

Baptism & Justification:

Sacramental Instrumentality in John Calvin
and the Pre-Concord Lutheran Confessions and Catechisms

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John Calvin's robust sacramental theology has not always been appreciated by his theological grandchildren. In the mid-nineteenth century, for example, when John Williamson Nevin sought to reintroduce American Reformed theologians and pastors to Calvin's sacramental theology, a stormy controversy ensued. Nevin and his companion Philip Schaff even faced heresy charges in their denomination. They were accused, among other things, of harboring and promoting "Romanizing" tendencies.¹ When Nevin's book, *The Mystical Presence* (1846),² was reviewed by Charles Hodge, the arch-Calvinist professor of theology at Princeton Seminary, he dismissed the results of Nevin's thorough historical scholarship by suggesting that what Nevin had uncovered was nothing but "an uncongenial foreign element" in Calvin's sacramental theology, probably derived from Calvin's overly familiar relations with the Lutherans!³

At least Hodge got part of it right. Calvin did have friendly relations with the early Lutherans. It is not difficult to demonstrate that Calvin looked up to and learned from Luther as the "pathfinder" of the Reformation.⁴ Nor is it difficult to show that Calvin accepted the Augsburg

¹James Hastings Nichols, *Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 84ff; E. Brooks Holifield, "Mercersburg, Princeton, and the South: The Sacramental Controversy in the Nineteenth century," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 54 (1976): 238-257.

²John W. Nevin, *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1846); reprinted and supplemented in John W. Nevin, *The Mystical Presence and Other Writings on the Eucharist*, ed. Bard Thompson and George H. Bricker, vol. 4 of *Lancaster Series on Mercersburg Theology* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1966).

³Charles Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper" [A Review of *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, by John W. Nevin.] *Princeton Review* 20 (1848): 251-52; for an excellent analysis of this sacramental controversy see B.A. Gerrish, "The Flesh of the Son of Man: John W. Nevin on the Church and Eucharist," chap. in *Tradition and the Modern World: Reformed Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 49-70.

⁴For Calvin's evaluation of Luther see B.A. Gerrish, "John Calvin on Luther," in *Interpreters of Luther*, Jaroslave Pelikan, ed. (Philadelphia, 1968), 67-96.

Confession, possibly even subscribing to it.⁵ Even during his debates with Westphal and Heshusius, Calvin was deeply concerned about Lutheran-Reformed relations; he argued that his treatises against “fanatics” like Westphal were not intended to be attacks on Lutherans as such.⁶ Calvin was convinced that there was essential continuity between his theological program and that of Luther and Melanchthon. He believed this to be true, despite differences of emphasis, even in the area of sacramental theology. My purpose in this essay is to investigate the baptismal theology of the pre-Concord Lutheran confessions and catechisms in order to compare it with Calvin’s. I have limited the scope of this study to the Lutheran symbolic books published before Calvin’s death (1564). After Calvin’s death both Reformed and Lutheran baptismal theologies begin to develop in different directions.⁷ I will concentrate on the question of the *instrumental* nature of the sacrament of Baptism, especially how each theological “system” relates the instrumentality of faith and Baptism to justification, and, then, particularly, how each “system’s” sacramental

⁵In August 1556, Calvin wrote to John Laski explaining his controversy with Westphal. In that letter he appealed to the Augsburg Confession: “The fact is, and it is useful to recognize this in the first place, that there is nothing in the Augsburg Confession which is not in agreement with our own teaching” (*Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia* [59 vols. *Corpus Reformatum*. Brunswick: C. A. Schwetschke and Son [M. Bruhn], 1863-1900], 16:263; hereafter = CO; See also W. Nijenhuis, “Calvin and the Augsburg Confession,” in *Ecclesia Reformata: Studies on the Reformation* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972], 97-114). Not only did Calvin endorse the AC, he also appears to have signed it. In a letter to Schalling he says that he actually “signed” (*subscripsi*) the AC (Calvin to Martin Schalling, March 25, 1557, CO 16:430). Nijenhuis understands “signed” figuratively as “agreeing with” or “subscribing to,” but Calvin himself, after his return from Strassburg, urged Jean Garneir, who took his place as pastor to the French congregation, to *sign* the AC: “I do not see why you hesitate to sign the Augsburg Confession” (Dec. 10, 1554); CO 15:336. Calvin certainly signed the Wittenberg Concord (which included an explicit declaration of loyalty to the Invariata [!] and the Tetrapolitan Confession) when he assumed his pastoral duties in Strassburg. Calvin even attended the ecumenical colloquies at Hagenau, Worms, and Regensburg (1540-41) as a *Lutheran* Representative (at Worms he status was changed from the Strassburg to the Duke of Lüneburg delegation. Ernst Bizer notes that during Calvin’s Strassburg pastorate (1538-41) Calvin was able among the Lutherans “to pass for one of themselves” (Ernst Bizer, *Studien zur Geschichte des Abendmahlsstreits im 16. Jahrhundert* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962], 244-47).

