actual usage, however, is more fluid than this scheme would appear to suggest. Perhaps the principal point to be made here is that the divine and human conversions

cannot be neatly separated; nor can the divine conversion be wholly confined to the past in its identification with the Incarnation. Luther can speak as if God's *conversio* to, or his *aversio* from, a person, depend upon that person's present stance towards God. He talks of *conversio* and *aversio* as the works of the right and left hands of God in a way which is not only redolent of the later theme of the *opus proprium* and the *opus alienum*, but also blurs the distinction between the universal act of the Incarnation and the dealings of God with a particular people or individual.<sup>26</sup> But, whatever may be the complexities of the relationship between them, the distinction between the divine and the human conversions remains the necessary framework within which questions about the nature of conversion must be put.

From this brief survey of *conversio* in the early Luther, then, two main features emerge. The first is Luther's recovery of the primacy of God's *conversio* to man. The second is the continuing variety (confusion?) of its use with respect to human conversion. Human conversion may be a state or an event; it may be unique or frequently repeated. It may have a reference to the sacrament of penance, or to the monastic life. Perhaps the two factors are linked. Is Luther's growing concentration upon the accomplished, objective act of God in the Incarnation and the Cross beginning to force all questions of human spirituality into a subsidiary position? Luther's apparent indiscipline in his references to *conversio* reflects the influence of the medieval tradition. But it may also be an indication of the secondary importance of human *conversio*.

5.2.3 One *Conversio* or many?

Marilyn Harran divides her treatment of *conversio* in the *Dictata* into three sections: man's preparation for conversion, conversion itself, and the post-conversion life.<sup>29</sup> Three things strike one immediately about her presentation. First, the treatment of the second stage, conversion itself, is cursory particularly in comparison with the attention paid to the preparation for conversion. Secondly, there is no sustained attempt to analyse the relation of baptism and conversion — but perhaps this is unsurprising as the material itself does not encourage such an endeavour. Thirdly, and most fundamentally, there is the problematic nature of such a three-fold schema in the context of Luther's theology.

The three elements of the schema are assumed to follow one another in a temporal succession of stages; a period of preparation for conversion, followed by the event of conversion, which in turn is succeeded by the post-conversion life of the Christian person. Harran's chief interest is in the preparation for conversion, the balance between the actions of God and the individual in that preparation, and the content (*facere quod in se est, humilitas, fides*) assigned to the human element by Luther in different stages of his development. In this focus of interest, as well as in the shape of the three-fold schema itself, she is in accord with the emphases of the scholastic tradition. Since Luther, too, the three-fold pattern has been congenial to much of the Protestant tradition. In the Calvinist tradition, for instance, the doctrine of election imposes a radical division between those within the realm of grace and those outside it, and thus enhances the significance of conversion as the boundary which separates off the

subsequent life in the Spirit — a life not possible before. The distinction between justification and sanctification in the same tradition underlines the parallel distinction between conversion itself and the life of Christian growth which it inaugurates.<sup>30</sup>

But however appropriate the adoption of such a three-fold pattern may be elsewhere, its value as a vehicle for the exposition of *Luther's* understanding of *conversio* is questionable. One problem concerns the notion of a post-conversion stage of progress; this will be examined below (§ 5.2.5). Another concerns the repeatability of the event of conversion.

The three-pattern applied by Harran is by no means theologically neutral. Its inner logic exalts the middle stage, the event of conversion, into a climactic watershed which imposes a radical separation between what precedes it and what follows. Thus Harran insists: "There is one definite moment that transforms a person and puts him on the path of pilgrimage." She equates the 'definite moment' with the second meaning of *conversio* in the scholion to Psalm 85, and identifies it additionally as *generatio*, new birth. But, for *Luther*, such a statement requires qualification. As Harran herself observes, the saved man continually asks for salvation; there always remains that with respect to which he is not yet saved.<sup>31</sup>

We are always saved with respect to the things which we have and which we have accomplished by beginning (*ad ea que habemus et peregrimus incipiendo*). But with respect to the things which are before us and towards which we have to be stretched out by making progress (*ad ea, que ante nos sunt et in que extendi habemus proficiendo*) we are not yet saved, but weak, captive and wretched. Therefore, here, too, we must always cry for salvation. . . . we must always cry and never think that we have attained, so that we may keep the

commandments of God, and we must forget that we have ever kept them before.<sup>32</sup>

How can *conversio* as a single, climactic watershed in the life of an individual be reconciled with the multiplicity of senses in which Luther uses the term, with the repeatability of *conversio* in some of these senses, and above all, with the concept conveyed in this passage of the abiding need for conversion?

Harran admits the problem herself; "it is very difficult to ascertain whether certain passages in the *Dictata* refer to the individual before his conversion to faith or rather describe the sorrowful conversion to God of the penitent Christian."<sup>33</sup> These difficulties arise because the framework which is being employed in the analysis of Luther's teaching is fundamentally alien to his thought. The fact that there is no clear distinction between repeatable and unrepeatable conversions in the *Dictata* corresponds to the shape of the Christian life in the thinking of the older Luther, where it is difficult to talk of *conversio* as a discrete event that can ever be regarded by the Christian individual as past, or as fully accomplished.<sup>34</sup> As far as the older Luther is concerned the importance of *conversio* as a single climactic event as implied by the three-stage schema of the Christian life is further undermined by the low profile of the vocabulary of conversion in the later Luther.<sup>35</sup>

5.2.4 Progress beyond *conversio*?

A second problem with the three-stage schema concerns the nature of the third stage, the post-conversion life of progress. The Luther of the *Dictata* can speak of progress in the Christian life, and can imply that there are stages in that progress. The existence of 'infants and sucklings' in the Church implies the possibility and expectation of growth onwards from that state.<sup>36</sup> There are stages in wisdom and godliness;<sup>37</sup> and Luther exhorts his hearers to pray for the fruits of that progress, *instructionem, confirmationem, perfectionem*.<sup>38</sup> But a simple division of time into two segments, a period of pre-Christian preparation separated from a period of Christian progress by the event of conversion, simply will not do. Even at this early stage it is an inappropriate framework for the interpretation of Luther, however much it may be a suitable schema with which to approach late medieval soteriology.

Luther is already sounding sharp warnings about the misuse of the idea of progress at the beginning of the *Dictata*. In the scholion to Psalm 4 he encounters the verse "In tribulation thou didst make room for me" (Ps. 4:1). Luther interprets the 'making room' or the 'enlargement' (*latitudo*) as education through discipline; as increase in strength through persecution; and as comfort and joy in the Spirit, as mind, memory (soul) and will are all enlarged by God in tribulation.<sup>39</sup> Tribulation is one of the ways in which the Christian person makes progress. But almost immediately the picture is qualified. 'Enlargement', even when it is divine in origin, cannot be expected to last long.<sup>40</sup> And secondly, it may, if treated wrongly, become a temptation to complacency and sluggishness. At this early date Luther



advances the contention that progress achieved in righteousness when objectified (made an object of trust by the individual) is not righteousness at all — but a snare. He supports his case with an impressive catena of quotations:

For 'when you start not wanting to become better, you stop being good,' says Bernard. Therefore this is what the apostle says (Phil 3:13): 'Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, I strain forward to what lies ahead.' 'Let him who is righteous still be justified' (Rev. 22:11). 'Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed (that is, let him be concerned) lest he fall' (1 Cor. 10:12). And again: 'When a man has finished, he is just beginning' (Ecclus. 18:7). 'If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know' (1 Cor. 8:2). In a similar way, he who thinks he has attained does not know how he ought to attain Him. But there is no way except the one mentioned here, namely, always to run back to the beginning and always to start anew (*Modus autem non est nisi iste, qui hic ponitur, scilicet semper recurre ad principium et a novo semper incipere*), in accordance with the admonitions of the apostle and of this psalm. For there is always something left where you may increase, and therefore you are always in motion and at the beginning (*semper es in motu et initio*).<sup>41</sup>

*Semper es in motu et initio* is a theme which would become central to Luther's understanding of the Christian life, although its direct relevance to the doctrine of baptism was not worked out in this early period. But already Luther relates it explicitly to the eschatological nature of the righteousness of the Christian, the gift of God's grace which is still to be received (*de accipiendis*) and always to be hungered and thirsted after; although righteousness received in the past is not to be denied, it is not a present possession in the sense that it may be the object of our self-congratulatory reliance. The true use of past blessings or enlargement is in

the confidence to pray for mercy and righteousness in the future; but to dwell on past righteousness is to be sated with it, to cease to hunger and thirst, and to join the ranks of the hypocrites and Pharisees.<sup>42</sup>

'Progress' or 'enlargement', then, can act either as a spur to the seeking of further mercy, or as a ground for complacent self-righteousness — it is double-edged. It might be argued that the double edged nature of progress is subversive only of the third or post-conversion stage of the three-fold model of the Christian life, leaving the first two stages, preparation and *conversio* essentially intact. This is not so. The Christian never reaches a stage when there is no longer any need to return to the beginning. That beginning to which the individual must constantly return *is* conversion. The need for *conversio* is the same whether a man or woman is technically at the pre-conversion preparation stage, or in the post-conversion 'returning' phase. The need for *conversio* is never removed in this life; and the constancy of this need has a radically corrosive effect upon the distinction between pre- and post-conversion life.

#### 5.2.5     Baptism and *conversio* conclusion

In his commentary on Romans (1515-16) Luther approaches some of these issues more explicitly. Harran makes two points in this connection. First she argues that Luther in this commentary interprets conversion "in two principal ways: as the decisive event that begins Christian pilgrimage and as the repeatable event that occurs after the Christian has fallen away from God through sin". Secondly, she underlines Luther's emphasis in this source

on 'perseverance in conversion', the constant battle against sin, the continuing state which is to characterise the whole Christian life.<sup>43</sup> While both of these observations militate against the three-stage treatment which has been criticised above, it is important to note that there is a distinction to be drawn between them. Their implications for the position of baptism are very different. One of them essentially harks back to the medieval past, while the other contains the seeds of Luther's mature understanding of the Christian life.

When Harran draws attention to the first of these motifs, "the dual dimensions of conversion as both unrepeatable entrance into the Christian life and repeatable return to that life", she illustrates the point by referring to a key passage, the scholion to Romans 6:10:

Hence also we are baptised only once, by which we gain the life of Christ, even though we often fall and rise again. For the life of Christ can be recovered again and again, but a person can enter upon it only once, just as a man who has never been rich can begin to get rich only once, although he can again and again lose and regain his wealth.<sup>44</sup>

Conversion in baptism is unique and unrepeatable, while conversion in penitence must be repeated again and again. But on closer examination the passage, perhaps especially the illustration of the man getting rich, is indicative of a certain fragility in the distinction between baptismal conversion and other, later, conversions. Luther compares the distinction between the once-for-all event of baptism and often repeated penitence to the difference between the first fortune a man amasses and those he wins and loses in his subsequent economic successes and reversals. It seems

rather a weak illustration, for Luther. The particular distinction of baptismal conversion appears to be limited to the significance of its first place in the series of conversions. There are elements in this way of thinking that point, not to the future course of Luther's development, but back to the past, and to the medieval isolation of baptism as the static entrance to the Christian life, passed long ago and of little further power, meaning or relevance to *homo viator*.<sup>45</sup> It has the further effect of raising the profile of the sacrament of the keys, which has an advantage over baptism — its repeatability.

But the future development of Luther's baptismal doctrine would not lie in the direction of a distinction between baptismal and subsequent conversions. This development could only take place at the cost of a further marginalisation of baptism. The future lay in the direction indicated by the second *motif* described above — perseverance in *conversio*. The Christian is *semper penitens*, always in need of conversion, never placed by past or present righteousness beyond the need to begin all over again. This development would ultimately result, not in a fossilised isolation of baptismal conversion at the entrance to the Christian life, but to a dynamic understanding which sets baptism over the whole of a person's life, and makes his or her conversion in all the stages of that life essentially a unity. It is in this way that the deepest insight from the years of the *Dictata* about the shape of the Christian life would have its full effect: *semper es in motu et initio*.

5.3 THE 'SHAPE' OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Consideration of Luther's handling of *conversio* leads directly to another theme which is crucial to the interpretation of his baptismal theology. The 'shape' of the Christian life has already been broached in a preliminary way in the context of the *significatio* of baptism (§ 3.5.2); but it is now time to examine it in more depth. First, the pros and cons of a 'linear' model as a representation of Luther's view of the Christian life will be examined (§ 5.3.1). Next, an alternative model will be suggested (§ 5.3.2), and considered in relationship to Luther's baptismal theology (§ 5.3.3).

5.3.1 Problems with the linear model

Precisely what is meant by the 'linear' model of the Christian life? Its main features have already emerged in our criticism of Marilyn Harran's assumption of a three-fold pattern in her interrogation of the early Luther in relation to *conversio*.<sup>46</sup> These include: (a) a radical disjunction between the pre- and post-conversion states of life (and hence between two groups of individuals); and (b) the uniqueness of the event which separates them. Almost inevitably, there is a third element to the picture; (c), the expectation of progress onwards from conversion. There is a sort of inevitability about this model; surely it is the common currency of Christian thought. The biblical language of the new birth suggests the radical division between two states. The theology of sanctification imposes the

expectation of growth and progress onwards from the point at which Christian life begins; irrespective of whether this beginning is to be fixed at baptism or conversion. The seven-fold sacramental system of the medieval Church was one reflection of this expectation of progress; *homo viator* passed onwards from the 'first grace' of baptism into the spheres of different sacraments and different graces.<sup>47</sup>

Sometimes Luther appears to assume such a model of the Christian life. Indeed, at certain points the structure of his thought appears to require it. For example, the way that Luther presents the theme of Law and Gospel in the *Freedom of a Christian* suggests a division between stages in the Christian life. First an individual must learn to despair of himself through the work of the law. Only when he or she has been utterly humbled by the Law can the Gospel come to help. A certain course of spiritual development seems to be normative, and it is implied that there is a category of individuals — those who have not as yet been forced away from self-reliance by God's alien work of the Law — who cannot hear the Gospel.<sup>48</sup> Oberman reinforces this perception of the *Freedom of a Christian* when he describes the 'joyous exchange' of justification as "the central event in a Christian's life."<sup>49</sup> There are passages in the *Lectures on Galatians* (1531) in which the same set of assumptions appears:

First a man must be taught by the law to know himself . . . Now, once a man has thus been humbled by the law, and brought to the knowledge of himself, then he become truly repentant . . . Now he begins to sigh . . . Then comes, at the appropriate time (*tum tempestive*), the saving word of the gospel . . . This is the beginning of salvation<sup>50</sup>

That Luther continued to divide one category of individuals from another is nowhere more evident than in his recognition of the 'wheat' and the 'tares' within the Church.<sup>51</sup> It is also possible to find Luther speaking about progress in the Christian life, not only in early material like the *Dictata*;<sup>52</sup> but also towards the end of the *Genesisvorlesung*, where Luther speaks of "the change of our will which also advances daily, when we gradually learn more and more to hope, trust and be patient. It is one and the same faith, therefore, that begins, makes progress, and reaches perfection."<sup>53</sup>

The linear model of the Christian life, then, has a certain validity for Luther. Through the ministry of Law and Gospel, the Christian moves from pride and self-justification to the beginning of a new life lived through faith in the promise of God. There is the possibility and expectation of progress from that beginning. Indeed, the pattern imposed on the Christian life by the *significatio* of baptism demands it. The Christian progresses in the dying to sin and the regeneration which begins at baptism, continues throughout life, but is only completed in death and final resurrection.<sup>54</sup> But there is another, very different, strand to Luther's thought which cannot be accommodated within the linear model.

The variety and non-specificity of the younger Luther's use of *conversio* is one indication that a single, identifiable, turning point in the life of a Christian does not, in fact, play a consistently important role in Luther's thought.<sup>55</sup> The low profile of *conversio* in the writings of the older Luther is another. But the kernel of this second strand in Luther's thinking about the shape of the Christian life lies in the doctrine of justification. In

Luther's hands this doctrine confronts the presuppositions of the linear model in two ways. The first has already been discussed in relation to the *significatio* of baptism. Luther's interpretation of justification by faith is deeply destructive of all human claims to progress. It forbids any reliance upon past experiences in the spiritual life; the Christian is debarred from looking back to a climactic turning point for confirmation of his present spiritual status.<sup>56</sup> The second factor, no less important, concerns the apprehension of the doctrine by the individual. Perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the *Lectures on Galatians* does it emerge that, for Luther, the Christian's turning from the righteousness of the law to the alien righteousness is not one single 'event', however climactic, but a life-long struggle. From Paul's warnings to the Galatians Luther deduced the ever-present danger of Christians losing their freedom in a renewed reliance upon the righteousness of works. The gospel was not a message to be heard and digested only once; it must be heard again and again, particularly in times of temptation:

Therefore I admonish you, especially those of you who are to become instructors of consciences, as well as each of you individually, that you ~~exercise yourselves~~ continually by study, by reading, by meditation and by prayer, so that in temptation you will be able to instruct consciences, both your own and others, and take them from the law to grace, from active righteousness to passive righteousness, in short, from Moses to Christ. In affliction and in the conflict of conscience it is the devil's habit to frighten us with the law and to set against us the consciousness of sin, our wicked past, the wrath and judgment of God, hell and eternal death, so that thus he may drive us into despair, subject us to himself, and pluck us from Christ.<sup>57</sup>



There is no thought here that only one journey from law to grace, from Moses to Christ, is necessary; the Christian needs to make that journey many times. The apprehension of the doctrine of justification — faith itself — is by no means an easily and quickly concluded matter:

[The distinction between the righteousness of the law and that of Christ] is easy to speak of, but in experience and practice it is the most difficult of all, even if you exercise and practise it diligently. For in the hour of death or in other conflicts of the conscience, these two kinds of righteousness come together more closely than you would wish or ask.<sup>58</sup>

The struggle of faith persists up to the very hour of death. Even then there can be no looking back to a past conversion experience, to a definitive journey from law to gospel, or to the life-time of progress which ensued — even here, the Christian is back at the point where the Christian life begins.

### 5.3.2 An Alternative Model?

For Luther, the Christian always stands under the call to repent and believe the gospel; no growth in empirical righteousness, no progress in the slaying of sin, no past conversion experience can put him or her beyond the need to hear that call. Such things must never be made the objects of trust; otherwise they become a righteousness of works. What we have described as the 'unselfconsciousness of faith' underlines Luther's prohibition against making any aspect of human spirituality the focus of attention, let alone of reliance.<sup>59</sup> There is an 'unselfconsciousness of love' to be reckoned with also, as the gospel delivers the individual from selfish

preoccupation with his or her own spirituality and opens up the possibility of love. The Christian's service of his or her neighbour is focused precisely upon that neighbour's need; it pays no self-regarding attention to the works themselves as evidence of spiritual progress.<sup>60</sup> Luther's understanding of justification by faith removes all the evidence of human spiritual progress from sight. By the same token, it imparts a certain circularity to the Christian life. There is no possibility of progress away from the start point, or from the need for *conversio*; rather a continual return to that beginning.

The circularity of the Christian life is reflected in a number of aspects of his theology. Conversion itself becomes, not an event, but a state to be persevered in by the Christian who must be *semper penitens*.<sup>61</sup> The indivisibility of grace is another expression of the same principle; for Luther the Christian is no longer a pilgrim travelling from one degree, mode, or means of grace to another. But perhaps it is in the *simul* doctrine that the circularity of the Christian life comes to its clearest expression. A Christian never progresses beyond the need for justification because of the nature of justification itself — he remains a sinner although righteousness is imputed to him as he lives by faith. But living in faith is a continuous necessity, not a once-for-all event. Sin remains, the need for repentance and faith remains. The person who is *simul iustus et peccator*, who is living at once in two kingdoms, who is both flesh and spirit, is, in Oberman's phrase, 'man between God and the devil.' The life of faith is no complacent reflection on past victories but an armed struggle.