⁶See Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 190-193.

⁷This is a subject that demands more research. Did the heirs of Calvin move away from their master? Did they develop tendencies already present in Calvin? Did later Lutheran theologians remain true to Luther and Melanchthon? Did Melanchthon remain true to Luther’s theology of the sacraments? It is worth noting that it was not until the Formula of Concord, when the Lutheran confession explicitly attacked Reformed theology, particularly Reformed baptismal theology, that Reformed theologians felt the need to “answer” any Lutheran symbolic book. Before that, Reformed churches tended to accept the Augsburg Confession, including it within their collections of confessions and creeds (see Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, *The Evangelical Creeds* [Harper and Row, 1931; Baker reprint, 1990], 354-355).

theology may be illustrated in their doctrine of infant Baptism. I intend to show that although differences are evident, early Lutheran confessional theology and Calvin were essentially agreed on the instrumentality of the sacrament of Baptism. Both stood opposed to Zwingli's matter/spirit dualism and his philosophy of signification. Early Lutherans and Calvin were also agreed on the instrumental necessity of faith for justification (against Rome): without faith there is no instrumental efficacy in the rite of Baptism.

The Lutheran Symbolic Books

The Augsburg Confession (1530). The first reference to Baptism in the Augsburg Confession (AC) occurs in Art. II "Of Original Sin." The disease of original sin is described as "truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit" (*so nicht durch die Tauf und heiligen Geist wiederum neu geboren werden*).⁸ Regeneration occurs through (*durch / per*) Baptism *and* the Holy Spirit. Both Baptism and the Holy Spirit are instruments of regeneration, but the precise relationship between these two instruments of regeneration is left unexplained in this article. The remedy for the guilt of original sin is not merely Baptism, but rebirth through Baptism *and* the Holy Spirit. The details of this relationship between rebirth, Baptism, and the Holy Spirit remain to be unpacked in later articles.

In order to understand the relationship between Baptism and justification it is important to examine Art. IV "Of Justification." For our purposes the key phrase in this article, concerning *how* and *when* we are justified, is that men "are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith. . ." (*sed gratis iustificentur propter Christum per fidem*). The German is a little more expansive: *sondern daß wir Vergebung der Sünden bekommen und vor Gott gerecht werden aus Gnaden, um Christus*

⁸English translations are from Tappert, et al., trans. and eds., *The Book of Concord: Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959). In some cases, however, where I have felt Tappert's translation is in need of refinement, I have used F. Bente, ed., *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), hereafter = CT, which often gives a more literal rendering. In each case I have compared the English translations to the Latin and German. Throughout this essay all Latin and German references in the Lutheran confessions and catechisms are taken from Lietzmann, Bornkamm, Volz, eds., *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, herausgegeben im Gedenkjahr der Augsburgischen Konfession 1930 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930; Elfte Auflage, 1992), in loc. cit.

willen, durch Glauben. Thus men are justified “when they believe that they are received into his favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. . .” The German does not contain the temporal conjunction *als*, so there is no indication given in the German text as to the *time* of reception of the benefits of justification.⁹ “This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight” (*Den diesen Glauben will God für Gerechtigkeit vor ihm halten und zurechnen*). The important point to note here is that faith is the *necessary* instrumental means of acquiring justification.¹⁰ The Book of Concord contains numerous and indisputable references to the instrumental indispensability of faith for justification. It will be important to keep this in mind as we examine the instrumental role of the sacraments. Faith is a *conditio sine qua non* of justification.

Articles IV and V are logically linked. Art. IV explains that men are justified “through faith.” But if faith is the means whereby the grace of justification is subjectively appropriated, then the question becomes “what is the cause of faith?” or “how is faith received? (*quomodo fides concipiatur*). After analyzing Melanchthon’s exposition of Rom. 10:14-15, Beck concludes: “In the AC itself Melanchthon followed the same procedure. In Art. IV he explained how we are justified. In Art. V. he shows what is the *cause* of faith or *how we obtain* the faith by which we are justified.”¹¹ The opening words of Art. V. make the connection clear: “*In order that we may obtain this faith*, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ’s sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake.”