The *simul* doctrine underlines a difficulty mentioned at the start of this chapter: the problem of 'boundaries' in Luther's soteriology and ecclesiology. There can be no water-tight separation between life before grace and the Christian life by a clear crisis point variously described as regeneration, conversion or justification. The boundary does not run across the believer's life at some moment in the past (whether identifiable or not); it runs through the present, cutting right through the believer's very being.

But however eloquently it speaks of the conclusions to be drawn from a throughgoing application of the doctrine of justification by faith, the circular model of the Christian life cannot do complete justice to Luther's thought. Even though Prenter is right in his insistence that "Luther has no room for any independently evaluated, divinely supported, and independently growing empirical piety", there is nevertheless that strand in the Reformer's thought which requires progress, growth and development in the spiritual life.<sup>62</sup> Any model of the Christian life which did not encompass this dimension would be highly artificial. Perhaps the image that most fully represents Luther's understanding of the Christian life is that of a spiral, which combines the circular pattern with a linear element. A continual return to the start is not the opposite of progress for Luther but the very essence of it.

### 5.3.3 Baptism and the shape of the Christian Life

Several pieces of the puzzle can now be assembled, as the examination of baptism and the individual is drawn to a conclusion. The first factor is

Luther's lack of focus upon a unique climactic beginning of the Christian life. This is evident in his use of the term *conversio* (§ 5.2.2), which tends to emphasise the repeatability of conversion (§ 5.3.3). It is also apparent in the way that Luther fails to tie baptismal regeneration exclusively to the moment of administration. The second piece of the puzzle is the absence in the mature Luther's theology of any possibility of Christian progress apart from a continuing return to the beginning of the Christian life (§§ 5.2.4; 5.3.2). Thirdly, there is the *simul* doctrine. The Christian is both righteous and a sinner, both flesh and spirit; and therefore needs both *Regimente*, rule by both word and sword, and needs to hear both law and gospel. All boundaries run through the present moment, and the Christian straddles them all. The final element is the *leitmotif* of Luther's baptismal theology, which we have called its 'present tense'.

These pieces fit together. The first three elements combine in the circular, or rather spiral, 'shape' of the life of a Christian. But this and the present tense of baptism are intimately linked, because the 'beginning' to which the Christian is continually recalled is baptism. At the trysting place of baptism, God addresses me with his word of promise. I must live from moment to moment by faith in that word of promise, never daring to rely on a past conversion, or to progress in empirical righteousness, although tempted to do so. To yield to that temptation would be to abandon the despised trysting place of baptism in the search for a glory of my own:

For what devil induces us who are called Christians and are baptised to renounce baptism and to seek for ourselves works of our own apart from Christ?<sup>63</sup>

5.4 CONCLUSION: 'Baptisatus sum'

The central themes which have emerged from this consideration of baptism and the individual will be taken up again at the conclusion of the investigation of baptism and ecclesiology in the next chapter, so that the common threads of the two enquiries may be drawn together. Meanwhile, however, there is a final soteriological matter to consider; the question of assurance.

For Luther, as we have seen, there can be no resting secure on past faith, past holiness or past spiritual achievement. Justification requires faith, baptism requires a response — now. But does Luther's model of the Christian life undercut the assurance found in his (past) baptism by the man who, in the face of trials, cried "*baptisatus sum!*"? On some occasions Luther speaks very severely about those who presume upon their baptism; "Christ wants no-one to boast of being an Israelite or a Christian saying, 'I am baptised' . . ." <sup>64</sup> Yet at other times he encourages people to do nothing less than boast in their baptism. Sometimes these two strands are in close juxtaposition, as in the *Grosse Katechismus*:

*Denn damit das du lesset uber dich gieffen, hastu sie nicht empfangen noch gehalten, das sie etwas nütze<sup>65</sup>*

*Also mus man die Tauffe ansehen und uns nütze machen, das wir uns des stercken und trösten, wenn uns unser sund oder gewissen beschweret, und sagen 'Ich bin dennoch getaufft, bin ich aber getaufft, so ist mir zugesagt, ich solle selig sein und das ewige leben haben beide an seel und leib.'<sup>66</sup>*

Quite apart from the apparent contradiction here, there is a problem concerning assurance. If baptism is the word of God addressed to me in the present, placing me directly on the critical boundary as it calls for my response, what place is there for the sacraments as grounds of confidence in times of trial, in *Anfechtungen*? The answer can only be in terms of a distinction in the audience to which different aspects of the teaching are addressed. To those who boast of baptism as a talisman of salvation, Luther calls for a continual, active abiding in baptism in faith. False confidence, whether placed in membership of the Church or in righteousness of life, has to be challenged. Those who draw boundaries, placing themselves on the 'right' side of them, must return to begin again from the boundary of their baptism that always stands in front of them, as it were. But those who are troubled in conscience, and those who may be tempted by various trials to turn their attention to the quality and quantity of their own faith, receive a different message. They have to learn to boast of their baptism, and to rely on its divine word of promise. The word of God spoken at baptism is always the same. But because of the difference in its hearers, it has a different impact. To some it comes as a stern call to repentance and faith, but others need to hear the same word as a promise of gracious comfort and assurance.

NOTES

1. See above, §§ 4.3.4, 4.4.2.
2. At § 6.4.1 below.
3. See above, § 3.6.5, pp. 175f.
4. The judgement concerned the case of one George Cornelius Gorham. In 1847 Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter refused to insititute him to the living of Brampford Speke on account of Gorham's refusal to admit that regeneration was invariably conveyed in the administration of infant baptism. Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, (London, 1966) I, pp. 250-259.
5. See above, §§ 3.3, 3.3.1, 3.3.2; but contrast the Luther of 1519, § 4.3.2 (p. 230).
6. On the other hand there are some questions of which Luther was only too aware, such as that which faith asks of its own adequacy. Here Luther's deliberate refusal to pose such questions is in itself an important theological statement. See above, § 3.4.3, note 130.
7. John Baillie, *Baptism and Conversion* (London, 1964), pp. 13ff.
8. See above, § 1.1.3, p. 17.
9. Marilyn J. Harran, *Luther on Conversion: The Early Years* (Cornell, 1983), pp. 23-53. Harran begins her study with the observation that before her, among the many commentators upon Luther only Otto Ritschl has examined Luther's concept of conversion. This fact is all the more remarkable in the light of the detailed attention paid in the literature to the *Turnerlebnis*, interpreted as Luther's own conversion experience (p. 16). Harran's subject is clearly of the greatest relevance to the interface between baptismal theology and Luther's model of the Christian life, but there are certain caveats to be entered. First, she concludes her survey at the year 1519. One reason for the concentration on the early period is the desire to throw more light on Luther's own conversion (p. 19), but this choice of an end date does not promote an engagement with the role of *conversio* in his mature theology. Secondly, Harran does not herself pay sustained attention to the relationship between conversion and baptism. Thirdly, much of her investigation concerns the relevant but essentially distinct question of *preparation* for conversion, and Luther's step by step progress away from the human possibility of the *facere quod in se est* of the *pactum* theology through ambiguous terms like *humilitas* to the maturing Reformer's unequivocal ascription of preparation to God. There is perhaps less concentration than there might have been upon examining the implications of Luther's understanding of *conversio* for his wider theology. Nevertheless, Harran's conclusions about Luther's understanding of *conversio* are of much interest. The points at which her chosen line of argument appears to lead her into difficulties are also most instructive, as will appear below.

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10. On the *conversio* of creation see *Confessions* XIII,2;5.
11. Harran, pp. 26ff. Augustine writes vividly of his own experience of *aversio*, *Confessions* II,1;10.
12. Harran, pp. 28ff.
13. Harran, pp. 30f.
14. Harran, pp. 31f.
15. Benedict used *conversio* of the entry into the monastery: "let their beds be assigned to [the monks] in accordance with the date of their conversion." (Rule, ch. 22; *The Rule of St. Benedict*, tr. J. McCann (London, 1976), p. 33.) But all Benedictines from the time of Benedict onwards vowed to continue in *conversio morum*, the monastic self-reformation of life (although Benedict himself used the cognate term *conversatio morum*). *Saint Benedict*, J. McCann (London, 1937,1979), pp. 147ff.
16. Harran, p. 36.
17. Harran, p. 35.
18. Harran, p. 44.
19. Harran, pp. 47f.; H.A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 64. The consideration of *conversio* in relation to penance also reintroduces the question of balance between the objective and the subjective components of conversion. The medieval shifts of emphasis from one to another element in the sacrament of penance (McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, I, p. 95) are parallel to the alterations in the balance of the meaning of *conversio*. Thus emphasis upon the element of satisfaction (*satisfactio operis*) correlates with an emphasis on the external component of *conversio*, as does emphasis upon the efficacy upon the priestly pronouncement of absolution. But the shift towards a stress on the inward state of the penitent, (*contritio cordis*), points to a very different model for the understanding of *conversio*. See also above, § 4.2.4 (pp. 221f.), note 91.
20. *Summa* Vol. 57, tr. Cunningham p.89; Harran, pp. 44f.
21. For instance, in the *Genesisvorlesung*, it appears infrequently. The relatively low profile of *conversio* in the later years is significant; see below § 5.2.3, p. 74.
22. WA 3,479,11-480,2 = LW 10,418f.; scholion on Ps. 73:16. (The numbered references in the text are to the different senses of *conversio* distinguished in § 5.2.1.)
23. Luther's reference to the conversion of Paul in his exegesis of Romans 9:3 falls into this category; WA 56,389,28-390,2.
24. WA Br 1,399,9, cited by Harran, p. 32; Luther in a letter of the year 1519 speaks of the lay brothers of the cloister as "*conversi*".
25. Harran, p. 22, quotes WA 56,379,10-12: *Primam gratiam eam voco, Non que in principio conversionis infunditur, sicut in baptismo, contritione, compunctione, Sed omnem aliam sequentem et novam, Quam nos gradum et augmentum gratie dicimus.* (Scholion to Romans 8:26.)



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26. WA 4,8,3-14 = LW 11,158. Harran, pp. 66f., uses this scholion as the framework of her own discussion.
27. See also the glosses to the same Psalm, WA 4,2,24-26; Harran, p. 63.
28. See, for instance, WA 3,502,24-37 = LW 10,445: "But he would not do this [ie. hide his 'right hand' of grace] to them unless they had first turned away his right hand into his bosom, had forced the spirit into the letter, and had hidden the faith before God. Therefore, as they did to him, so is he doing to them."
29. Harran, pp. 56-85. She uses the same schema in handling other sources.
30. On the relationship between sanctification and election in Calvin, see F. Wendel, *Calvin*, tr. Philip Mairet (London, 1963), pp. 244f. The clear separation of Christians from unbelievers, the elect from the reprobate, is linked with what Bouwsma describes as Calvin's hatred of 'mixture'. See note 72 to Chapter 6. But although Calvin's temperament and his theology called for a sharp boundary to be drawn around the elect, this does not necessarily imply a similarly sharp boundary between the different phases of the Christian's life, ie. conversion. The elect are the elect from before birth. See note 55 below.
31. Harran, p. 81.
32. WA 4,375,1-13 = LW 11,511 on Ps. 119:147.
33. Harran, p. 83; see also p. 56 where Harran makes the same admission. When Luther speaks of conversion it is not always clear when he is referring to the once for all definitive shift from unfaith and unrighteousness to faith and righteousness, *coram Deo*, and when he is thinking of the turning to God of the repentant Christian.
34. See below, § 5.3.1.
35. See above, § 5.2.2; note 21.
36. WA 3,81,5f. = LW 10,87; Ps. 8:2.
37. WA 4,327,1-23 = LW 11,445; Ps. 119:33-40; Harran, pp. 75f.
38. WA 4,328,20-23 = LW 11,447.
39. WA 3,43,37-45,12 = LW 10,48-50.
40. WA 3,45,14f;46,37f. = LW 10,50;53.
41. WA 3,46,40-47,9 = LW 10,53.
42. WA 3,47,16-19 = LW 10,53f.
43. Harran, pp 87f.
44. WA 56,327,20-24 = LW 25,315; Harran p. 89.
45. See Jetter's concluding remarks to his discussion of baptism in the *Commentary on the Sentences*: "*Erbsünde und Taufgnade stehen gleichsam als die beiden Portalpfeiler am Eingang des Christenlebens, erstrecken sich aber geistlich nicht weiter in die christliche Existenz hinein. Der Christ hat sie von seinem ersten Schritt an immer schon hinter sich, als zwei Größen, die unterm Torbogen gleichsam*

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- aneinander erstarrt sind. Sollte nicht das eine die bleibende untere, das andere die bleibende obere Komponente des Christenlebens sein? Anstatt die Existenz zu bestimmen, leisten sie sie nur ein und werden alsbald zu einem Stück Vergangenheit, das bei aller theoretischen Bedeutsamkeit doch nichts Lebendiges mehr ist." Jetter, pp. 169f.
46. See above, § 5.2.3, pp. 272f.
47. Jetter, p. 230: ". . . den katholischen Weg, auf dem sich Sakrament an Sakrament, Gnade an Gnade reiht, bis der homo viator unter ihrem Geleit und von ihnen gekräftigt das Ziel erklommen hat."
48. WA 7,52,37-53,4 = LW 31,348.
49. H.O. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* tr. E. Walliser-Schwartzbart (New Haven and London, 1989), pp. 183f. Italics mine.
50. WA 40,I,231,21-232,21 = LW 26,131f.
51. WA 43,571,38-572,6 = LW 5,208; WA 44,24,36 = LW 6,34. That this is not the same as the division between the false and the true churches will emerge below, § 6.2.3, pp. 316ff.
52. See above, § 5.2.4, p. 275. See also WA 4,139,31-140,6 = LW 11,293 (scholion to Ps. 101:8); where Luther commends *vita proficientis*, the life of the Christian who makes progress. But this is embedded in an early example of Luther's insistence that the Christian must continually forget past progress and place himself or herself back at the beginning. Thus he talks of the 'morning' of the soul and of the Church; *Semper in matutino sit*.
53. WA 44,401,33 = LW 7,139 on Gen. 41:8.
54. See above, § 3.5.2.
55. The same is true of Calvin, who "never tries to suggest that conversion may be dated or located, as the pietists will do later." A. Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, tr. D. Foxgrove, W. Provo (Philadelphia, 1987), p. 252. Ganoczy emphasises the 'gradualism' implicit in Calvin's understanding of *conversio* (p. 251).
56. See above, § 3.5.2.
57. WA 40,I,49,35-50,16 = LW 26,10.
58. WA 40,I,49,31-34 = LW 26,10.
59. See above, § 3.4.3.
60. A Christian "lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbour through love." (*The Freedom of a Christian* WA 7,69,13f. = LW 31,371.) Wingren, pp. 201f., emphasises this directedness of love towards the neighbour.
61. See above, § 5.2.5, p. 279. This points to the rediscovery on Luther's part of one of the foundation senses of *conversio* in the Augustinian tradition (sense 2 above, § 5.2.1). Cf. Harran, pp. 106,189. R.S. Wallace notes the same emphasis on repentance as a mark of the entire Christian life in Calvin. (Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh, 1959), p. 94.
62. Prenter, p. 97.

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63. WA 45,673,36ff. = LW 24,233 on John 15:5.
64. WA 46,707,18-708,9 = LW 22,197. This emphasis is also to be found in the early Luther, see, for instance WA 57,III,193f. = LW 29, 195 (Lectures on Hebrews, 1517-18).
65. WA 30,I,216,26f.
66. WA 30,I,217,26-29.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A CHURCH WITH NO BOUNDARIES? - Baptism and Ecclesiology

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION: Defining the Church

Luther's theology does not encourage the drawing of boundaries. The concept of an identifiable, dateable *conversio*, a unique watershed marking off the definitive beginning of the Christian life, separating an individual's life into two qualitatively different segments, is one which bristles with difficulties in the context of his thought. There are corresponding problems in the doctrine of the Church. Any attempt to draw a sharp, clearly identifiable line around the community of faith is a highly questionable proceeding if Luther's ecclesiology is to be taken seriously. Two features of that ecclesiology militate against such an undertaking.

One is the powerful focus in Luther's approach to the Church upon the centre of the Church's essence and existence, to the exclusion of questions about the location and nature of its boundary.<sup>1</sup> What is the centre of the Church, what constitutes it as 'Church'? This question, which receives its answer in the doctrine of the *notae* (marks), is the one with which Luther is grappling, to the exclusion of concern with defining the circumference. But the difficulty of identifying the boundaries of the Church is by no means merely a superficial matter of Luther's preoccupation with other issues. A

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second central feature of Luther's ecclesiology demonstrates that the problem with boundaries is radical - the Church's hiddenness. If the Church is by its nature invisible, how can its membership and extent be identifiable?

But what is baptism, if it is not in some sense a boundary of the Church? The problems are parallel to the soteriological ones discussed in the last chapter. *Prima facie* it must surely be allowed that a sacrament of initiation defines, or at the very least plays some part in defining, not only the beginning of a new life but also the extent and membership of the community to which it is the entrance. In this chapter the ecclesiological dimensions of Luther's doctrine of baptism set out in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will be explored. No less than in the discussion of baptism and the Christian life in Chapter 5, the issue of boundaries will be a recurrent theme. The difficulties of a model of the Christian life which lacks a single clear beginning find their precise parallel in the problems of a Church without boundaries. In both cases the difficulties impinge directly upon the theology of baptism.

Before its relationship with baptismal theology is approached directly (§ 6.3), however, Luther's ecclesiology 'without boundaries' requires a deeper examination on its own terms. We begin with an examination of Luther's supposed neglect of the circumference in favour of the centre in the remainder of this section, before tackling the issue of the Church's hiddenness in § 6.2.

6.1.1 The marks of the Church: The Christological Centre

The true treasure of the Church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.<sup>2</sup>

For Luther the Church begins and ends with the treasure of the gospel. The preaching of the word of God and the people of God are inseparable. Where the Church is, the gospel will be preached. And, as the gospel is never preached without effect, where the word is heard so also the Church will be created.<sup>3</sup> Although the preached word alone is sufficient identification of the Church, Luther draws attention to other *notae*. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the office of the Keys, ministries in the Church, prayer, public praise of God, and the Holy Cross of suffering and trials; all these too are 'marks' of the Church. But in his polemical tract of 1541, *Against Hanswurst*, Luther lists no less than ten marks, including the right honour of marriage and the temporal power, and fasting.<sup>4</sup> The group of marks of the Church betrays the same fluidity in its membership on different occasions as does that of the appointed signs or 'places' where God is to be encountered.<sup>5</sup> With the marks, as with the signs, there is room for dispute about the priority to be observed amongst them, and in particular, there is the need to interpret the priority of word correctly.<sup>6</sup>

The resemblances between the *notae* and the signs are hardly surprising; although there are some differences of membership at the margin the two groups are essentially one and the same. The Church is the community gathered around the signs and means of grace, the appointed trusting places where God wills to be found.<sup>7</sup> These means of grace and their proper use

are the marks of the Church. The people of God are identified by that around which they gather. This is nowhere more apparent than in the *Genesisvorlesung*, where Luther's concept of the Church bears some resemblance to a group of people assembled around a camp fire in the wilderness. All the attention is upon the focal point around which they gather, not upon the shadowy fringes of the group and the comings and goings at the margin.

6.1.2 The marks of the Church: The undefined boundary

One aspect of Luther's use of the *notae* is the lack of focus upon the boundary of the Church. Avis sees this as typified by Luther's failure to count discipline, or the bann, as one of the marks; here Luther's position is to be distinguished from that of much of the Reformed tradition, following Bucer.<sup>8</sup> The development of Reformed ecclesiologies would lie in this direction, towards more tightly defined and controlled gathered congregations of the elect. Discipline and excommunication would play an important part in this process; although a far more radical sharpening yet of the boundary of the Church was available to those communions where infant baptism was abandoned.<sup>9</sup> But it is perverse to attach too much significance to Luther's omission of discipline from his list of marks of the Church. Discipline as such, like the ministry of the Church, may be admitted as essential to the life of the Church, may even be recognised as a 'mark', without any implied commitment to a sharply defined and narrowly circumscribed Church.<sup>10</sup>

Of greater relevance than the omission of discipline from the marks of the Church, is the question of the Reformer's purpose in his teaching about those marks. This must be seen against the background of the struggle against Rome, and the disputed claim with Rome as to the rightful possessors of the name 'Church'.<sup>11</sup> 'Where was your church before Luther?' This question had to be answered. The pattern which runs through the Genesis Lectures of the weak, despised, true Church persecuted and despised by the outwardly impressive false Church, boasting in its birthright, reflects its importance.<sup>12</sup> In this context the marks have a double effect: defensively, they answer those who restrict the name 'Church' to those who own the jurisdiction of the Pope; offensively, they exclude the 'synagogue of the Pope' from the Church because the gospel is not seen there. Luther appears to use both types of argument, the positive and the negative:

Wherever that word is heard, where baptism, the sacrament of the altar and absolution are administered, there you must determine and conclude with certainty, 'This is surely God's house, here heaven has been opened'.<sup>13</sup>

Where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call and gather the Christian Church.<sup>14</sup>

But which is more fundamental to Luther's usage of the *notae*: the restriction of the name 'Church' against those who falsely claim it, or the refusal to accede to the narrow use of those who wrongly deny it? That there is a certain ambiguity in Luther's language cannot be denied. Sometimes there is stress upon the need for a 'pure' teaching of the gospel, or for a presence of the word which goes beyond the mere presence of the text of the gospel. Thus although Luther emphasises that a church which is pure and unmixed in membership is not to be looked for, as the wheat and the



tares are always intermingled, a purity in ministry and teaching is to be expected:

It is sufficient that in David's time the kingdom and the ministry were pure . . . that nothing wrong or idolatrous was taught or commanded . . . Where there is a church in which the heavenly doctrine is purely taught and the magistrate does not oppose sound doctrine, there the tabernacles of Jacob are pure and beautiful (*pura et specia*). The body of Christ is sound, firm, and strong, but it is not lacking in filth, matter, ulcers, spittle and excrement. Still it is said to be sound by synecdoche.<sup>15</sup>

But if this objection is raised: 'Yet they [the papists] have baptism, the Lord's Supper etc.', I reply: 'Those who have the pure word and baptism belong to us and to the true church. But those who have the pomp in addition are not the true church. Even though they have baptism, the text of the Gospel, etc., yet they have these in vain (*frustra*), because Christ and Belial are not in accord. For the bed is narrow. Consequently one of the two fall out, and the short cloak cannot cover both . . .'<sup>16</sup>

It could be argued that once the word (or any other of the marks of the Church) has been qualified with an adjective such as 'pure', the use of the doctrine changes significantly. Unqualified, the marks identify the christological centre, in relation to which groups and individuals may have different stances; some may 'gather round', others may despise and abandon them. But as soon as they are qualified in this way the situation changes. There is now a question mark against at least some putative churches; a standard against which their preaching of the gospel, administration of the sacraments, and ministry have to be judged. The marks have become, as it were, a boundary between 'Church' and 'not-Church', and their negative, excluding, role has overshadowed their positive significance as the guarantee

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of the presence of God's people wherever the word, baptism and the supper etc. are found.

Closer examination, however, reveals that the marks, when used in this way, do not operate as a boundary to define the limits of the Church. Their positive role as identifying guarantor of the Church's presence is preserved. There is more than one reason for this. First, the qualifications placed upon the word and the other marks are not so extensive as would appear at first sight. In the passages quoted above, Luther is denying the mark of the gospel only where human additions totally compromise it, or where civil authorities muzzle it. There is no concept of an assessment according to *degrees* of purity of teaching or administration or ministry — the name 'Church' is only withheld where for one reason or another the marks are in reality not present at all. Secondly, for reasons that will be set out more fully below (§ 6.2.3), the distinction between two churches, true and false, is *not* the same as the boundary which separates off those individuals who are truly members of the Church, dividing the wheat from the tares. Luther consistently maintains the invisibility of the latter boundary in the mixed Church of both wheat and tares.<sup>17</sup> In any case, in the *Genesisvörlesuñg* it is quite clear that individuals frequently complicate any simple boundary between the true Church and the false. Lot's sons-in-law, though within the *Ecclesiola* of the godly, show their true character when they laugh at the word.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand godliness could be found outside the true church, among the descendants of Cain, the family of Esau, and in in the household of Laban.<sup>19</sup>

The doctrine of the *notae* is adapted to a defensive argument, maintaining the presence and reality of the Church where papists and radicals, for very different reasons, wish to deny it. This is its true *Sitz im Leben*. But where Luther is himself adopting an attacking stance, most notably when he wishes to deny the name 'Church' to the papists, the *notae* fit only very uncomfortably into his argument, and he has to struggle to avoid the admission that Rome is a Church because she possesses the word and the sacraments.<sup>20</sup> The marks, so central to Luther's ecclesiology, are ill suited to act as criteria by which the boundaries of of the Church can be drawn. They are, however, admirably suited to the depiction of the christological centre which guarantees the presence of Christian people, and thus of the Church, the 'lambs who hear the shepherd's voice'.

### 6.1.3 The Hidden Church

*Es ist ein hoch tieff verborgen ding die kirche, das sie niemand kennen noch sehen mag, Sondern allein an der tauffe, sacrament und wort fassen und gleuben mus. (The church is a so deeply hidden thing that no one can see it or know it but can only grasp and believe it in baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the word.)<sup>21</sup>*

Since the *notae* are in effect the appointed signs and places (means of grace), which themselves possess a common unity in Christ, the christological nature of the centre is clear. The marks of the Church define its centre, not its circumference. But is the haziness of the boundary which surrounds the Church merely a function of the fact that Luther's attention is

elsewhere, or is it much more deeply rooted in his theology? The invisibility of the Church provides the answer to this question.

The hiddenness of the Church is fundamental to its nature; this is particularly clear in the *Genesisvorlesung*. It is a complex theme; the element of paradox which is fundamental to this aspect of Luther's ecclesiology is itself far from simple -- it is best thought of as a network of interlocking tensions and paradoxes. The most obvious paradox is the contrast between the outward appearance of the Church and its inner reality. The people of God appear weak, poverty-stricken, and despicable. Its appearance of weakness is to be set against the hidden truth about this Church; it possesses the true riches of God, even though it does so only by faith in his promise. Its despicable outward appearance belies its inner glory; its present poverty obscures its eschatological treasure.<sup>22</sup>

One aspect of the apparent weakness of the Church is its insignificant size. "God nevertheless has his little church (*ecclesiola*), even though it is small (*exiguam*) and hidden (*absconditam*)."<sup>23</sup> It is "the small flock of the godly"<sup>24</sup> Size does not make the Church, neither does holiness; when seeking to identify it "the word alone must be considered, and the verdict must be reached on the basis of it"<sup>25</sup> But its smallness should not blind people to its true nature and riches. This Church, although small in number, is the seed on account of which God shows kindness to a troubled earth; like Atlas it carries the world on its shoulders; it is no less than "the ruler of the world"<sup>26</sup> The Church of the small remnant of the faithful is despised for other reasons, as we have seen.<sup>27</sup> It bears the marks of suffering, persecution and the cross. Its unimpressiveness is a function of the

outward appearance of the appointed signs and 'places' upon which its life is centred.

In all these aspects the relationship between the Church's exterior weakness and its inner glory is matched by the equal and opposite contrast which applies to those outside it. Here success and glory are the surface appearance; spiritual poverty and death the inner reality, and the (self-chosen) signs and places seem splendid.<sup>28</sup>

Paradoxically, it is the essential invisibility of the true Church of believers which calls for the doctrine of the *notae*. In the context of the hiddenness of the true Christians amongst the hypocrites in the mixed Church, it is the doctrine of the marks which confirms that despite all appearances to the contrary, this Church is indeed 'Church'. It does so against the appearance of impurity and compromise; the church in Wittenberg was holy, not because all admixture of hypocrites, users, heretics and idolaters had been rooted out from it, but on account of the ministry of the word exercised there.<sup>29</sup> The marks serve as a defence against the radicals who explicitly demand a pure gathered Church of true believers, denying the name 'Church' to a mixed community. They also defend against the charge made against the Church by its enemies of insignificance and weakness.<sup>30</sup>

Although its invisibility is basic to Luther's understanding of the Church, there are strands in the complex web of his ecclesiology which have been seen as tending towards a less 'hidden' and more circumscribed Church. In the next section these alternatives to the hidden Church will be examined.

6.2 MAKING THE CHURCH VISIBLE: Alternatives to the Hidden Church?

In the complex web of Luther's ecclesiology, there are two themes which appear to have the potential for reinstating a clear boundary for the Church. Both have already emerged from the examination of the *Genesisvorlesung*; and the uneasy relationship between the invisible, eschatologically oriented, Church and the actual community of faith available to human inspection provides the matrix for them both. First, there is the two churches theme. Secondly, there is Luther's use of what may be called 'remnant theology', the small company of true believers concealed amongst a great conglomeration of 'tares', or carnal Christians, in the mixed Church. This is to be linked with the role played in Luther's thought by the *ecclesiola*, the 'little Church' of true *fideles*.

There are crucial questions to be posed here. Did Luther, whether by means of the distinction between the two churches, or via the concept of the *ecclesiola* of true *fideles*, effectively side-step the difficulties posed by the 'boundarylessness' of an invisible Church? There is little point in proceeding to examine the consequences for baptismal theology of a Church without boundaries unless we can be sure that boundaries are not re-introduced by Luther in another form, by the back door, as it were.

In this section these possible new 'boundaries' will be examined in turn. They raise rather different issues, although they are closely connected. The two churches theme maintains Luther's focus upon the centre of the

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Church in contrasting the different stances taken by visible communities towards the signs or marks which denote that centre. The possibility of a church within a church, of an *ecclesiola* of true believers, however, appears to sidestep the haziness of the Church's boundary by drawing another much sharper boundary closer to the centre.

### 6.2.1 *Ecclesiola: A Church of the true fideles?*

Luther's dilemma was that he wanted both a confessional church based on personal faith and experience, and a territorial church including all in a given locality. If he were forced to choose, he would take his stand with the masses, and this is the direction in which he moved.<sup>31</sup>

One interpretation of Luther's developing ecclesiology has it that the Reformer began his ministry at Wittenberg on his return from the Wartburg with a desire to gather the true believers into a small fellowship within the wider mixed congregation, for worship, instruction, administration of the sacraments. This is the implication of the 'third service' Luther speaks of in his preface to the 1526 German Mass.<sup>32</sup> But, according to this interpretation, Luther abandoned the project, partly with regret because of the spiritual sloth and unresponsiveness to the Gospel of his fellow Germans, partly in horrified conservative reaction against the excesses of such as Müntzer and Carlstadt and in revulsion at the lawlessness of the Peasants' Revolt.<sup>33</sup> But the *ecclesiola* project can plausibly be presented as a symptom of Luther's disillusionment in itself. The idea of gathering the believing Christians together may have arisen precisely because of the mixed nature of

the wider community, where in spite of the liberation of the word of God from its Babylonian captivity it was becoming increasingly clear that many — the majority — were deaf to the gospel.

The main difficulty with the concept of an abandoned *ecclesiola* 'project' is more fundamental, however. The possibility of setting up an unmixed congregation of true believers was ruled out, not so much by the human weakness of Wittenbergers as by vital theological considerations. The attempt to create a pure church is an attempt to circumvent the necessary hiddenness of God's people. The small, despised, community of faith, the faithful remnant of true believers gathered around the appointed signs, once it sets itself apart from (above?) the wider mixed community and pronounces itself the 'Church' becomes by that very act the proud self-exalting Church which glories in its birthright; the 'false church' *par excellence*.

But although the notion of a Church within the Church, the *ecclesiola* of true believers within the mixed community of wheat and tares, is beset with problems in the context of Luther's theology, it is nevertheless a persistent notion with a long pedigree in the history of Western Christianity. The 'abandoned project' was not something without a theological ancestry deep within the medieval tradition. One of the implications of Scott Hendrix's line of reasoning, when he examines the ecclesiology of the *Dictata* against the medieval background, is that the inner church of the true *fideles* is a concept deeply embedded in Luther's thought which continues to play its part in shaping his ecclesiology.<sup>34</sup> Of particular interest is Hendrix's claim that the boundaries of this *ecclesiola* are by no means necessarily invisible. His reasoning requires careful consideration.



6.2.2 Excursus: The *Fideles*, the Medieval Tradition and the *Dictata*

Hendrix traces the thought that there are differing degrees of membership in the Church back to Jerome and Augustine. The seminal event is the latter's controversy with the Donatists.<sup>35</sup> The Augustinian reply to the Donatist attack on the compromised Church which contains sinners is two-fold, consisting (i) of an appeal to the Parable of the Wheat and Tares (in which Augustine would be followed by Luther) and the belief that the purifying and separating of the Church into saints and sinners would be God's action on the Last Day; and (ii), an appeal to *caritas*. For Augustine *caritas* functions both as the mark of the sanctity of those who are truly children of God, the *boni* as against the *mali* (Hendrix calls this sense II), and also as an aspect of the unity of the Church Catholic as opposed to schismatics and heretics (Hendrix's sense I).<sup>36</sup>

The ecclesiological 'map' becomes increasingly complex, with an expanding series of concentric circles. In the centre there are the *boni*, members of the Church catholic who show the marks of sanctity, understood by Augustine in this context as *caritas* sense II. Next come the *mali*, who nevertheless, because they are members of the Church Catholic, partake in *caritas* sense I. But a further boundary must be drawn to include a yet wider circle, because the Donatists and others are validly baptised and are to be distinguished from the unbaptised pagans. Baptism, although it still has a function as the outermost circumference, is now at two removes from the boundary of salvation.<sup>37</sup>

The concept of the mini-Church within the Church shows remarkable persistence throughout the medieval period, but Hendrix observes certain changes in the pattern of interpretation. Generally these have the effect of making the 'map' still more complex. For instance there is a tendency towards greater emphasis on distinctions *within* the inner group of the *boni*.<sup>38</sup> Another development concerns the divergence of the terms *boni* and *fideles*. With Augustine they had been virtual equivalents. But in many of the later writers an ambiguity creeps in. Sometimes the reference of *fideles* is to the narrower group who demonstrate true repentance, and are possessors of *caritas*. At other times there is an inclusive reference which embraces the *mali* as well.<sup>39</sup> By the time of Aquinas there is a systemisation of the position of these *mali fideles*: they are indeed part of that mystical body which is united to Christ, but they possess only *fides informis* having lost the *caritas* they received at baptism; and are members of the Church only *numero, non merito*.<sup>40</sup>

The Luther of the *Dictata* fully reflects the medieval ambiguity in the reference of the term *fideles*.<sup>41</sup> The *fideles* can be all those who are not pagans, Jews or heretics; all the members of the Church.<sup>42</sup> Yet there is much to indicate a narrower interpretation of the word itself, and still more which demonstrates Luther's belief that the true boundary of the Church runs well inside the outer limits of the baptised community.<sup>43</sup> There is the contrast of the *viva fide* of the strong, or of the wheat, with the *vana fide* of the chaff.<sup>44</sup> There are the vast numbers of lukewarm Christians (*multitudo tepidorum et literalium Christianorum*), whom Luther does not hesitate to number with the persecutors and heretics as the troublers of the Church, as he develops the allegorical significance of the neck-deep waters

of Psalm 69:1.<sup>45</sup> There is the distinction between Christians after the spirit and after the flesh, as implied in Luther's interpretation of the Hagrites (Ps.83:8):

. . . these names fit only those who who are counted among the people of God but are not deservedly so. As they were then, so many of our people are now too. For the heretics and those cut off are not properly denoted by these names, but, as I have said, only those who are mixed with, and in the midst and number of, the true people (*mixti et in medio ac numero populi veri*), having the name and shape and appearance of God's people and yet denying its strength and truth. Just as the Jews and Israelites after the flesh were God's people only in name, place, and number, so Christians after the flesh are God's people only in place, name, and number. (*Christiani carnales nomine, loco et numero tantum.*) They are strangers and visitors, and they have a share in the same city, but they are not citizens. They will depart to their own place.<sup>46</sup>

The double reference of *fideles*, with its use to denote both the inner group and the whole mixed baptised community shows Luther in a clear relationship to the medieval tradition going all the way back to Augustine. Passages like the above, however, appear to support Hendrix's view that there is a sharper deliniation of the inner group, a more definite distinction between them and the carnal Christians, especially towards the later sections of the *Dictata*, than is found in the tradition.

But it is in the dividing principle that the clearest break with tradition can be seen. In parallel with the increasing tendency to adopt the narrower restricted application of *fideles*, there is the move towards replacing *caritas* by *fides* as the distinguishing mark of the inner group. This is not simply a matter of replacing one quality subsisting in the individual by

another; it is a matter of addressing the question of the orientation of those individuals towards things quite outside themselves, towards things which are hidden (and future). The 'good' are those who are at present experiencing the 'night' of the killing of the flesh, in order that they may flourish in the 'morning'; their good things, as opposed to the treasures of the carnal, are future.<sup>47</sup> What will be revealed in the future is hidden in the present; when Luther comments on Psalm 27:5 ("He will hide me in his shelter (tabernacle) in the day of trouble, he will conceal me under the cover of his tent . . ."), he presents the division between the carnal and the spiritual as a matter of orientation:

For they [the church] live by faith and in spirit, that is, by the recognition and love of what is invisible. So the carnal do not live by faith, but empirically; not in spirit but in the flesh. Hence they are not 'under the cover' but out in the open, and they are involved in visible things.<sup>48</sup>

Here there is obvious continuity with the Luther of later years. The underlying eschatological dimension to the meaning of the term *fideles* is established, and it is already firmly linked to the hiddenness of the Church. But in Hendrix's opinion, this hiddenness is radically reinterpreted by Luther. Previously the hiddenness of the Church consisted primarily of the difficulty of locating the inner boundary of the mini-Church of the *boni* from the rest. It was difficult to locate because it related to the uncertain individual possession of an invisible entity, true *caritas*. But now the invisibility of the true Church is not so much concerned with the negative matter of uncertainty about the extent of its membership. It is far deeper than that -- it is a matter of its orientation towards invisible goods, a

positive factor which is fundamentally determinative of its whole character.<sup>49</sup>

On the basis of such an understanding of the *fideles* and the nature of their invisibility, Hendrix draws certain conclusions about the *ecclesiola* and its function in Luther's thought. One line of his argument begins from an understanding of the hiddenness of the true Church as a matter of orientation, and appears to proceed towards a partial removal of any element of hiddenness of membership or identity. So when Luther speaks of the necessity of the *fideles* remaining within the community of the baptised, in Hendrix's opinion "he speaks of them as if they were quite discernible and puts little emphasis on their invisible character."<sup>50</sup> In a second line of argument which begins from the same point (hiddenness as orientation to hidden goods) Hendrix seeks to show that this mark of the *fideles* detaches them from any necessary dependence upon the existing church order with its ministrations of sacramental grace. With the removal of *caritas* as the essential mark of the faithful, the dependence upon that sacramental structure which dispenses *caritas* is removed also.<sup>51</sup> The cumulative result of Hendrix's approach is the concept of a clearly identifiable *ecclesiola* of the *fideles*, whose dependence upon Christ and the gospel gives them a potential independence of any particular ecclesiastical structure. Thus according to Hendrix the theological ground for the ultimate break with Rome is intimately linked with the theology of the mini-Church: "In 1513-15 Luther has no reason to suppose that this inherent independence must be turned into organisational separation. Nevertheless, if he is brought to this point, his ecclesiological understanding as manifested in the *Dictata* is

capable of providing the theological underpinning for the ongoing life of the Church."<sup>52</sup>

If Hendrix is correct, the *ecclesiola* of true believers is firmly established as a discernible, fully functioning reality, whose relationship to the wider sacramental community is purely contingent.<sup>53</sup> There must be important consequences for baptismal theology. But is he correct? A full understanding of the potential of 'ecclesiola theology' in Luther's thought must await a closer examination of the themes of the true and false Church, the Church visible and invisible, going well beyond the early period. (See § 6.2.3). But a provisional answer can be given from the material upon which Hendrix founds his argument in the *Dictata*.