⁹Nestor Beck, *The Doctrine of Faith: A Study of the Augsburg Confession and Contemporary Ecumenical Documents* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 75ff.

¹⁰The controversy over the temporal relationship between faith and justification (whether the Latin *cum* and the German *als* in Art. IV means “when” or “if”) does not affect the logical force of my point here. The AC clearly teaches that faith is *necessary* for justification. See Beck, p. 77ff.

¹¹Beck, 93.

The Word and sacraments are the instruments (*als durch Mittel / per instrumenta*) through which (*dadurch*) the Holy Spirit is given. More than that, they are indispensable instruments, according to the conclusion of Art. V, where the Anabaptists are condemned “who think that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.” In context, I take it that “without the external Word” (*ohne leibliche Wort / sine Verbo externo*) refers to “the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments.” So that the “external Word” refers to the audible/physical means whereby God communicates the Gospel, namely, the human voice of his ministers and the physical presence and experience of the sacraments (see also Art. XXVIII, pars. 8-9).

According to Art. V, neither the Word nor the sacraments produce faith *ex opere operato*. This is an important point. Their efficacy depends upon God who dispenses faith *ubi et quando visum est Deo*. Thus, there is the recognition that the saving power of both the Word and sacraments are dependent upon God’s will exercised through the Holy Spirit. God working through the Holy Spirit is a more ultimate cause in the generation of saving faith than the sacraments. The Holy Spirit works (*efficit*) faith in those to whom the Gospel calls (see AC XVIII & the sixth Schwabach article). Beck notes the polemic undertones of this affirmation of the Holy Spirit’s role in producing faith: “It implies that by their own powers men may produce general or common faith, but are altogether unable to elicit true faith by which we are justified before God.”¹²

Eck argued in his *Articles* for the Diet of Augsburg that Luther denied that the sacraments conveyed the Holy Spirit and grace to the recipients (Art. 215). Here we see that Eck’s attack is not entirely accurate. In the AC the sacraments do communicate the Holy Spirit and grace, they are genuine instruments of God’s saving grace; nevertheless, the sacraments do not *autonomously* or *automatically* impart the Holy Spirit and saving faith. Eck accurately notes that for the Lutherans, the sacraments do not become effective for justification without faith, and God will

¹²Beck, 95.

work faith *per sacramenta* when and where he wills. This is a major advance on the late Medieval *ex opere operato* theology of the sacraments.

The last clause of the Art. V suggests that Holy Spirit uses both the Word and the sacraments to communicate the Gospel and thereby work saving faith. Thus, the ministry of the Gospel includes both the Word and sacrament. These are the *instrumenta* used of God (*als durch Mittel*) to communicate the Gospel; and God works through them, when and where he pleases (*wann und wann er will*), to graciously impart the Holy Spirit and faith. Beck observes that here in Art. V of the AC Melancthon slightly shifts the emphasis of the Schwabach and Marburg articles concerning the relationship between the Holy Spirit, Faith, and the Word. “In this way Art. V places the creation of faith in the hands of God’s sovereignty, but at the same time stresses the limits which he himself has set to his activity.”¹³

AC V’s theology of the means of grace can be summed up as follows: 1) Justification is not “through the sacraments” but “through faith.” We obtain faith “through the Word and sacraments” (*per verbum. . . per sacramenta*). God does not justify all those who merely receive the outward administration of the sacraments; “but for Christ sake, he justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake” (*sed propter Christum iustificet hos, qui credunt se propter Christum in gratiam recipi*); 2) The sacraments do not justify; they are used by the Holy Spirit as instruments to work faith in the recipients. They are designed to powerfully communicate the Gospel and call forth faith (Art. XIII; *excitare / erwecken*); 3) The AC does not use this language (Luther and Melancthon, however, do), but we might also characterize the relationship as the Holy Spirit working as the “inward” efficient cause of faith in concurrence with the Gospel, administered through the instrumentality of the Word and sacraments, which are the “outward” or

¹³ Beck, 96. Beck asks the question “in whom does the Holy Spirit create faith?” His answer derives not from the AC but from the Visitation Articles and the Instructions for Visitors. In order to avoid the obvious connections with the Calvinistic doctrine of effectual calling, Beck argues that the Holy Spirit’s creation of faith depends upon the recipient’s penitent and terrified conscience. “The Holy Spirit, creates faith in *penitent sinners* who hear the Gospel” (p. 97, original emphasis). This seems to make the Holy Spirit’s work dependent upon a human preparatory work. At any rate, the question remains: does the Holy Spirit create penitence or is penitence the human condition that enables the Holy Spirit to create faith?

secondary causes of faith; 4) Whichever way we articulate the relationships between the Holy Spirit, Gospel, and sacraments, it is clear that unless a living faith is present, no saving benefit is conferred upon man. It is especially clear that the sacraments *sine fide* have no power to justify the sinner. The sacrament of Baptism does not confer justification *ex opere operato*. It is clear that the Holy Spirit does not justify the sinner by means of the sacraments *sine fide*. This insight has special relevance to questions surrounding the efficacy of infant Baptism. Unless some way can be found to connect faith with the infant recipient of Baptism (infant faith, imputed parental faith, etc.) or unless an *exception* can be made to the seemingly inseparable instrumental link between faith and justification (*per fidem*), infant justification is inconceivable.

Art. IX summarizes the Lutheran theology of Baptism. “Of Baptism they teach that it is necessary to salvation, and that through Baptism is offered (*angeborten werden / offeratur*) the grace of God; and that children are to be baptized, who, being offered (*oblati*) to God through Baptism, are received into God’s grace. They condemn the Anabaptists, who reject the Baptism of children, and say that children are saved without Baptism.”

This Article teaches the necessity of Baptism. The German affirms that Baptism is necessary (*nötig*) and the Latin says that it is “necessary for salvation” (*quod sit necessarius ad salutem*). Secondly, Baptism is a means of grace: “the grace of God is offered through Baptism.” What is this grace? Is it the good favor of God and equivalent to the grace of justification? Or is it sanctifying grace—a new power of life infused in us? The phrase “grace of God” is ambiguous. Thirdly, Children must be baptized since through it they are offered to God and received into his grace. At first glance, this appears to contradict other portions of the AC where the sacraments are denied *ex opere operato* power apart from faith. That faith is not explicitly mentioned here in this Article, however, does not necessarily imply that it is excluded from consideration in the doctrine of infant baptism (as we shall see when we get to Luther’s Large Catechism). Finally, there is a condemnation of the Anabaptist rejection of infant Baptism. The Latin version adds to the condemnation by rejecting the teaching “that children are saved without Baptism.” Is this written against Eck’s accusation that the Lutherans taught such a doctrine (see Eck’s Art. 227-233)? Is this

intended to deny salvation to those infants and others who are providentially hindered from receiving Baptism before death?

Article XIII “Of the Use of the Sacraments” explains the true nature and use of sacramental symbolism. “It is taught among us that the sacraments were instituted not only to be signs by which people might be identified outwardly as Christians, but that they are signs and testimonies of God’s will toward us for the purpose of awakening and strengthening our faith. For this reason they require faith, and they are rightly used when they are received in faith and for the purpose of strengthening faith.” This is an explicit denial of the Zwinglian symbolic sacramental theory. The AC makes it clear that the sacraments do not merely serve as visible marks to identify the church in the world. They certainly do function in this way; but they are much more than symbolic professions of faith and badges of ecclesiastical membership performed by Christian people. God is active in the sacraments. God communicates his will in the sacraments. God uses the sacraments to awaken and strengthen our faith.

Once again, we have an explicit denial of the instrumental efficacy of the sacraments *apart from faith*. The sacraments are not effective apart from faith, just as God’s Word does not benefit us apart from faith. If the sacraments communicate the Gospel and convey the grace of God, nevertheless, the Gospel and grace of God cannot be of any benefit to us until we receive it by faith. Faith must be added to the sacraments because faith must “believe the promises that are set forth and offered” in the sacraments. It is true that faith does not establish the *validity* of the sacraments. Faith does, however, insure the effectiveness of the sacraments as means of justification. The *editio princeps* added a condemnation of the Romanist doctrine that the sacrament was a *opus operatum* ¹⁴ The sacraments do not justify *ex opere operato*. The outward act alone does not autonomously justify the sinner. Faith must be added for the sacrament to be effectual.