First, Hendrix thinks that the Church's hiddenness understood as orientation towards hidden things partially — or totally — replaces the invisibility of the Church's boundaries, membership and extent. The scholion to Psalm 69 is relevant here. Luther offers a sustained treatment of the particular temptation facing the contemporary church; the threat posed by the great numbers of nominal, ease-loving, luke-warm Christians. It appears at first that the *fideles* are to be sharply distinguished from the surrounding mass of the carnal. But as Luther warms to his theme it becomes increasingly apparent that there is no sharp line separating one individual off from another — this is a disease which threatens to engulf the whole Church. There is no identifiable group of individuals who are immune from it. The sense of Luther's approach here is that of an appeal to Christians who face this temptation, and who find themselves, as it were, on the knife-edge between the company of true *fideles* and the mass of the luke-warm.

Thus Luther exhorts his hearers to apply the Psalms, not against the persecutors and heretics of the past, but against "the half-Christians and those who serve the Lord only in a carnal and formal way", notably the princes of the Church.<sup>54</sup> But the burden of Luther's warning about the dangers of a time of peace cannot be deflected into a consideration by the elect of the plight of others; "Therefore go down with Jacob weeping to hell (Gen. 37:35). Mark this sign for yourself: When you are lukewarm and not in hell with your heart, know that there is danger for you . . ." <sup>55</sup>

*Humilitas*, a *leit-motif* of the *Dictata*, has as its corollary the invisibility of the elect or of the *fideles* even to themselves.<sup>56</sup> The setting of the individual Christian right on the boundary itself (Chapter 5) has its ecclesiological counterpart, the roots of which are already present in the *Dictata*; the impossibility of confidently identifying the members of the *ecclesiola* of the true believers.<sup>57</sup>

Hendrix's second line of argument seeks to detach the *fideles*, now defined by their faith, or orientation to invisible goods, from any necessary dependence upon a given Church order or upon the sacramental ministry of the Church. But there are several clear statements in the *Dictata* to the contrary. The fault of the Arians was precisely their refusal to submit to the protection of bishops and masters.<sup>58</sup> The Hebrews who sought meat to replace the God-given manna have contemporary equivalents in those who would be independent of the Church, the gospel and the teaching office.<sup>59</sup> Part of the foolishness and weakness of the Church which men despise at their peril is the evil of her members, as a mixed community where there is

a lack of the works of faith. The 'Bohemians' are bracketed with Mohammed as persecutors and despisers of this weak and hidden Church.<sup>60</sup>

Hendrix argues that by the later sections of the *Dictata* the way has already been prepared for the break with Rome with the potentially explosive concept of the essential independence of the *fideles* of any particular ecclesiastical structure.<sup>61</sup> Even if it be admitted that this view is broadly correct, on its own it does not give a full picture of the ecclesiology of 1513-15. If the roots of the break with Rome can be seen in the *Dictata*, equally visible are the seeds of Luther's subsequent rejection of a pure gathered *ecclesiola* within the Church. It is fundamental to Luther's thought from these early years that visible purity in the Church is unavailable; on the contrary any appearance of it must be neither claimed nor sought.<sup>62</sup>

### 6.2.3 Separating the True Church from the False?

The invisibility of the Church is not compromised by any recourse on Luther's part to an inner boundary, which demarks an *ecclesiola* of true believers. Such a visibly pure Church is unattainable. But what of Luther's distinction between the true and false churches, a theme of unquestionable importance in Luther's ecclesiology? In the *Genesisvorlesung* the true church is despised, weak, few in number. It must live in faith and hope under the mark of the 'holy cross'<sup>63</sup> Does this not reintroduce a visible *ecclesiola* in another form?



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In fact the true Church must not be thought of as a visible, defined, *ecclesiola*. One reason is Luther's own strictures against the search for an unmixed Church, and his frequent reference to the parable of the wheat and tares. The true Church is emphatically *not* the unmixed *ecclesiola* of true *fideles*. This is closely linked with a second factor, namely the fluidity or porosity of the boundary between the true and false Churches. To demonstrate this requires a more thorough examination of the two churches theme than has been attempted so far.

Part of the problem in its interpretation is the fact that the two churches theme appears to be used in two rather different ways by Luther. In one sense, the division between the two churches is a highly visible one, dividing two utterly different communities, one of which exhibits the marks of word, sacraments, the holy cross of suffering and trial, while the other most emphatically does not. Thus in a work which contains one of his most sustained treatments of the two churches theme, with particular reference to the claims of Rome, *Against Hanswurst* (1541), Luther presents the marks of the true Church as plain for all to see.<sup>64</sup> The marks which demonstrate the falsity of the papal church are also clear to all.<sup>65</sup> The members of a church which exhibits the 'marks' can from those marks simply deduce that theirs is the true Church. There is a certainty about it, and therefore a visibility about the division between the two churches. As the preachers in Electoral Saxony can and must without any doubt or apology proclaim and boast that their teaching is true, Luther can prove that "we are the true, ancient church", and can demonstrate the reverse about the papists.

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But a corrective is needed to any assumption that the true Church is wholly true; it must always remain a mixed body, with truth and falsity inextricably entwined within it. This is not just a matter of mixed membership. There must also be a safeguard against presumption, lest possession of the marks leads to a false boasting. This corrective and safeguard is provided by the second strand in the two churches theme. In the *Genesisvorlesung* the division has also an invisible, highly porous side to it. The godly Church of Seth and Noah, for instance, although sharply distinguished from the false church of Cain and Lamech, contains within itself the seeds of its own decline into falsehood.<sup>66</sup> The danger of fleshly confidence and security in possession of the title 'true Church' is at all costs to be avoided - there is no automatic succession, physical or otherwise.<sup>67</sup>

Even if there is a 'boundary' which separates the two Churches, it is an extremely permeable one, frequently crossed by individuals in both directions. Any attempt to construct a pure *ecclesiola* must take account of the way in which the purity as well as the size of the Church may wax and wane.<sup>68</sup> In the Lectures one of the constantly repeated patterns Luther draws from Genesis is the way that the 'true' Church imperceptibly becomes false through pride, and especially through glory in its birth-right. The claim to be the true Church is one of the most dangerous claims to make for the Luther of this period; it is another instance of the peril inherent in the drawing of boundaries, which so often places the drawer on the wrong side.<sup>69</sup>

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These are serious objections to any interpretation of the two Churches theme which in effect empties the whole content of 'Church' into a narrowly defined *ecclesiola*. Luther explicitly spoke of the mixed Church of wheat and tares. The true Church is marked by the purity of its doctrine, but it is not without sin in life.<sup>70</sup> Although the contrast and the struggle between the false and the true Churches are central to Luther's ecclesiology, the 'true' Church cannot neatly be separated off by a sharp boundary line. But there is a further dimension to the difficulties of such an interpretation. It is a function of the complexities of the layers of paradox in Luther's ecclesiology mentioned above (§ 6.1.3). While the first and most obvious paradox, as we have seen, comprises a double contrast between the respective appearances and inner realities of the Church (the true Church) and the rest of mankind, there is a second and more elusive paradox which cuts across it. This second layer of paradox has the effect of bringing together the despised remnant of the true Church with the arrogance and compromised claims to purity of the empirical Church.

Already in the *Dictata* part of the poor surface appearance of the *fideles* consists precisely in the compromised Church Catholic.<sup>71</sup> To make the distinction between the true and false Churches and to draw the contrast between them is insufficient. Although the false and true Churches can be and are treated separately, a full understanding of the paradoxical element in Luther's ecclesiology requires that their essential inseparability be recognised also. Just as Jacob dwelt in the house of ungodly Laban,

And so to the end of the world the false church will be joined to the true church (*adiuncta erit falsa Ecclesia, verae Ecclesiae*), and false brethren to godly and sincere brethren. We today teach the gospel

purely and faithfully, but we have an admixture of usurers, papists, heretics and sectarians . . .<sup>72</sup>

The inseparability of the two Churches is far more than a mere matter of their co-existence in close proximity. This second paradox reaches its highest point with the picture of the papal Antichrist himself reigning "not in the cowshed, but in the temple of God."<sup>73</sup> Where else should we expect Antichrist to be, other than in the midst of the most sacred and holy things? The admixture of carnal Christians, the presence even of Antichrist — these are part of the despised surface weakness which conceals the true glory of the Church. We might almost go so far as to regard them as 'marks' of the Church. For Luther, to attempt a total separation of the true Church from the false Church would be unthinkable, because it would constitute an attempt to make the purity of the Church visible, and to make its concealed glory available for human inspection. Such an attempt rebounds upon itself — it leads nowhere other than back to the false, self-confident Church of Esau, which relies, not on the promises of God, but upon the 'birthright' of its own religious status.

It is the essential invisibility of the Church which for Luther rules out any idea of a gathered *ecclesiola* of true believers. The abandonment by the Reformer of his plan to set up small gathered congregations of true Christians is not to be explained merely in terms of Luther's urgent priorities elsewhere. Nor was it a solely a matter of a conservative reaction against the radicals. The '*ecclesiola* project' — if such it was — never was consistent with one of the central principles of Luther's ecclesiology. It would have been an attempt to make visible that which of

its very nature must in this age remain hidden, and to separate what must remain conjoined.

6.2.4 A Church without boundaries?

For Luther, then, the meaning of the word 'Church' cannot be forced into the narrow circumference of the number of the true *fideles*. Its reference has to be much wider than that, as we have seen. But neither would it be correct to make an unqualified identification of 'Church' with the entire number of the baptised. The reality of the false Church, which can only be regarded as 'Church' in a most ambivalent way, undermines any claim which may be advanced on behalf of the papists (and others) for their inclusion on the basis of their possession of the sacraments. By the same token it rules out any comprehensive claim on behalf of *Christenheit* as a whole. But on the other hand Luther's true Church itself has something of the nature of quicksilver about it; it cannot be grasped, and it eludes precise delineation. This is because in this world it cannot be seen in isolation from the false Church; or it would perhaps be more appropriate to say that it is not available in detachment from the false Church in this age. The more insistently the claim of truth and purity is made for a given Church, the more clearly it identifies itself as false.

The tendency of Luther's use of the *notae* to concentrate upon the christological centre of the Church rather than upon defining its outer boundaries has been discussed already.<sup>74</sup> Neither the *ecclesiola* theme nor the two churches doctrine are capable of reversing this apparent

'boundarylessness' of the Church, and the possibility of an inner, unmixed, visible, church of true believers is therefore eliminated. This invisibility of the Church's boundaries is particularly Lutheran. Like the rest of his mature theology, Luther's doctrine of the Church reflects the two fronts on which he was forced to fight. The ecclesiologies of the papists and of the radicals are both excluded. A simple identification of the Church with a visible empirical sacramental community will not do, but nor will the creation of a new, unmixed community of true believers in separation from the existing sacramental community. Thus the outer limit of the sacramental community (baptism?) will not suffice as the effective boundary of the group of those who are properly, in number and worth, called 'Church'. The inner boundary which limits the *ecclesiola* of true believers will not do either, because it is in principle unavailable for inspection. It is immediately clear that there are difficulties with a 'boundaryless' Church, not least in the theology of baptism. If baptism cannot function as the boundary of the group which is rightly called 'Church', nor can it be side-stepped as irrelevant by the identification of a neatly defined group of true believers within the baptised community.

6.3 BAPTISM AND THE CHURCH

In the previous sections of this chapter two aspects of Luther's ecclesiology have been examined. One is the doctrine of the *notae*, which expresses Luther's focus upon the appointed signs and trysting places which denote the existence of the community of faith gathered around them. The other is the invisibility of the Church, which Luther maintains against all attempts to sidestep or soften it. It remains to grapple with the implications for baptismal theology.

As so often in dealing with Luther, a correct understanding of his thought in this area requires the maintenance, rather than the resolution, of apparently unsustainable difficulties and tensions. Our present problem is the relationship in Luther's theology, or rather the apparent lack of it, between baptism as the visible sacrament of initiation and the invisible boundary of the membership of the Church. For Luther, as we have already hinted, the two most obvious ways of resolving this problem are unavailable. The Church cannot be made visible by a simple identification with the sacramental community, so that baptism becomes its boundary. On the other hand the visible community of the baptised cannot be ignored as effectively irrelevant to the membership of the Church by means of the drawing of a tighter inner boundary, separating off the true believers from the false. Nor, finally, can the tension be resolved by altering the practice of baptism so that the community of the baptised and the fellowship of true believers are made to coincide. Thus the baptismal theology of Rome, that of much of the radical reformation in general, and finally that of the *Täufer* in

particular, are all effectively excluded. With all these options ruled out, it is necessary to seek another model for the relationship of baptism and Church in Luther.

6.3.1 Baptism as Boundary of the Church?

In one sense, of course, there is no question but that baptism, as a rite of initiation, must operate as a boundary of the Church. But there are forces operating in the framework of Luther's theology which appear to distance baptism from the far more vital question of who is, and who is not, truly a member of the Church. If true membership of the Church has to do with matters entirely separate from the rite of baptism, then the sacrament appears to remain on the sidelines, with only a formal importance remaining to it. Thus baptism in Luther's theology would suffer a fate essentially the same as that which befell it in the medieval tradition. To test for true membership of the Church, for the possession of grace or salvation, one must look, not at baptism, but elsewhere. Baptism remains in its formalised — and fossilised — isolation.<sup>75</sup>

It is important that the nature of these forces be properly understood. The dynamic of the reformation theology of the years leading up to the breakthrough could be, and has been, presented as an 'anti-sacramental' impulse, freeing the Christian from abject dependence upon the churchly ministrations of sacramental grace. Thus Hendrix sees the *fideles* of the *Dictata* as having only a contingent relationship to the wider sacramental community.<sup>76</sup> This argument has already been dealt with in some detail. It



has also been argued above that Luther cannot with justice be presented as magnifying the word at the expense of the sacrament; any playing-off of one means of grace against another becomes increasingly alien to the mature Luther. The same Christ works in them all — they are all one.<sup>77</sup> The broader question of the potential independence of the true *fideles* from the wider sacramental community is linked with this. Since there can be no question of independence from the sacraments themselves, the potential independence is merely from one particular form of the sacramental community, namely the contemporary papal church. Further, we have sought to demonstrate above, *pace* Hendrix, that the invisible nature of the Church for Luther precludes any sustained attention on his part to a delimited *ecclesiola* or inner group within the sacramental community.<sup>78</sup> Nor will the two Churches theme serve to separate the *fideles* from the company of the baptised — the true Church is itself, a mixed 'wider sacramental community'.<sup>79</sup>

The impulses in Luther's theology which appear to distance baptism from the vital question of the limits of true membership of the Church do not do so, then, by creating a community of believers divorced from any dependence on the empirical sacramental community. They operate rather more subtly. Although no *visible* boundary marking off a discrete *ecclesiola* of the true believers can be admitted, there is most certainly a crucial *invisible* boundary. It is no less real for being invisible. This is the boundary which separates those who have the use of baptism in faith from those who have the sign without faith. It is the boundary which separates those who are members of the church *numero* and *merito* from those whose belonging is simply *numero*. Despite the mature Luther's continuing emphatic insistence

upon the validity and reality of baptism which is utterly independent of the faith which receives it, there remains a suspicion that the impetus towards the marginalisation of baptism is irresistible. Within the sacramental community — which almost means, for sixteenth-century Europe, within an entire society — all are baptised. But not all have faith, and thus the distinguishing principle of true membership of the Church for Luther surely has to be, simply, faith. How, then, can baptism relate to the invisible limits of the true membership of the Church, and how is its seemingly inevitable isolation at the margin to be avoided?

The answer to this conundrum lies in the 'tense' of baptism. Baptism cannot be confined to the past — it acts as call in the present. The baptised community may be an amorphous mass almost exactly co-terminous with the society in which it is set. But by virtue of baptism that whole community is called to hear the word of promise; and, in faith, to meet God, the author of the promise, at the appointed trysting places, including baptism itself. The *Genesisvorlesung* present three possible responses to this call. One is the obedience of faith. Another is illustrated by the arrogance and pride of those who despise the weakness of baptism and the other signs, and forsake them for a self-chosen worship of their own. The third possible response appears to be the direct opposite of the second; so far from despising and abandoning baptism some individuals and communities boast of their possession of it, or they sit back in idle false confidence.<sup>80</sup> But a complacent fleshly boasting in the signs and a proud despising of them, rather than being mutually exclusive, can readily co-exist, as they did in the case of Esau, who at the same time both despised and presumed upon his birthright.<sup>81</sup> Baptism divides individuals and communities from one

another when differing responses are made to its call. The false church and the true are distinguished precisely in this — the signs are at the centre of one community so that they become its marks, while the other despises them in rejection or presumption or both. Within the community gathered around the signs, itself a mixture of wheat and tares, the true *fideles* are distinguished by their stance in relation to the call.

But the present tense of this call and the response required must be underlined. The divisions between individuals and between communities we have spoken of must not be objectified into barriers with a continuing assured independent existence of their own. To rely on the boundary which separates me (or my community) from falsehood, constitutes an attempt to circumvent the unselfconsciousness of faith, by making it something which in itself is capable of being known and relied upon. To draw the boundary in this way is an act of presumption, places the individual who draws it in need of *conversio*, and denotes the community which draws it as false:

. . . we have two classes of Christians today. All of us who are baptised and are reborn through baptism are indeed called Christians, but we do not all remain true to baptism. Many desert Christ and become false Christians. There is a scarcity of true Christians, and there is also a false and a true Christian Church. The former boast . . . they glory solely in the title and the name . . . [they] merely bear Christ's name, and are Christians physically . . . [they] do not cling to the doctrine of forgiveness of sins and do not remain true to baptism or to the promise of Christ; but through false doctrines they separate themselves . . . They also make use of baptism and Holy Communion . . . but they are only outward and nominal Christians. They do not believe . . . Christ wants no-one to boast of being an Israelite or a Christian saying, 'I am baptised; I am a bishop, a canon or a preacher.' This is not enough. It must be your concern to believe, to conduct yourself as a Christian should . . .<sup>62</sup>

Sometimes Luther speaks as if it is sufficient merely not to desert one's baptism. Thus in the papal church children up to the age of seven or eight, if they die before they have understood and obeyed the teaching of their church, are saved, because they have not yet fallen away from their baptism, and their bridegroom.<sup>83</sup> At other times abiding in baptism appears in a far more active mode, and as a daily struggle.<sup>84</sup> This range of possibilities for the understanding of abiding in baptism highlights the tension we have already observed in the concept of faith itself. Although the overall tenor of Luther's teaching of faith implies the requirement for an active, positive believing, there are also some occasions when Luther appears to talk in a more negative and passive mode.<sup>85</sup> It is best not to attempt too great a precision about the subjective aspects of the way in which their baptism confronts individuals and communities as demand and as call in the present.

But the overall picture is clear. Baptism is indeed closely related to the boundary between those inside and those outside the true Church of God. Baptism is that boundary. The parallel with baptism and *conversio* in the previous chapter is exact. As the need for *conversio* cannot be consigned to the past because it never fails to confront the individual Christian, so those who are confronted by their baptism continue to stand right on the boundary between 'Church' and 'not-Church'. The twin possibilities of entering and of departure or abandonment always lie open before them — they must ever learn to abide in their baptism.

6.3.2 Baptism as determinative of the Church's Life

Baptism, as well as being the boundary of the Church, albeit in a highly idiosyncratic way, is also, as one of the *notae* or signs and places, right at the heart of the Church's life. The whole life of the Church is to reflect the fact that it is a community of the baptised; and it is to do so in a number of ways.

The *significatio* of baptism as death and resurrection not only determines the nature of the Christian pilgrimage; it also shapes the life of the Church. It denotes the Church as a community which lives under the 'holy cross', in weakness, trials and sufferings. The contrast between the success and fine appearance of the world, or the grandeur of the false church, and the unimpressive, persecuted, despised people of God is inevitable -- the Church is the community of the baptised, who are dying to the things of one world in order know the life of another. Their dying and poverty are visible; their spiritual treasures and future resurrection are not.<sup>86</sup>

The Church as the community of the baptised is also marked by a common sharing in freedom and vocation. All the members of the community have the same calling -- to devote themselves to their baptism, to the dying to sin and the old man and to the living of the new life before God.<sup>87</sup> "God has given every saint a special way and grace (*sehn sondere weyß und gnade*) by which to live according to his baptism. But baptism and its significance he has set as a common standard for all men, so that every man is to examine himself according to his station in life, to find out what is the best way for him to fulfil the work of his baptism, that is, to slay sin and

die . . ."88 They are to remain unshackled by all other vows and burdens.89 The one calling takes a multiplicity of forms — Luther's doctrine of vocation, as we have seen, is intimately linked to baptism, so that the individual callings of parent, husband, soldier, servant, etc., become the matrix upon which the dying of baptism is performed — within the community of the baptised.90 There are no differences in degree or worth amongst these callings.

The Church is a community of priests. Admittedly, in the *locus classicus* for Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, Luther makes no reference to baptism. But in *De Captivitate* Luther makes explicit what is implicit in *The Freedom of a Christian*: "Now we, who have been baptised, are all uniformly priests in virtue of that very fact. The only addition received by the priests is the office of preaching, and that with our consent."91 The separation of priests and laity "has proved to be unbelievably hurtful to baptismal grace, and to the confusion of fellowship based on the gospel", and it has resulted in the terrible domination and despising by the clergy of the laity, who, nevertheless, have been baptised with the Holy Spirit.92 The priesthood of believers is an expression of the centrality and all-sufficiency of the sacrament of baptism. It also represents a further dynamic in Luther's theology against the delineation of any spiritual elite within the Church. The barriers which separate man from man are reduced to only one — baptism.

6.3.3 Baptism and the Shape of the Church

Luther must be taken seriously when he talks of the marks of the Church. Baptism, as one of those marks, in fact as the first of them, is at the very centre of the Church's life, and stamps its character upon the whole. The doctrine of the marks demonstrates Luther's focus of attention at the centre, at what it is that denotes, guarantees and determines the life of the Church (§ 6.1.1). Yet almost the whole of our attention in this chapter has been upon questions concerning the boundary. In the complex web of distinctions and contrasts between true believers and carnal Christians, between the true Church and the false, the quest for a better understanding of baptismal theology poses the question about the limits of what can properly be called 'Church' for Luther. Baptism is in the unique and somewhat paradoxical position among the marks of the Church as having to function, not only as centre, but also as circumference.

How does baptism act as boundary of the Church? It does so in two ways. First it defines the entire community of the baptised as those to whom the word of promise of the forgiveness of sins is addressed. It brings them all under the call of dying to sin. Secondly, baptism divides men and women by the response they make to that word and call. The boundary of the Church consists in the different stances taken by individuals — and communities — towards its centre. Luther, with the medieval tradition, recognises two categories of membership in the Church (§ 6.2.2). But the inner group is no visible community of the faithful. The wider community in which baptism and the other signs are displayed is visible enough; the marks of the Church remove all doubt as to where the people of God may be found. Also clearly

visible are the parts of the baptised community where baptism is all but lost; where its freedom is muzzled, and new baptisms are sought in acts of penance and satisfaction, in monastic and other vows. But the circular or spiral 'shape' of the Christian life noted in the last chapter has its parallel in the 'shape' of the Church. In the same way that the beginning of the Christian life in baptism can never be left behind, but always confronts the Christian in the present as call; so the boundary (in this second sense) of the Church in baptism can never be definitively drawn. To solidify the boundary of baptism, by drawing it around a visible church of the righteous is not an option. It would be tantamount to removing the ever present call to faith and to dying to sin. Such a community could only become a community of the presumptuous and the righteous by works -- the false church *par excellence*.



6.4 CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this chapter need to be brought alongside those of the chapter 5 about baptism and the Christian life. The parallels between the two are striking. In both, there have been questions about boundaries: in one case the boundary of *conversio* at the beginning of the Christian life; in the other, the boundary of the true Church. And in both cases, it is the present tense of baptism, a thread which has run throughout this study, which is the key to a proper understanding, if not to a full resolution, of the tensions involved.

6.4.1 Difficulties with Boundaries

The impossibility of a visible, separated, community of the righteous *fideles* in Luther's theology is closely paralleled by the impossibility of visible, objectifiable, measurable progress in the Christian life. Thus Luther's abandonment of the 'ecclesiola project', if such it was, is in fact intimately linked with the notorious difficulties about sanctification in his theology. For Luther, the mind which seeks to draw or identify sharp boundaries which separate different stages of the spiritual journey of an individual, or to divide the true Christians off from other members of the baptismal community exhibits a mentality which has not grasped the full import of the doctrine of justification by faith.

From the soteriological angle, Luther does not exclude spiritual progress as a reality in the Christian life. As we have observed, he can be found speaking in the commonly accepted way which assumes that such progress is indeed to be looked for.<sup>93</sup> However, as soon as such progress is objectified, it becomes works-righteousness, and a new beginning again, a new *conversio* is required. Progress in the spiritual life must be reflected in greater love towards one's neighbour, as the Christian undergoes the baptism of dying to sin and self within the particular matrix of his callings.<sup>94</sup> But like faith, this love must not be conscious of itself — although progress in both faith and love is indeed to be looked for, it is not to be an object of attention for the Christian. The fundamental principle is that there can be no progress whatsoever away from the beginning, rather there must be a continual return to it. No one at all stands above the need to hear the divine word of promise of the forgiveness of sins, which stands at this beginning of the Christian life. There is a boundary, but I stand, never beyond it, but right on it, as *simul iustus et simul peccator*.

A community of those who perceive themselves to be *fideles* presents the same dangers. Such a community offers every chance for the development of works-righteousness, as it assumes itself to be on the right side of a barrier which separates it from all the faithless. Baptism will quickly be dead within a Church which does not attend to its continual call for a return to its beginning in repentance and faith.

The invisibility of the Church, the spiral or circular shape of the Christian life, the *simul* doctrine, and justification by faith all hang very closely together. In terms of the language we have been using in this

chapter and the last, it could be said that for Luther, the important boundaries are never *past* — nor indeed can they ever be said to have been *passed*. A Christian cannot look upon his or her conversion as a past event as if no future conversion was required. Likewise a church must never assume itself to be unmixed, or in no further need of reformation: *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*).

There is a boundary which separates individuals and defines the extent of the invisible Church as the community of true believers. But it is not a boundary which can be drawn as if it were visible and fixed, because it is one which continuously confronts individuals and churches in the present. Understood like this, the boundary is nothing other than baptism itself.

#### 6.4.2 The Present tense of Baptism

The 'present tense' of baptism has been the *leitmotif* of this study.<sup>95</sup> But what, precisely, is meant by it? Is it an artificial construct, foreign to Luther's own usage and thought, or does it express something very important about Luther's baptismal theology?

At its simplest level, the present tense of baptism has the negative role of debarring any putative 'second planks'. The positive side of the same theme is the assertion that there is no need for such replacements because the original, baptism itself, is still in full vigour. Thus the burden of the baptismal section of *De Captivitate* is the abiding, unsinkable ship, and

Luther's refusal to contemplate any gradual diminution of baptismal grace through sin (§ 4.3.1).

Secondly, baptism is present because it can always be recalled:

It will therefore be no small gain to a penitent to remember above all his baptism (*si poenitens primo omnium sui memoriam apprehendat*), and, confidently calling to mind the divine promise which he has forsaken, acknowledge that promise before his Lord, rejoicing that he is still within the fortress of salvation because he has been baptised, and abhorring his wicked ingratitude in falling away from its faith and truth. His heart will find wonderful comfort . . .<sup>96</sup>

Thus far, it could be argued that the present tense of baptism amounts only to the fact that it is a past event available to be remembered and relied upon, because it is a past event whose effects are lasting. But there is a third, deeper aspect to baptism's present tense, which lies in its *significatio*. The dying and rising again of baptism are not complete until death and the last day respectively. Until then, baptism is a continuous process:

You must understand baptism to mean something by which evermore you die and live, and, therefore, whether you use the confessional, or any other means of grace, you must still return to that very power that baptism exercises, and begin again to do what you were baptised for, and what your baptism signified. But baptism never loses its efficacy . . .

. . . indeed we are continually being rebaptised until we attain to the completion of the sign at the last day.<sup>97</sup>

But the present tense of baptism is centred above all upon the divine speech to be heard in it. In baptism there is an encounter between God and man, and as we saw at the beginning of our examination of baptism in the Genesis Lectures, Luther does not hesitate to describe it in terms of theophany.<sup>98</sup> God speaks his word of promise in different ways, through various means. One of the ways he addresses Christians -- in fact the first way he speaks this word to them, is in and through their baptism. He never ceases to address the baptised in this way; baptism remains as the trysting place of God and man, long years after the baptismal water is poured. The present tense of baptism arises from the fundamental principle of Luther's theology -- the word of the Lord on which baptism is predicated, "He who believes and is baptised shall be saved." This word is always to be heard in baptism; it is never silenced.

NOTES

1. So, for example, Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (London, 1953), p. 326: "It is the great strength of Luther's doctrine of the Church that he returns to the true centre of all ecclesiology, to Christ himself living and reigning in the midst of his people, exercising active and present sovereignty which he needs to delegate to none, since he is always at hand, through the Holy Spirit in the Word and in the Sacraments which are the visible Words. The first generation of Protestants had to get its centre right, as against the disruptive tendencies to split apart the Word and the Spirit, and the Word and the Sacraments. It was in the next generation that the problem of the circumference really arose . . ." So also Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (London, 1981), pp. 1-4.
2. 95 Theses (1517), thesis 62.
3. So Althaus, pp. 289f.
4. WA 51,478-485 = LW 41,194-198. See G. Rupp, "Luther against the Turk, the Pope and the Devil", *Seven-Headed Luther*, ed. P.N. Brooks (Oxford, 1983), pp. 267-70.
5. See above, § 2.2.1, pp. 40f.
6. On the priority of the word amongst the signs or places, see § 3.2.2 (p. 123) above. Avis (pp. 16f.) emphasises the predominance of the word, and implies in effect that all the other *notae* may be collapsed into one, the preached word of the gospel. While there can be no question that among the various marks of the Church there is a priority of the word to be acknowledged, it is far less clear-cut a matter than Avis appears to suggest. The polyvalence of *verbum* has to be addressed here as in the case of the appointed signs (§§ 2.3.2, 3.2.2), as must the lack of consistency in Luther's statements about the marks and the appointed places (see § 2.2.1) In the later period, any lauding of one of the means of grace or one of the *notae* at the expense of another is alien to Luther (see § 4.2.2, pp. 205f., for contrast with the *Dictata*).
7. See above, § 2.5.3, p. 82.
8. Avis, pp. 18,48ff. Although Bucer is the clearest example of this tendency, there are also hints of it in Oecolampadius, Melanchthon and Calvin, for example.
9. Avis, p. 49.
10. Melanchthon, who held to the Lutheran view of the Church as mixed and imperfect, containing hypocrites as well as true Christians, was nevertheless willing to include discipline as one of the marks. See Avis, p. 28.
11. So, for example Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia, 1981), pp. 126-130; Avis, p. 2.
12. See above, § 2.5.2.

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13. WA 597,4ff. = LW 5,244 on Gen. 28:16.
14. The Greater Catechism, WA 30,I,189,1f. = BC 416,45.
15. WA 44,24,36-25,14 = LW 6,34; on Genesis 31:19, Laban's idols.
16. WA 43,598,21-27 = LW 5,246 on Gen. 28:17.
17. For instance, LW 5,208; 6,34.
18. WA 43,67,27-32 = LW 3, 269, on Genesis 19:14.
19. See above, § 2.5.3, p. 83; note 167.
20. See for instance WA 43,598,7-16 = LW 5,245f.
21. WA 51,507,13ff. = LW 41,211; *Against Hanswurst*, 1541. At this point a misconception about Luther's ecclesiology must be addressed. In his otherwise illuminating survey Avis remarks: "Although wholly coherent in itself, Luther's radical ecclesiology proved too paradoxical to be workable in practice and even Luther himself was ultimately both unable and unwilling to implement it." He also says, "Luther's concept of the Church was the ecclesiology of a pure idealist" (pp. 6, 23f.) This view seems to accord with certain elements in Luther's understanding of the Church. Its hiddenness puts it beyond the reach of human apprehension — although, as Avis himself recognises, Luther repudiated the charge that he wanted a church with no more reality than Plato's republic (p. 4). The marks of the Church focus upon its centre, the impact made by the gospel in human society; not upon the need to define the circumference. Another factor in Avis's analysis is Luther's view of the Christian as beyond the need for "external sanctions imposed by the secular authorities" (p. 22). Thus Luther emerges as an incurable idealist engaged upon the laudable but hopeless task of attempting a purely spiritual government of the Church by the gospel alone. Eventually sad experience and common sense prevail; Luther is forced to abandon hope of putting his ecclesiology into practice, and his successors are obliged to construct a more workable concept of the Church with form, limits, and structure. (So Avis, pp 21-24.) Such a view cannot be allowed to stand. The sustained attention which Luther gives, in his complex teaching of the *zwei Reiche* and the *zwei Regimente*, to the situation of the Christian and the Church in the world belies any suspicion of an impractical idealism which fails to take the world seriously. Luther claimed with some justice to have paid more attention to this matter than any since Augustine. See Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Brighton, 1984), pp. 2ff. It was not Luther but the Anabaptists who took the independence of the 'pure' Christian, who needed no rule by the sword, literally, and who attempted a total separation of the two kingdoms. For Luther this was no less than a blasphemous contradiction of the life of the Christian on earth as expressed in the *simul* doctrine (Cargill Thompson, pp. 174ff.). Neither the true Christian, nor the true Church, exists on earth in unmixed form. (See § 6.2.3.) Far from being 'idealistic' Luther's teaching about the Church springs from a deep appreciation of the tensions involved in Christian existence, both individual and communal, in the world. On the invisible Church see also Lohse, pp. 178f. In my view Lohse does not allow sufficiently for the depth of the Church's invisibility in Luther's

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- thought, although he is right to caution against too simplistic an interpretation of this theme.
22. See above, § 2.5.2; also § 2.5.5 for the example of Jacob in exile. Another layer of paradox is the mixed nature of the Church; part of its poor appearance is its aspect of compromise and worldliness; see below, § 6.2.3, p. 318.
  23. WA 43,123,2f. = LW 3,345 on Gen. 20:8; see also Isaac's "ecclesiola", WA 43,483,10f. = LW 5,78 on Gen. 26:24f.
  24. WA 42,189,1f. = LW 1, 254 on Gen. 4:4.
  25. WA 42,333,41-334,6 = LW 2,101 on Gen. 7:17-24.
  26. WA 42,533,1-27 = LW 2,377f.; WA 42,310.10f. = LW 2,68; WA 43,665,17ff. = LW 5,342f.
  27. See above, § 2.5.2.
  28. So, for example, in the Genesis Lectures, the mighty giants of Gen. 6:4, WA 42,286,21-27 = LW 2,34ff.; the builders of the Tower of Babel, WA 42,401,35-42 = LW 2,198.
  29. WA 44,23,14-25,16 = LW 6,32ff. *passim*.
  30. WA 43,392,12-393,18 = LW 4,355ff. on Gen. 25:22, the sufferings of Rebecca.
  31. Bainton, p. 243.
  32. WA 19,75,3-30 = LW 53,63f. Luther regretfully concludes that "*ich habe noch nicht leute und personen dazu.*"
  33. For example, Avis, pp. 22f.; Bainton, pp. 242f.
  34. Hendrix, *Ecclesia in Via: Ecclesiological Developments in the Medieval Psalms Exegesis and the Dictata Super Psalterium (1513-15) of Martin Luther* (Leiden, 1974).
  35. Hendrix, pp. 17ff.
  36. Augustine, *Contra litt. Pet.* II 104,239 (PL 43,342f.); Hendrix, p. 19-21.
  37. Indeed baptism appears to become yet more marginal when the question of predestination is brought into play. Of those who will ultimately be saved, some have already attained a degree of advancement in the way of *caritas*; others press towards this, although they are still struggling with their natural desires (implying yet another division, this time between levels of spirituality within the inner group of *boni*). But there is yet a third group; those who cannot be classified as *boni* at all, but who lie "dormant in heresies and pagan superstitions". The elect can be found amongst them too; even here "The Lord loves his own." *De Baptismo* v. 27,28 (PL 43,195f.); Hendrix, pp. 23f. Although Augustine emphasises the indispensability of baptism, the extension of election beyond the boundaries of the baptised community points to a rather different logic, and a further weakening of baptism as an effective boundary of the community of the saved.



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38. Hugh of St.-Victor, d. 1142, theologian of Victorine house of Augustinian canons in Paris, is a good example of this. He divides beginners at the stage of repentance from those advancing in righteousness, and both from those perfect in glory. But all three groups are *boni*; outside all these circles lie the unrepentant *mali*, who themselves, however, are still within the community of the baptised (Hendrix pp. 44f.). Hendrix argues that this tendency towards the sub-division of the inner group tends to blur the outline of the inner 'mini-Church'. Yet paradoxically on its own this trend might well serve to emphasise the distinction between the *boni* and the *mali* rather than to diminish it; the latter are now more clearly identified as those who cannot be said to share the life of Christian pilgrimage at all.
39. Notably Hugo; see Hendrix pp. 45-51.
40. Hendrix, pp. 53-7. Both the younger and the older Luther would retain this phrase; WA 3,83,7 = LW 10,90 (scholion to Ps. 8:8); WA 43,428f. = LW 4, 406f.
41. See Hendrix, pp. 155-158, for an analysis of this.
42. WA 55,I,166,10; Hendrix p. 155.
43. For the narrower use of *fideles* in particular see WA, 3,207,7ff.;284,14ff.;414,24-415,1. Hendrix, p. 156.
44. Scholion to Ps. 35:18[19], WA 3,198,5-7 = LW 10,168.
45. WA 3,416,29f; LW 10,351f.; see also on Psalm 70:2, WA 3,444,11f. = LW 10,387, *tepidi et presumptuosi et schandalosi*; and on Ps. 73:1, WA 3,478.34 = LW 10,418.
46. WA 3,632,6-12 = LW 11,124f.
47. WA 4,55f. = LW 11,199; on Ps. 90:5f., "Thou dost sweep men away; they are like a dream, like grass which is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers." (RSV) The saints must pass from evening to morning through the night of affliction, while the carnal enjoy their day of prosperity before passing into an abiding night.
48. WA 3,150,16-151,4 = LW 10,125.
49. Hendrix, pp. 194ff.
50. Hendrix, p. 195.
51. Hendrix, pp.196f., appears to reduce the relationship between the *fideles* and the wider Church community to the question of whether or not faith can be nourished inside this community. This argument has the merit of reflecting the later teaching of the *articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae*. But its use in *this* context has the serious demerit of confusing the mixed community of wheat and tares with the false Church. They are by no means identical; and at this stage, the Roman Church is the former, not the latter, for Luther.
52. Hendrix, pp, 286f.
53. Hendrix, p. 196f.

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54. WA 3,417,34-418,2 = LW 10,353.
55. WA 3,432,34ff. = LW 10,373.
56. For example, WA 3,462,27-38 = LW 10,404.
57. On the older Luther's insistence that the membership of the Church is invisible see also Althaus, p. 292: "No earthly power can draw the boundaries of the church and decide who belongs to it and who does not."
58. WA 4,75,35-38 = LW 11,224f.
59. WA 3,577,38-578,37 = LW 11,62ff.; compare Hendrix, p. 197.
60. WA 4,77,24-34 = LW 11,227; scholion to Ps. 91:8.
61. Hendrix, p. 197.
62. On Psalm 68:31, "let Ethiopia hasten to stretch out her hands to God", Luther comments that the Church is symbolised by Ethiopia, which also, however, stands for the ungodly. "But the Church is symbolised and called by the name 'Ethiopia', as is sufficiently clear because of the blackness of sin and because the Church confesses itself to be black." WA 3,409,27f. = LW 10,350.
63. See above, § 2.5.2; note 153.
64. WA 51,478-485 = LW 41,194-198 Baptism comes in first place in this list — it has a natural priority because the 'additions' of Rome can all be regarded as putative replacements for a lost baptism, or as new baptisms.
65. WA 51,487-497 = LW 41,199-205. Again, the first aspect of papal teaching and practice that Luther condemns is the teaching "that the original baptism is subsequently lost through sin".
66. WA 42,270,22-35 = LW 2,12.
67. See above, § 2.5.3, p. 82.
68. ". . . *Deus nunquam Ecclesiam penitus deseruit, Etsi aliis temporibus copiosior, aliis tenuior fuit, Sicut etiam doctrina aliis temporibus purior, aliis obscurior est.*" WA 42,423,28-31 = LW 2,229.
69. See above, § 5.3.1, for the parallel difficulty with boundaries in the Christian life.
70. WA 51,516,15f. = LW 41,216.
71. See above, § 6.2.2, note 62.
72. WA 44,23,20,24 = LW 6,32 on Gen. 31:14-16. Luther's attitude to the mixed Church in this and other similar passages is to be contrasted with that of Calvin. Bouwsma talks of Calvin's pronounced natural antipathy towards 'mixture' of all kinds, and his preference for clear boundaries, whether between nations, the sexes, or between the elect and the reprobate. W.J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York, 1988), p. 34f. "The coincidence of church membership with residence in the town made the Genevan church a 'mixture' of righteous and wicked, a situation that, however he could reconcile himself to it doctrinally, aroused his deepest anxieties and drove him towards clerical supremacy. He yearned for a pure church,

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a visible and exclusive community of saints, however small." Bouwsma remarks that Calvin was closer in this regard to the Anabaptists than he cared to admit (pp. 217f.) On Luther's attitude see G. Rupp, "The Turk, the Pope and the Devil", p. 267; "The false Church belongs to the true Church as a shadow belongs to substance. But the two Churches do not simply coexist, but grapple incessantly. For behind Luther's view of the Papacy as a 'werewolf' is this picture of the false Church as a sinister *Doppelgänger*."

73. WA 51,505,7-13 = LW 41,209.
74. See above, § 6.1.
75. See Jetter, esp. pp. 169f., 215; for the isolation of baptism in the medieval tradition.
76. Hendrix, pp. 196f, see above, § 6.2.2, p. 312.
77. See above, §§ 2.2.1 (p. 43), 6.1.1 (p. 297).
78. See above, § 6.2.1.
79. See above, § 6.2.3.
80. § 2.5.3; "I am not baptised . . . for the purpose of sleeping and snoring at home in idleness", WA 43,617,23ff. = LW 5,274.
81. WA 43,428,16-22 = LW 4,406f. See above, § 2.5.6, p. 92.
82. Sermon on St. John 1:46, true and false Israelites, 1537; WA 46,707f. = LW 22,197.
83. WA 51,501,16-502,2 = LW 41,207.
84. See above, § 3.4.4, p. 152.
85. See above, §§ 3.4.3, p. 150.
86. See above, § 2.5.5, pp. 89f.
87. *De Captivitate*, WA 6,535,24-26 = LW 36,70; see above, § 4.3.1.
88. WA 2,735,18-22 = LW,35,40.
89. As we have seen, this is central to Luther's argument about the freedom of the baptised in *De Captivitate*; see above, § 4.3.1.
90. See above, § 3.5.3
91. WA 6,564,6ff. = LW 36,112.
92. WA 6,563,29ff. = LW 36,112.
93. See above, § 5.3.1, p. 281.
94. See above, § 3.5.3.
95. See especially §§ 2.3.1, 2.6, 3.2.4, 3.3.2, 3.3.3, 3.5.2, 3.7, 4.3.1, 4.3.4, 5.3.3.
96. *De Captivitate*, WA 6,528,20-24 = LW 36,59.
97. *De Captivitate*. WA 6,535,4-16 = LW 36,69. Tr. B.L.Woolf, in J. Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: selections from his writings* (New York, 1961), p. 303.
98. See above, § 2.2.2.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### LUTHER ON BAPTISM: Assessment

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Luther's mature theology of baptism has been set out, and some of its soteriological and ecclesiological dimensions have been explored. A number of *motifs* have made themselves apparent: the inseparability of word and water; the double-sided relationship of baptism and faith; the present tense of baptism; the unselfconsciousness of faith; the circular or spiral shape of the Christian life; the Church without boundaries. Some of these themes are familiar and immediately apparent to the most cursory reader of Luther; while others are less obvious and require more teasing out. Some are narrowly baptismal in their reference; others are indications of the two-way relationship between baptismal theology and its setting in Luther's wider thought.

The task of this final chapter will be to attempt an evaluation of Luther's baptismal theology, and especially of its characteristic themes. More precisely, since a full assessment of the significance and value of Luther's contribution to baptismal theology must ask questions which are beyond the scope of this study, it is the aim of what follows to offer some pointers towards that assessment.

7.1.1 The requirements of assessment

Ultimately, a complete evaluation would require the posing of at least three types of question. First, there are questions of *coherence*. Is Luther's theology of baptism internally consistent, despite the paradoxes and tensions within it? Secondly, there is the issue of *validity*. How does this doctrine fare when placed against the relevant norms of scripture and tradition? Lastly, the question of *value*, what is there here which is distinctive, and of abiding value to the Church?

The need to expose and assess the coherence of Luther's baptismal theology has been part and parcel of the investigation of the foregoing chapters. But the issues of validity and abiding significance cannot be addressed solely on the basis of this investigation; taken together they raise a wide spectrum of issues ranging from the interpretation of the biblical basis of baptismal theology through to the concerns of twentieth-century church polity. To evaluate Luther's baptismal theology in such a broad context cannot be within the scope of this study. But it will be possible, however, to view Luther's baptismal theology in its own, narrower, sixteenth century context, and in so doing to provide the basis upon which a wider assessment can be made.

Chapters 2 to 6 have been an exercise conducted almost wholly *within* the theology of Martin Luther. First, his mature baptismal theology has been presented from two very different angles with the object of building a multi-dimensional picture which not only clarifies the various formal issues in Luther's baptismal theology but also illustrates the dynamics of the role

played by baptism in his wider thought (Chapters 2 and 3). Secondly, the issue of continuity over time has been faced. Sufficient evidence has been gathered from earlier material to demonstrate a basic continuity in the central principles of Luther's baptismal theology between the years immediately after the reformation breakthrough and the later 1520's, when, after the teaching and activities of the *Täufer* had forced themselves upon his attention, the main features of his final position were in place. Some aspects of the mature baptismal theology have been traced back earlier still, and the close relationship between baptism and the central concerns of Luther's reformation 'breakthrough' has been demonstrated (Chapter 4). Finally, Luther's baptismal thought has been examined in relation to neighbouring areas of his theology. This has been done by viewing baptism in two different settings: the individual Christian life and its pattern; and the community of the baptised, the Church (Chapters 5 and 6). Thus much of the argument of these chapters has been driven by an attempt to demonstrate the inner consistency, first within Luther's mature baptismal thought, secondly within his theology of baptism across time, and thirdly between this and other areas of his theology. But all the difficulties, the apparent discontinuities, and the tensions which have been considered, whether they arise across time or between one field and another, are problems — real or apparent — between Luther and Luther.

Such an exercise, wholly within the thought of one man, is certainly of value. This is particularly so in the case of Luther. The complexities of his thought; the unrestrained, sometimes incautious, manner in which he prosecutes each theme which comes to hand; the immense variety in form, content, and style of the vast *corpus* of his works; the deeply paradoxical

nature of some of the concepts and tensions at the heart of his theology — all these factors conspire to make the discovery and elucidation of his inner consistency no easy matter.

But Luther's theology of baptism was not formed in a vacuum; a final appraisal of it must pose questions which go beyond Luther himself.

### 7.1.2 The scope of the inquiry

These wider questions may take a number of forms, and they may be asked with a variety of motives. First, there is the matter of tracing the different external influences upon the Reformer's developing baptismal views. Some 'sources' for elements of the mature baptismal theology have been noted in the course of the earlier chapters; most notably the Augustinian formula for the joining of word and water, and the nominalist emphasis upon the *potentia ordinata*.<sup>1</sup> In his use of *conversio*, Luther demonstrates the fact that he is heir to a lengthy and complex tradition.<sup>2</sup> But there are limits to the usefulness of investigations which seek explanations of elements in Luther's mature baptismal theology in the medieval tradition. The almost complete absence of baptism from the 'centre-stage' of Luther's thought in his formative years up to 1519 places something of a road block in the way of any thorough-going attempt to trace the influences of the tradition upon Luther's developed theology of baptism. Jetter's almost total failure to account for this 'baptismal reticence' on the part of the young Luther in terms of the tradition or other external influences upon him illustrates the point.<sup>3</sup>

Such external influences as there were upon the baptismal doctrine which emerged from the shadows of this formative period were almost entirely negative in character. Luther's baptismal theology betrays the way he reacted against his opponents, or rather, his perceptions of them. The vehemence of his reaction to all ideas of 'second planks' pervades his baptismal thought from *De Captivitate* onwards. But it is Luther's later reaction against the *Schwärmer* and *Täufer* which is the most potent external factor of all. His mature position on the relationship between faith and baptism, the vigour of his emphasis upon the foundation of baptism in the word of command, and his concept of faith itself, all testify to its influence. This is hardly surprising. It was the disorder in Wittenberg occasioned by the radicals which forced him to return from the Wartburg and to begin the rebuilding of the Church.<sup>4</sup> It was inevitable that from this moment, the diverse groupings of the radical reformation would be a powerful negative force in the development of Luther's thought.

There is a second level at which wider questions can be asked of Luther's theology of baptism. Here the issue is not confined to the influence of others upon Luther, or to his influence upon them. There is a need, rather, to compare Luther across a broad range of his contemporaries and near contemporaries. With some of them the question of influence, positive or negative, may not arise at all. But the comparison will remain instructive. At which points is his baptismal thought uncomfortably isolated? In which aspects does he stand on common ground, and with whom? It is only by answering questions like these that those elements which are truly distinctive in Luther's approach to baptism can be recognised.



Beyond this comparison of Luther with other sixteenth century theologies of baptism there is a third group of questions, at the widest level of all. Luther's baptismal theology, like all others, must be set in the context of almost two thousand years of Church history. What is its relationship to the New Testament, and to the Christian tradition? Is Luther isolated in his espousal of the present tense of baptism, the spiral shape of the Christian life, the unselfconsciousness of faith, and the other distinctive themes which have emerged from this study? The issue of biblical and other support becomes the more pressing the more distinctive Luther's contribution to baptismal theology is judged to be.<sup>5</sup> To questions of validity must be added those of applicability. How much value can a baptismal theology forged in the environment of sixteenth century *Christenheit* retain for a Church which lives in the pluralistic world of the late twentieth century? Such questions are of fundamental importance; they concern the lasting significance and worth of Luther's baptismal theology for the Church Catholic.

It is primarily with questions of the second category that this chapter must be concerned, however. A comparison with other sixteenth century traditions (§ 7.2) will provide the launching point for a final assessment of Luther's baptismal theology (§ 7.3). But it is to be hoped that the conclusions of this narrower investigation into Luther in his own time will point towards some answers to the ultimate questions of validity and significance. At the very least, the task of presenting Luther's baptismal thought in its distinctiveness must be an indispensable preliminary to assessing its ultimate value.

7.2 LUTHER AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Luther's opinion of the baptismal theologies of some of his opponents is already clear. He attacks a whole spectrum of errors. In their different ways the *Schwärmer* and the papists are guilty of separating what should be indissolubly joined; the water and the word of baptism (§ 3.2.3). The papists deny that the benefits of baptism are only to be received in faith, while the *Täufer* make baptism dependent upon faith (§§ 3.4.1, 3.4.3). Rome negates the abiding power of baptism in its turning to 'second planks' (eg. § 4.3.1). Many are guilty of despising baptism, and in one way or another seeking salvation and knowledge of God in a self-chosen religion or piety of their own (§ 2.2.3).

In the comparison with some of his contemporaries which follows, however, the focus of attention will move from his opponents to his fellow reformers. It will be important to know whether Luther was fencing with real opponents, and in what measure Luther's perceptions of his opponents were correct. But the central purpose of these comparisons must be to illuminate that which is distinctive in Luther's baptismal theology. And here, the greater the area of common ground, the more fruitful the comparison will be. The inquiry will begin with a brief survey of some representatives of views against which Luther reacted. But the centre of the argument will be a more detailed comparison with Zwingli and Calvin.

No attempt will be made in what follows to present a comprehensive survey of sixteenth century baptismal theology. The inquiry will be restricted to a few representative figures and groups. Nor, even with this small selection, will any attempt be made at a full appreciation of the baptismal theology of each individual or tradition in its own right. Rather, the brief survey of the various sources will be used to highlight the points of resemblance and contrast with Luther.

#### 7.2.1 The Council of Trent

The Council of Trent insisted upon an *ex opere operato* understanding of sacramental efficacy.<sup>6</sup> There is room for dispute about the precise meaning of the words, but there can be little doubt that the Council, faced with the teaching of Luther and of other Reformers that the sacraments require faith, for instance in the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII, intended to anathematise precisely this view.<sup>7</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Lutheran *motif* of the present tense of baptism did not escape notice at Trent. The Council insisted that the return of baptised sinners to grace must be accounted for by the sacrament of penance.<sup>8</sup> The notion that baptismal grace cannot be lost, so that post-baptismal sins are remitted by the renewal of baptismal faith was also specifically rejected.<sup>9</sup>

Insofar as the Council focused upon baptism, however, much of its attention was taken up with the third Lutheran proposition condemned in

*Exsurge Domine*, concerning the tinder of sin remaining in the soul after baptism, which Luther insists is enough to debar a baptised infant from heaven even without actual sin.<sup>10</sup>

It has been asserted that Luther "did not quarrel much" with Catholic baptismal doctrine.<sup>11</sup> Such a position can be maintained only by concentrating upon the admittedly rather elusive differences between the Catholic *ex opere operato* doctrine and the Lutheran indissoluble union of water and word, to the exclusion of Luther's vigorous assertions of the need for faith. It has been argued above that the mature Luther in no way retracts his earlier view that faith is the only way of receiving the sacrament to its use; in the later period, although this opinion is less conspicuous in the environment of the forceful assertion of the independent validity of the sacrament, Luther continues to hold it.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the difference concerning 'second planks' is no mere side issue, and Luther's theology of baptism can *only* be understood on the basis of the *perpetuum sacramentum* specifically denied at Trent.

### 7.2.2 The Radical Opposition

There will no attempt in what follows to disentangle the separate threads of the radical reformation, in order to present a coherent picture of the particular baptismal theologies of representative individuals or groups. Nor will there be an attempt at completeness; it is the points of contrast with Luther that are of interest. Rather, a thematic approach will serve to highlight several features which, although they may by no means necessarily

be common to all the elements which make up the *Täufer* and the *Schwärmer*, are sufficiently widespread to be important in a comparison with Luther.<sup>13</sup>

The focus of attention all too readily passes to the question of infant baptism. The dominance of this matter makes for difficulty; it overlies a complex web of other issues which divide Luther from his radical opponents.

The first such issue is best described as the divorce between outward sign and inner regeneration. One aspect of this is an attitude to externals very different from that of the mature Luther. When Luther attacks those who talk of a dog's bath, or who value the water of baptism as they value the water that a maid cooks with or that a cow drinks, he is not dealing with opponents entirely of his own imagination.<sup>14</sup> Karlstadt may be taken as an example. He insists that water without faith is merely bath water, which cannot affect the soul.<sup>15</sup> Already in 1520 Karlstadt is distinguishing between the inner baptism of tribulation from the water which is an allegory of it, but not the thing itself.<sup>16</sup> It must not be thought that a 'spiritualist' *denigration* of the water of baptism is typical of the radicals in general.<sup>17</sup> The denigration of the water specifically in the absence of faith, pre-eminently in infant baptism, is far more common. Thus when Sebastian Franck declares that the sacraments in the Church since the time of the apostles are nothing but a disgrace it is not the elements of the sacraments as instituted by Christ that he despises. For fourteen hundred years there has been no baptism at all, so the inner truth of baptism has been forcibly separated from the outward signs originally given.<sup>18</sup> The phrase 'water bath' can be used without pejorative intent.<sup>19</sup> It is the disjunction between the sign and its significance which is the primary point

at issue, although a generally negative attitude towards externals may in some cases make an important contribution towards it. There is a direct parallel in the distinction between spiritual and physical eating in the Supper. For the Karlstadt of 1523, the external sign of baptism is divinely commanded, and therefore is not to be discarded, but in his economy of salvation it has a marginal role:

. . . the Spirit is not bound to an external thing, nor does inner harmony have to be attested or authenticated by the external sign. Nor [should one assume] that the Spirit cannot perform his life and work without externals, John 4:13f., but [it should be done] simply without trust and comfort in externals.

Where, however, one knows some who think that eternal bliss (*selickeyt*) and true union depend on the sign, to them he shall denounce and condemn the external signs, though fittingly and properly, as Paul did with circumcision.<sup>20</sup>

It is scarcely possible to imagine pastoral advice more opposite in intent to that dispensed by Luther. It is at this point, rather than with Karlstadt's subsequent rejection of infant baptism, that his fundamental difference with Luther lies. The divorce between the inner and outer baptisms, between sign and effect, is the keynote of much of the radical opposition to Luther's baptismal theology.

A second important strand common to much radical baptismal theology is the insistence upon the appointed place of baptism in the temporal order of salvation. Thus Balthasar Hubmaier insisted against Zwingli that baptism had its allotted place in the scriptural order of events which began with the proclamation of the word, continued with hearing, faith, baptism, and finally issued in works.<sup>21</sup> Melchior Rink saw baptism as the 'capstone' of the

process of spiritual renewal. It points back to an experience of repentance and forward to a life of obedience.<sup>22</sup> Here is another contrast with Luther. The difference does not lie only in the fact that Luther specifically denies the importance of the temporal relationship between baptism and faith.<sup>23</sup> Hubmaier, followed by much of the Anabaptist tradition, is insisting upon an order which separates that which Luther so tightly joined — word and water — and which places the sacrament not at the beginning of the process but at or near its end. Luther's view of the tense of baptism is the exact opposite to this punctilious insistence upon its correct temporal location.

Its location at the end of the process of salvation places baptism on the side of human response, not on the side of the divine initiative. An individual's baptism seals the covenant pledge of faith, testifies to that faith before others, and commits him or her to live according to the new creation.<sup>24</sup>

Of these three themes the first and the third are at least partially reflected within the mainstream Reformation tradition by Zwingli.<sup>25</sup> Zwingli's defence of infant baptism tends to obscure the way that on several issues he is far closer to elements in the radical tradition than to his fellow reformer, Luther.

### 7.2.3 Zwingli

The distinguishing feature of Huldrych Zwingli's sacramental theology is the radical disjunction between signs and what they signify.<sup>26</sup> His

evaluation of the place of externals in religion is utterly different from that of Luther. Zwingli was motivated by a "profound suspicion of outward things in religion", and reacted against the medieval "superstitious attachment to people places and things".<sup>27</sup> The Luther of the *Genesisvorlesung*, with his specific emphasis upon the appointed signs and 'places' appears thoroughly 'medieval' by comparison with the markedly 'humanistic' mind-set of Zwingli.

The gulf which separates the two men is readily seen when their stance on the question of God's acting towards mankind with or without means is compared. Both reformers recognise that God can work without means, but that he works with them, in accommodation to human needs.<sup>28</sup> But it is in the conclusions which they draw from this double principle that they differ. Luther's continual plea is for attention to the ordered power, for the shunning of speculation about God in his essence. But for Zwingli, the contingency of the appointed externals preserves the freedom of the Spirit.<sup>29</sup> The 'sacramentarians' are those who direct people to trust in the symbols rather than in God himself.<sup>30</sup>

In the specific case of baptism Zwingli draws the distinction between the inward baptism of the Spirit and the outward rite with water. This in itself reinforces the principle that God is free to act without regard to the means:

All this simply leads one to realise that in Scripture baptism is understood in different ways, and that salvation does not depend on any form of outward baptism. Therefore we learn that water baptism is a ceremonial sign, to which salvation is not tied, as has already been proved by the example of the dying thief and others. . . . None save God can give [the inward baptism of the Spirit]. And nobody can be saved



without it. But it is quite possible to be saved without the other baptism of external teaching and immersion in water.<sup>31</sup>

The contrast with Luther could hardly be greater. Zwingli, like many of the Radicals, is dividing the inner and the outward baptisms. Luther will not allow sign and effect, water and word, to be separated.<sup>32</sup> Given the extent of the gulf between the two men, it may be thought surprising that baptism was one of the agreed articles at Marburg. There are two factors which may at least partly explain it. First, the dispute concerning the real presence at Marburg drew the focus of the debate on sacramental theology away from baptism towards the eucharist. The real presence issue highlighted the differences in a way that baptismal theology could not. The second factor which may account for the agreement between the two sides at Marburg is their common opposition to the Anabaptists.

After some early ambiguity Zwingli swung behind the practice of infant baptism.<sup>33</sup> He was to use a variety of arguments in support of his position. There is every precedent for baptising those whose faith will come later; John's baptism baptised men and women into Christ who as yet did not know him, and circumcision was given to those whose faith was still to come.<sup>34</sup> Later Zwingli was to develop an argument from the theology of covenant. Under both dispensations, new and old, God makes his covenant with a people. Although children cannot have faith, by synecdoche they are included among the people of faith.<sup>35</sup> The parallel with circumcision is grounded on the basic unity of the churches of the two Testaments: "Since therefore there is one immutable God and one testament only, we who trust in Christ are under

the same testament, consequently God is as much our God as he was Abraham's, and we are as much his people as was Israel."<sup>36</sup>

The participation of Luther and Zwingli on the same side in the debate about infant baptism is thoroughly deceptive, however. Zwingli finds no difficulty in accommodating the separation of baptism and faith precisely because of his insistence upon the distinction between the two baptisms, inward and outward. He opposes the Anabaptists because they attribute too much to the rite, and are too concerned with it. For Zwingli, "whoever makes being a Christian to depend upon the manner or fact of baptism is falling into sacramentalism and legalism."<sup>37</sup> Zwingli accused the Anabaptists of sharing in the Roman Catholic view that externals can affect the soul.<sup>38</sup> In so doing they "have no regard for the free election of God" as, "like the papists they think that salvation is tied to the symbols". Paradoxically Luther and the Anabaptists appear together in this context in opposition to Zwingli; they are both concerned with the right use of an appointed external sign, in sharp contrast with Zwingli, who professes indifference to outward forms.

Zwingli's doctrine of baptism, then, separates the outward rite from inner regeneration. The rite itself becomes a pledge of allegiance, a public declaration which Zwingli, the some-time army chaplain, compares to the act of a soldier publicly wearing the military insignia of his commander.<sup>39</sup> From this point onwards, it is inevitable that the baptismal theologies of Zwingli and Luther diverge so markedly that further more detailed comparisons would be only of very limited use. Admittedly, Luther was prepared to countenance the possibility of salvation without baptism.<sup>40</sup> Yet no-one bound the word

and the water; the sign, *significatio* and effect; and the inner and outer baptisms more tightly together than he.

7.2.4 Luther and Calvin on baptism (i): common ground

To compare the baptismal theologies of Luther and Calvin is a more complex task than a comparison with Zwingli, but by the same token also a more fruitful one. The differences are less immediately apparent, and in many ways they concern the balance and emphasis of the baptismal teaching, rather than points of formal disagreement.

The differences between Zwingli and Luther touch the very heart of the latter's baptismal teaching. By contrast Calvin, although he accepts Zwingli's view of baptism as a public confession or badge of Christian allegiance, refuses to make this the sole object of the sacrament.<sup>41</sup> He expresses clear support for Luther's cardinal principle, the inseparability of word and water. This is a principle valid for all sacraments.<sup>42</sup> The external signs appear in the context, so typical of Calvin, of 'accommodation'. The sacraments are an additional aid to faith; 'visible words' added in consideration of our carnal nature to "train us in accommodation to our sluggish capacity, just as nurses lead children by the hand."<sup>43</sup>

When Calvin insists that the signs must not be separated from the word, like Luther he is responding to opponents on two fronts.<sup>44</sup> His refusal to ascribe a secret virtue to the element is the counterpart of Luther's attack

on those who venerate the signs without attending to the word of promise or command joined to them:

Who, then, can say that we are cleansed by that water which certainly attests that the blood of Christ is our only laver? So that we cannot have a better argument to refute the hallucination of those who ascribe the whole to the virtue of water than we derive from the very meaning of baptism, which leads us away as well from the visible element which is presented to our eye, as from all other means, that it may fix our minds on Christ alone.<sup>45</sup>

In the same way, Calvin's attack upon those who look upon baptism as a mere sign springs from the same concern that Luther exhibits in his complaint against those who despise the sign; the word of promise has been left out of account. Calvin will not accept a view of baptism that restricts its value to a visible confession of faith before the world, on the model of the insignia of the commander borne by a soldier. In his refutation of this (Zwinglian) view he adduces Mark 16:16.<sup>46</sup>

Given this measure of agreement at the heart of the theology of baptism, it is possible to make a more wide-ranging comparison between Luther and Calvin than would be useful with the baptismal theology of Zwingli, which is built on a very different foundation. The area of agreement between Luther and Calvin extends beyond the foundation of the sacrament in the unity of word and sign.

Luther's teaching on the significatio of baptism finds its parallel in one of the benefits of baptism, namely, "that it shows us our mortification in Christ and new life in him."<sup>47</sup> The mortification of the flesh for Calvin is

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life-long. There is more than an echo of Luther's language when he says that it is "begun in baptism, is prosecuted every day, and will be finished when we depart this life to go to the Lord."<sup>48</sup> What Luther in the *Grosse Katechismus* describes as what baptism *nütze, gebe und schaffe* also finds its equivalent with Calvin. It is true that the benefits of baptism are not treated by Calvin as conceptually distinct from its significance, as is the case with Luther. Instead they are placed side by side. Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>49</sup> It denotes mortification. But thirdly, it also assures the baptised of their union with Christ and of their part in all his blessings.<sup>50</sup> Despite the difference in vocabulary Calvin, like Luther, speaks of salvation as the benefit and goal of baptism.<sup>51</sup>

Luther's double principle on the question of faith and baptism also has its counterpart in Calvin's approach to baptism. "The sacraments confer nothing, and avail nothing, if not received in faith . . ." Calvin uses the simile of a closed vessel, which cannot receive what is sprinkled on it, and thus remains empty, to depict the case of the absence of faith.<sup>52</sup> But neither the unworthiness of the minister nor a lack of faith on the part of the baptisand compromises the dignity of baptism itself.<sup>53</sup>

Although it is very different in method, style and tone, Calvin's defence of infant baptism is as vigorous as that of Luther. If Luther's defence is marked by the variety of seemingly unrelated arguments that he employs, the argument of Calvin is marked by a single-minded concentration upon one clear theme. Calvin's insistence upon the unity of the covenant across the divide between the Testaments enables him to insist on the parallel with circumcision, and to ground his defence upon the concept of covenant. Most

of the other arguments which he employs in *Institutes* IV,xvi are responses to the reasoning of opponents. Thus to the Anabaptist insistence that faith comes by hearing Calvin replies with what appears to be a near relation of Luther's *fides infantium*. There is no compelling reason to suppose that those who die in infancy, and are shortly to receive the full illumination of God's light, should not already experience irradiation with "some small beam" of that light. Unlike Luther, Calvin is quick to deny that such illumination can be called 'faith', at least without qualification:

I would not rashly affirm that they are endued with the same faith which we experience in ourselves, or have any knowledge resembling faith (this I would rather leave undecided); but I would somewhat curb the stolid arrogance of those men who, as with inflated cheeks, affirm or deny whatever suits them.<sup>54</sup>

The fact that Calvin balks at describing this illumination of infants as faith may perhaps be taken as evidence that his thinking requires, as Luther's did not, that human conditions (of intellect and will?) must be satisfied before there is a possibility of faith.<sup>55</sup> But his argument here has exactly the same structure as Luther's; it is hypothetical in form. When Calvin, still answering the same Anabaptist objection, talks of baptism for future repentance and faith, he refers to the 'seed' of faith and repentance which "lies hid in them by the secret operation of the divine Spirit."<sup>56</sup> This 'seed' reflects the centrality of the doctrine of divine election in Calvin's thought. But it also highlights the way that Calvin, like Luther, allows baptism and faith to be separated in time.<sup>57</sup>

In the same way that Luther's hypothesis of *fides infantium* is ultimately dependant upon the primacy of the divine warrant for baptism, the argument from the seed of faith is subsidiary to the central plank in Calvin's defence.<sup>58</sup> Circumcision and baptism are two different signs of one and the same covenant. There is no difference in the promise (forgiveness of sins) or in the signification (regeneration).<sup>59</sup> Although Luther does not make use of this defence in the *Grosse Katechismus*, he shares the presuppositions upon which Calvin grounds it. The promises attached to baptism and circumcision are one and the same spiritual promise. Circumcision and baptism are two signs of one covenant.<sup>60</sup>

The number and variety of the resemblances between Luther and Calvin in the various *loci* of baptismal theology is a function of the measure of agreement between them on the fundamental matter of the conjunction of word and sign. But there is also an element of contrast which emerges equally strongly from the heart of their baptismal teaching.

#### 7.2.5 Luther and Calvin on baptism (ii): contrasts

Calvin, like Luther, insists that the word must be brought into the reckoning when the sign is considered. But Luther also inveighs against those who seek the word in isolation from the sign.<sup>61</sup> Here the differences between the two men begin to make themselves apparent. Calvin is by no means so completely a theologian of the *means* of grace as the mature Luther, and the vigorous assertion of the importance of externals does not have the same place in his theology.

For Calvin the word of the gospel and the sacraments are not on the same plane. The way that he speaks about the latter in the context of the divine accommodation to human weakness as 'added' underlines their essentially secondary position, as does the way that the 'seeing' of the sacrament does not stand on its own but is the confirmation of the 'hearing' of the word.<sup>62</sup> This is emphatically not the case with the older Luther, who places the preached word *alongside* the other external signs, and who refuses to rank the means of grace.<sup>63</sup> Another aspect of the sacraments as 'added' to the word is Calvin's emphasis upon the subjective dimensions of their function as 'seals' of the divine will, in nourishing and increasing faith.<sup>64</sup>

The secondary position of the sacraments with Calvin reflects a different general attitude towards externals than that of the mature Luther. Calvin shares with Luther a belief that the plethora of signs in the Old Testament from Eden onwards are to be ranked with the sacraments of the New Testament.<sup>65</sup> And although he cannot subscribe to the belief that where the text of Genesis talks of God speaking the reader is to infer that he did so through a human agent, Calvin commends the motives of the 'good men' (Luther?) who do so against the spiritualising of the Anabaptists.<sup>66</sup> But he insists, in a section (*Institutes* IV,xiv,17) of particular importance for the interpretation of his sacramental doctrine, that moderation must be observed in sacramental theology, and more must not be claimed for the sacraments than should be claimed for them.

This 'moderation' is reflected in his caution concerning what may be attributed to the external signs themselves. "They do not of themselves bestow any grace, but they announce and manifest it, and, like earnest and



badges, give a ratification of the gifts which the divine liberality has bestowed upon us." God in no way "resigns his office to external symbols"; the secret, internal operation of the Spirit makes the sacraments fruitful in the elect, but is in no way bound to them as "vessels and vehicles".<sup>67</sup> Calvin's prohibition of emergency baptism is a consequence of his denial of the necessity of baptism for salvation, which itself reflects Calvin's refusal to empty the operation of the Spirit into "vessels and vehicles".<sup>68</sup> For Calvin the washing of water and the cleansing in the blood of Christ are utterly distinct, and the power of one must not be predicated of the other.<sup>69</sup> The reverse is true of Luther. For him the water of baptism is so closely joined to the word that he is free to make the most immoderate claims for it without qualification or restraint.

This important difference is evident even where Calvin appears to be drawing insights from the heart of Luther's baptismal theology. Calvin insists upon the present tense of baptism. Baptism signifies a life-long mortification.<sup>70</sup> The washing and purification of baptism embraces the whole course of an individual's life; there is no need to seek other remedies, other 'sacraments', for post-baptismal sin. "Wherefore, as often as we fall, we must recall the remembrance of our baptism, and thus fortify our minds, as to feel certain and secure of the remission of our sins."<sup>71</sup> The difference between Luther and Calvin here is a matter of emphasis and use. The focus of Calvin's attention is upon the human act of remembering, which is in accord with his view of the sacraments as divine accommodations to the weakness of his people, and their need for visible stimuli to faith. But for Luther the theme of the present tense of baptism cannot be exhausted in terms of the act of remembrance. The human use of the sacrament can never

be the focus of attention, however important it is. For Luther, the abiding of baptism is the very presence, activity and speech of God himself.

7.2.6 Summary: Luther and his Contemporaries

The bed-rock of Luther's baptismal theology is the joining of word and water in his interpretation of Augustine's expression, *Accedit verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum*. It is possible, without over-simplification, to express the distinctiveness of his view in precisely these terms.

Those who denigrate the water of baptism, or who on the basis of texts like John 6:63 ("the flesh availeth nothing") deny the water of baptism any spiritual power, are charged by Luther with leaving the word out of account. With the word, the water of baptism is indeed, 'holy'.<sup>72</sup> But Luther distances himself also from the Roman view. The Church of Rome also leaves the word out of account. Although Luther, like the papists, is content to allow a virtue in the water, such virtue is only there because of the word of promise. The nature of baptism as the union of water and word of itself imposes the necessity of the hearing of faith.

But there is also the possibility of a seeking of the word in separation from the sign. In Luther's eyes, the *Schwärmer* were guilty of this error, which is, of course, the obverse of their other mistake, the despising of the water considered apart from the word. But a comparison of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin is also profitable at precisely this point. Here two questions run in parallel. First, there is the matter of the divine use of means. How

far and in what way is the offering and conveyance of grace tied to the external signs which God has appointed? Secondly, in the particular case of baptism this wider question implies a more specific one. What is the connection between rite and effect, between the administration of the water and regeneration, between outward and inward baptisms?

With Zwingli there is a radical *disjunction* between the two baptisms, which corresponds to his negative assessment of the place of externals in religion, and to his understanding of baptism as confession or pledge. God most certainly does not tie himself to means; the word is available without the water. Calvin insists upon the *distinction* between the administration of the water and the operation of the Spirit, but does not permit a dissociation of the two. God, through the Spirit, "countenances his own ordinance, preventing the administration of the sacraments which he has instituted from being fruitless and vain".<sup>73</sup> Thus the unity of the inward and outward events is not fundamental, but is contingent upon the divine election. This corresponds to Calvin's view that God has added the sacraments to the word to nourish and stimulate faith; there is no absolute necessity. Where we cannot receive the sacraments 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>74</sup>

For Luther, God has bound himself to the signs. He has not done so in the ultimate sense of abandoning his freedom to act outside them, nor is the necessity of baptism absolute.<sup>75</sup> Luther's doctrine of baptismal regeneration has to be interpreted in terms of the tense of baptism, and cannot, therefore, be seen in terms of an instantaneous imparting of grace at the

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moment of baptism. But that outward baptism and inward regeneration are indissolubly linked for Luther there can be no doubt. This unity is a function of that between water and word.

7.3 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS7.3.1 The Middle Way?

It would be possible to paint Luther as a man of the middle way in his baptismal thinking.<sup>76</sup> There is no question but that Luther saw himself in these terms, as a man with opponent on two sides. He rejects the quasi-magical view of the working of the sacramental system which he saw in the Catholic *ex opere operato* understanding. From the middle 1520's onwards he reacts increasingly strongly against the multiplicity of radical and Anabaptist theologies which he sees as undermining baptism, assurance, and faith, and as inaugurating a new theology of works by making baptism and thus salvation itself dependent upon the human factors of religious experience and possession of a certain faith.

From one point of view Luther does indeed appear as the theologian of the middle way. He stands with Catholic Christendom in his uncompromising assertion of the utter objectivity, reliability and validity of the sacrament of baptism. And yet he will by no means allow a presumptuous, faithless, boasting in baptism. On the question of the necessity of faith for the receiving of the benefits of baptism his stand is equally firm. From the point of view of his radical opponents Luther is very much the Reformer of the over-cautious middle path, whose failure to follow through to the logical conclusions of his theology was evidence of a culpable timidity. The question of infant baptism, the focal point of so many soteriological and

ecclesiological issues, was the most obvious example of this Lutheran failure of nerve. There is a temporal dimension to the picture. The Luther against whom the *Täufer* struggle is the older, established, Luther whose unrestrained use of the civil power against them, and intemperate language in dialogue with them, reflect his increasingly bitter conservatism. By contrast the Luther of Catholic perception is the younger Luther, the 'German Hercules' who threatens to bring the whole edifice of Christendom crashing down. But the continuity which has been demonstrated in Luther's baptismal theology unites these two Luthers as one Luther, the Luther of the consistent middle way.

The imaginary map so often drawn to represent the spectrum of Christian theology and practice in the middle years of the sixteenth century, could be applied to the particular field of baptismal theology. Between the Roman Catholics and the different shades of Anabaptist at either extreme would stand the mainstream Reformers. But Zwingli, with his separation of inner and outer baptisms, and his view of baptism as covenant pledge or as a badge of Christian confession and allegiance would stand much closer to the 'left' than Luther, with his insistence upon the joining of word and water, and upon baptism as God's work. On such a map it would probably be Calvin who should be placed nearest the exact centre. He distinguishes the inward baptism from the outward rite without, however, insisting upon a complete disjunction. He retains infant baptism, and, unlike Zwingli, he refuses to allow the human act of confession and pledge to exhaust the use and meaning of the sacrament. Luther's mature baptismal teaching appears on the moderate centre-right on such a map. That such a picture could be drawn

with some basis in truth cannot be denied. But from another point of view it would be utterly misleading.

Luther's baptismal theology cannot with the least credibility be presented as 'moderate', or as the fruit of a compromise between the conflicting claims of the necessity of faith and sacramental objectivity. At the heart of Luther's understanding of baptism lies no uneasy and shifting balance between various competing insights and emphases, which moderate and limit one another. There is rather an inescapable and consistently maintained *tension* between different theological assertions, all vigorously held and defended. 'Tension' and 'paradox' are far more appropriate descriptions of Luther's baptismal theology than 'compromise' or 'moderation'.

At the heart of Luther's theology of baptism is the tension between the absolute requirement for faith without which its benefits cannot be received, and the sacrament understood as a divine work whose effectiveness and power by no means depend upon human faithfulness. Other tensions hinge on this central one; in general they operate between the subjective and the objective factors in theology. One concerns baptism and the assurance of salvation; Luther denies the right of boasting, yet deflects all confidence away from faith to baptism and the other means of grace. From one point of view '*baptisatus sum*' is the presumption of the arrogant; from another it is the cry of faith which seeks — and finds — confirmation of salvation outside itself. Baptism functions both as the assurance of entry into the kingdom and as call to repentance and faith. Another tension concerns the nature of faith itself, with Luther's rigorous demand for a conscious *fides explicita* in

apparent head-on collision with his recognition of *fides aliena* and his explicit denial of the self-consciousness of faith.

### 7.3.2 Resolving the Tension: (1) The Objectification of Grace

From Luther's standpoint, his opponents can be shown to have resolved these tensions in one way or another. In the Roman Catholic understanding this resolution of tension may be presented as involving the *objectification of grace*. Grace is conveyed by the administration of the sacraments *ex opere operato*. It is conveyed effectively. There is no counterbalancing insistence upon faith, merely the negative requirement that no obstacle be interposed. But with the thought of its 'conveyance' grace risks becoming an entity in itself, apart from the one source of salvation, Christ. Once distinct from its source, it is inevitable that in the medieval sacramental system grace is also fragmented. Baptismal grace is different from the grace of penance, confirmation, or orders. It applies to a particular stage in the Christian life; it avails for the cleansing of original sin. But it needs supplementation or replacement at later stages of the life of the *viator*. For the Christian baptism is effectively confined to the past; no role is left to it for the present.

Another characteristic of a baptismal theology which objectifies grace, and which further underlines the punctiliar 'tense' of baptism, is a narrow focus upon the moment of administration itself. 'Baptismal regeneration' becomes the event of that moment. It is also almost inevitable that such intense concentration upon the rite and upon precisely what is conveyed in



it, will in the context of a series of other rites — chrismation, the laying on of hands — lead to disputes about precisely which aspect of the saving process, which parcel of grace, should be attributed to a given sacramental action.<sup>78</sup>

With Luther, grace is not a substance, which is capable of division or of conveyance in measured quantities; when he speaks of grace he speaks of Christ himself.<sup>79</sup>

### 7.3.3 Resolving the Tension: (11) The Objectification of Faith

To ground the validity and efficacy of baptism upon faith is nothing less than an attempt to base salvation upon human religious experience and potential. For Luther, it constitutes a new *theologia gloriae*, a new celebration of human works. Paradoxically, the doctrine of justification by faith can only be sustained when faith itself is far from the focus of attention. Faith must have a certain 'will o' the wisp' quality about it, as it looks away from itself to the word of promise. And with Luther it *does* exhibit precisely this elusiveness; sometimes he praises its power and creativity beyond measure, at other times he warns against a faith which presumes to be certain of itself. Faith, like love, must be unselfconscious: it must never be *incurvatus in se*.<sup>80</sup>

From Luther's point of view attempts to resolve the central tensions of baptismal theology by removing all traces of sacramental efficacy fall into this trap. Anabaptist baptism, because it is based upon faith, becomes a

witness to human piety and religious excellence. Precisely because of this foundation, it also becomes chronically uncertain. But evidence of this method of evading the tension is not confined to the Anabaptists, their fellow radicals, their successors or their modern equivalents. It can also be found in the well-springs of the Reformed tradition.

Separation of the inward spiritual baptism from the outward rite on the model of Zwingli focuses attention on the former at the expense of the latter, which can no longer represent a ground of assurance. It is no longer a divine work, but a human response. Calvin's insistence upon the Spirit's independence of vessels and vehicles, though more subtle, has the same effect. The new birth is no longer irrevocably bound to baptism. The fine balance between subjective and objective is lost. As a result, the Christian's attention is almost inevitably increasingly directed towards the evidence (or lack of it) for election and regeneration in his or her spiritual state.

The great twentieth-century interpreter of the Reformed tradition, Karl Barth, unreservedly places baptism on the side of human response, as he refuses to allow the 'sacramental' interpretation of it as a divine work. His fierce opposition to this view "is directed against [the] conjuring away of the free man whom God liberates and summons to his own free and responsible action."<sup>81</sup> One aspect of Barth's approach which he shares with the Reformed tradition in general is the thoroughness with which he separates the baptism with the Holy Spirit and the rite of water baptism. The latter for Barth becomes a purely human act, a prayer offered in free obedience for the former, but not in presumptuous certainty, as the Spirit must remain free.<sup>82</sup>

The subject of baptism can only be human, and infant baptism is ruled out precisely because when an infant is brought and carried to baptism, as opposed to the responsible adult, who freely and responsibly hastens towards it, "He is not a subject . . ." There are most certainly human requirements which must be satisfied by baptismal candidates (and the baptising community). They must be "human beings who are capable of thought and action and who may be summoned as such to conversion, obedience, hope, and the decision of faith."<sup>3</sup> An infant cannot satisfy these criteria, and, sadly, it must be added that on Barth's presuppositions, many people of full physical age would be permanently excluded from baptism on account of their mental incapacities.

Barth is careful not to allow the reality of conversion, or of the baptism in the Holy Spirit to which water baptism is directed to depend upon the quality of the decision of faith. But it is hard to see how the Christian's assurance can rest on other than subjective foundations when (a) the freedom of God with regard to the new birth is so strongly emphasised, and (b) the step which begins the journey of Christian obedience is so very much a human step (albeit one whose very possibility arises from grace).

This is in sharp contrast with Luther's consistent refusal to allow any attention to be paid to human capacities whatsoever. For Luther, faith does not attend to itself, but to Christ.

7.3.4 Luther: Maintaining the Tension

Far from being at or near a notional centre point in the spectrum of sixteenth century baptismal theology, Luther is radically isolated. He is alone in his refusal to resolve the tension which lies at the heart of his understanding of baptism.

His mature theology of the means of grace commits Luther to the centrality of the *potentia ordinata*, and to a God who has chosen to be revealed under the weakness of his chosen masks. The mystery and majesty of God apart from the masks is fully preserved — paradoxically, just as the revealed God is the God hidden under his opposite the uncovered God is the hidden God in and for himself, who must be left alone. The sovereign freedom of God to act apart from the regular ways of the *potentia ordinata* is also asserted by Luther.<sup>64</sup> But when measured against the standard of the emphasis of Calvin and much of the Reformed tradition upon the *freedom* of God with respect to the sacraments, all Luther's attention is upon the way that God has *bound* himself to the appointed signs and places, including holy baptism. He *is* truly to be found, encountered and heard there. No doubt about that can be permitted. Faith hears the words of the divine promise and, in believing them, receives all that the sacrament of baptism gives, conveys, and effects. Without faith, this 'use' of baptism is not possible.

And that is all that needs to be said. The tension in Luther's baptismal theology can only be maintained by a refusal to pose questions which go beyond this. Once faith starts asking questions of itself -- is it sufficient? is it certain? -- it is no longer attending to God as he is

revealed where he wills to be found. But on the other hand, when faith begins to pay attention to the sign itself apart from the word, and to build its confidence upon the fact of possession; then faith is no longer faith but presumption. Here too, inadmissible questions are being asked. 'What happens' at the moment of baptism? What spiritual good have I, as a baptised person, to call my own? But faith looks neither at its possession of spiritual capital in boastful complacency, nor at its own strength or weakness in agonised introspection. It gazes only upon Christ.<sup>85</sup>

To some it has appeared that the tensions surrounding baptism in Luther's theology are unsustainable. His recognition of baptismal regeneration is seen to be on a collision course with the central discoveries of his reformation breakthrough, above all with his doctrine of justification by faith.<sup>86</sup> Yet Luther's baptismal doctrine, properly understood, is one of his sharpest expressions of justification by faith. The utter objectivity of baptism as divine word and work prevents the faith which grasps it becoming a self-conscious work of human piety. But it is Luther's insistence upon the present tense of baptism which demonstrates the closest links to the heart of his reformation theology. This is a current which flows throughout Luther's thought. Its sources can be traced as far back as the *Dictata*; it bursts into the open in *De Captivitate*; and carves out a broad course through the later years. Luther's understanding of baptismal regeneration must be interpreted in its light.

The Christian stands *coram Deo* in the present moment. All claims to past progress in the spiritual pilgrimage, to religious experience, to a past conversion, to present growth in holiness, are disallowed; such things, once

relied upon, become the righteousness of works. Even though the life of the baptised is to be a life-long, daily death and resurrection, merely to ask the question, to attend to the results of the process, is to fail to direct the attention of faith to the correct place. The abandonment of all claims to a visible, pure, Church is a logical consequence of this prohibition. There are no pure believers to constitute it. All boundaries are dissolved save those which pass *through* the individual at the point of crisis.

The present tense of baptism is the ground of the Christian's assurance. No sin can destroy its permanence, no past desertion of his baptism can compromise the utter objectivity of the promise of God uttered there, or abolish the possibility of attending to God there. But the present tense of baptism also constitutes the Christian's calling. It is the calling to experience death to the old man and regeneration in the new in the obedience of daily life within the matrix of all particular callings. The Christian may have experienced this death a thousand times before. Regeneration in newness may have been going on for many years. But its result — the new man — is hidden to the individual, and must remain so. The life-long process is open to God. Others may see some evidence of it, including the neighbours whom the Christian is called to serve in the unselfconsciousness of love. But for the Christian his own 'baptismal regeneration' is concentrated upon the present moment. In his baptism he has one of the appointed trysting places for his encounter with God, where he hears the promise and call of God. Progress in the Christian life is not only possible but is of its very essence — the *significatio* of baptism requires it. But this progress, which is the reference of 'baptismal regeneration', is not available to the individual as an object for inspection. Nor can it be

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progress onwards from the first step of baptism, as if the word and call of baptism did not need to be heard again, and the gospel itself did not take a lifetime to apprehend. For the Christian, there can only be one direction to move — back into his baptism: *semper es in motu et initio.*

NOTES

1. See above, §§ 2.2.4 (p. 48), 2.3.2 (p. 59).
2. See above, §§ 5.2.1, 5.2.2.
3. See above, § 4.2.4.
4. Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career*, pp 51-68; Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists*, p.115.
5. Isolation in itself is not a disqualifying handicap. Barth attacks Luther's theology of baptism precisely at those points where he is *not* isolated, deploring the 'sacramental' understanding of baptism which Luther shares with many others in an ancient tradition, against which Barth himself takes a lonely stand. Barth, CD IV,4 pp. 102ff.
6. Session VII, Canon 8.
7. BC, 35f.; 213.
8. Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, Vol. II, trans. Dom Ernest Graf, (Edinburgh, 1961), p. 171.
9. Jedin, p.372.
10. Jedin, pp. 145f.
11. Harry Loewen, *Luther and the Radicals* (1974, Waterloo Ontario), p. 81. See also Louis Bouyer, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism*, tr. A.V. Littledale (London, 1956), pp. 236-239 for a spirited Roman Catholic defence of an *ex opere operato* view of sacramental efficacy as an expression of the foundation of the sacraments in the creative word of God.
12. See above, §§ 3.4.1; 4.3.3.
13. This procedure is only excusable on the grounds of the limited purpose of this investigation (see above, § 7.2.). Luther was himself aware of the existence of different strands within the movement, however hazy and prejudiced his knowledge may have been. Further, he specifically recognised the relevance of these differences in the field of baptismal theology. See Grönvik, p. 149.
14. Eg. WA 30,I,214,35f. = BC 439.
15. *Of Holy Water and Salt*, Wittenberg, 1520, A3v.; C.A. Pater. *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptist Movements: The Emergence of Lay Protestantism* (Toronto, 1984), p. 100.
16. Pater, p. 101.
17. Pater, p. 100, distinguishes Karlstadt's position from a spiritualist dualism of matter and spirit and a consequent total denial of worth to the external sign. See also p. 151.
18. Franck, *A Letter to John Campanus* (1531), trans. in G.H. Williams and A. Mergal, eds. *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, (London, 1957), p. 149.



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19. As, for example, by Melchior Hoffman in *The Ordinance of God* (1530), tr. in Williams and Mergal, pp. 187,190.
20. *Von manigfeltigkeit des eynfeltigen willen gottes, was sund sey* (1523), G2v.; Pater, p. 105.
21. Marlin E. Miller, "Baptism in the Mennonite Tradition", *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LXIV (No. 3) (1990), p. 234.
22. Oyer, pp. 78,80.
23. WA 30,I,219,12-18; see above, § 3.4.1 (pp. 143f.).
24. So, for example, Rink (Oyer, p. 78); Hubmaier (Miller, p. 243).
25. See below, § 7.2.3.
26. W.P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford, 1986), p. 185.
27. Stephens, p. 187.
28. Stephens, p. 188; cf. §§ 2.2.3, 2.2.4 above.
29. Z VI,iii,271,10ff.; Stephens, pp. 186f.
30. Z VI,iii,165,1-166,7; Stephens, p. 187.
31. Z.IV,224f.; G.W. Locher, *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives* (Leiden, 1981), p. 219. The immediate context is Zwingli's response to the Anabaptist prescription for a particular form of outward baptism.
32. See above, § 3.2.3.
33. Stephens, pp. 194f.
34. Stephens, pp. 196f.
35. Stephens, pp. 208f.
36. Z VI,170,12-16; Stephens, p. 211. Here Zwingli and Luther are very close; see above, § 2.5.4.
37. Locher, p. 219.
38. Stephens, p. 201, note 20.
39. Stephens, p. 185.
40. See above, § 2.4.1.
41. Inst. IV,xv,13.
42. Inst. IV,xiv,1-5.
43. Inst. IV,xiv,6.
44. See above, § 3.2.3.
45. Inst. IV,xv,2; cf IV,xiv,9. Luther will allow an ascription of power to the water of baptism; but as this power is in fact the word itself his stance is closer to that of Calvin than might at first appear. WA 42,170,15-19 = LW 1,228 on Gen. 3:23f.
46. Inst. IV,xv,1; see also IV,xiv,13. Cf. Z,III,761; Wendel, *Calvin* tr. P Mairret, (London, 1963; Fontana edn. 1965) p. 319, and above, § 7.2.3, p. 357.

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47. Inst. IV,xv,5. Like Luther, Calvin attributes the same *significatio* to circumcision; see above, § 2.4.1 (p. 71).
48. Inst. IV,xv,11; cf. § 3.5.1 above (p. 157).
49. Inst. IV,xv,1-4.
50. Inst. IV,xv,6.
51. See above, § 3.3.1.
52. Inst. IV,xiv,17.
53. Inst. IV,xv,16f.
54. Inst. IV,xvi,19. In the 1536 edition of the Institutes Calvin had not made this qualification explicit. Wendel, p. 327.
55. This appears fundamental to Barth's attack upon infant baptism. Baptism requires, in both the baptising community and the candidates, "human beings who are capable of thought and action and who may be summoned as such to conversion, obedience, hope, and the decision of faith." CD IV,4,165. See below, § 7.3.3 (pp. 364f.)
56. Inst. IV,xvi,20.
57. Cf. WA 30,I,219,12ff.
58. See above, §§ 3.6.3, 3.6.5.
59. Inst. IV,xvi,4. Wendel, pp. 325f., traces the influence of Bucer at this point.
60. See above, §§ 2.4.1, 2.4.3, 2.5.4.
61. See above, § 3.2.3. It is 'word' (sense 2) which must not be sought apart from means; 'word' (sense 1) is one of those means (see § 3.2.2 for the polyvalence of *verbum*).
62. Inst. IV,xiv,12; Wendel, pp. 312f.; T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Edinburgh, 1986), p. 117.
63. See above, §§ 2.2.1, 2.3.2, 3.2.2.
64. Inst. IV,xiv,7. There is no direct equivalent to this in Luther himself, but the Augsburg Confession contains language strikingly similar to that of Calvin. Cf. Art. XIII on the Use of the Sacraments (BC,35).
65. Inst. IV,xiv,18. Calvin is willing to extend the term 'sacrament' to cover them all. The sacraments of the two Testaments differ only in non-essentials. (So J. Raitt, 'Three Inter-related Principles in Calvin's Unique Doctrine of Infant Baptism', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, XI,I (1980), p. 52.
66. Parker, p. 115; cf. § 2.2.4 above, also note 146 to chapter 2.
67. Inst. IV,xiv,17.
68. Inst. IV,xv,20; Raitt, p. 57.
69. Inst. IV,xv,2.
70. Inst. IV,xv,11.

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71. Inst. IV,xv,3. Wendel, pp. 319f.
72. WA 30,I,214,14-17; see above, § 3.2 (p. 119).
73. Inst. IV,xiv,17.
74. Inst. IV,xv,22.
75. For both Calvin and Luther it is the contempt of the sign which is critical, not its absence where it is unavailable. Inst. IV,xv,22; see above, § 2.4.2 (p. 73).
76. So, for example, Barth, CD IV,4 pp. 103f. See also H Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments* tr. N.E. Nagel, (1985), p. 44: Luther trod a "lonely way" between Rome and the enthusiasts.
77. Cf. Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p. 340.
78. For example, the dispute about whether the sealing of the gift of the Spirit is to be attributed to baptism in water, or to some other rite, which occasioned G.W. Lampe's study, *The Seal of the Spirit* (1951, 1967). That such rather arid preoccupations are still at the forefront of baptismal theology is evident in the Lima Document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (WCC, Geneva, 1982), Baptism, § 14, pp. 4,6. On the baptismal section of the Lima document, the general point may be made that both sides of the tension are present. The necessity of faith for the reception of the salvation which baptism embodies is asserted (§ 8), but the pervasive use of unqualified language in the document demonstrates that the validity and effectiveness of baptism is not thought to depend upon faith. For example: "God bestows upon all baptized persons the anointing and promise of the Holy Spirit, marks them with a seal and implants in their hearts the first instalment of their inheritance as sons and daughters of God." (§ 5) There is a hint of the present tense of baptism (§ 9). But the document is devoid of the dynamic tension which characterises Luther's baptismal theology because, although both sides of the issue are stated, there is no attempt to confront the conflict between them at any depth. The irenic desire, almost inevitable in a document of this nature, to state two sides of a question without addressing the tension between them is nowhere more evident than in the bland statement, "Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift." (§ 8)
79. See James Atkinson, *Martin Luther: Prophet to the Church Catholic* (Exeter, 1983), p. 57: "[Luther] argued that grace was not *something* God communicated, like milk poured into a jug, but was none other than the living, active, working Christ, no less than God *communicating himself to us.*"
80. See above, § 3.4.3 (pp. 150f.).
81. Barth, CD IV,4, p. 106.
82. Barth, pp. 71,73,90,207.
83. Barth, pp. 165f.
84. See above, § 2.2.4 (p. 48).
85. WA 40,I,545,30f. = LW 26,356.

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86. See above, § 1.1.2 (p. 13).

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