¹⁴Tappert, 36.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531). Melanchthon's Apology (Ap) must now be briefly examined for clarification on the subject of the instrumental nature of Baptism. In his defense of AC II Melanchthon clarifies what Luther means: "Here our opponents lash out at Luther because he wrote that original sin remains after Baptism, and they add that this doctrine was properly condemned by Leo X. His Imperial Majesty will recognize an obvious slander here. Our opponents know what Luther meant by this statement that original sin remains after Baptism. He has always written that Baptism removes the guilt of original sin, even though concupiscence remains—or, as they call it, the 'material element' of sin. Concerning this material element, he has also said that the Holy Spirit, given in Baptism, begins to mortify lust and to create new impulses in man."¹⁵

In the course of his explanation of AC IV, Melanchthon so emphasizes the *indispensability* of faith for justification that he must make sure that no one misconstrues the instrumental priority of faith as a rejection of the instrumental status of the Word and sacrament. "The particle 'alone' offends some people. . . . We exclude the claim of merit, not the Word or the sacraments, as our opponents slanderously claim. We said earlier that faith is conceived by the Word, and we give the highest praise to the ministry of the Word." Commenting on Rom. 1:16 and 10:17, Melanchthon draws the strongest possible connection between justification and the necessity of an apprehending faith. ". . . if justification occurs only through the Word, and the Word is apprehended only by faith, it follows that faith justifies."¹⁶

When Melanchthon explains AC VII and VIII he makes a strong distinction between "the church according to outward rites" (*ecclesiae secundum externos ritus*), of which wicked men and hypocrites belong, and "the living body of Christ" (*vivum copus Chiristi*), which "has fellowship not alone in the outward signs, but has the gifts of the heart, namely, the Holy Spirit and faith" (this last clause is not part of the Latin original, but the German paraphrase). If we define the

¹⁵Tappert, 105, 104.

¹⁶Tappert, 117.

church merely according to outward rites, according to Melanchthon, then we are guilty of a kind of Judaism which confuses the people of the Gospel with the people of the Law. Outward rites are not sufficient to make us “living members” (*viva membra ecclesiae*) of the Church. When Melanchthon insists that the genuine people of God “are only those, according to the Gospel, who receive this promise of the Spirit,” he is clearly distinguishing “outward fellowship” (*externa societas*), distinguished by its participation in the outward rites of the church, from the “true kingdom and members of Christ.”

These statements in the Apology are crucial for understanding sacramental efficacy in the AC. Melanchthon does not fail to make the connection explicit: “Likewise, what need will there be of faith if the sacraments justify *ex opere operato*, without a good disposition (*sine bono motu*) on the part of the one using them?”¹⁷ And then, a little later, “Therefore, the Church consists of those persons in whom there is a true knowledge and confession of faith and truth.”

In Ap IX Melanchthon defends infant Baptism. First he defends the necessity of Baptism, especially for children: “They approve the ninth article where we confess that Baptism is necessary for salvation; children are to be baptized; the Baptism of children is not useless but is necessary and efficacious for salvation. . . . It is most certain that the promise of salvation also applies to little children. It does not apply to those who are outside of Christ’s church, where there is neither Word nor sacrament, because Christ regenerates through Word and sacrament.”¹⁸ Justification or salvation is offered (*offeretur*) to all, including children; therefore, the sacrament of Baptism must be applied to children “because salvation is offered with Baptism” (*quia salus cum baptismo offeretur*).

¹⁷CT 233.

¹⁸Tappert, 178. Tappert’s translation of the last clause is rather free. The original does not say that Christ *regenerates* through Word and sacrament, only that “the kingdom of Christ exists only with the Word and sacraments” (*regnum Christi tantum cum Verbo et sacramentis existit*).

Not only is salvation offered to children through Baptism, but the Holy Spirit is also given through Baptism. Melancthon concludes this brief defense of infant Baptism with a plea based on the fact that “God gives the Holy Spirit to those who are baptized in this way” (*quod Deus dat Spiritum Sanctum sic baptizatis*). This statement by Melancthon does not logically contradict his polemic against the *ex opere operato* error. Apparently Justis Jonas, when translating the Apology into German, considered it prudent to qualify Melancthon’s statement that “God gives the Holy Spirit to those thus baptized.” Jonas’s translation explains the proof of God’s approval of infant Baptism consists in the fact *daß er vielen, so in der Kindheit getauft find, den heiligen Geist hat gegeben*. This is an unnecessary qualification since Melancthon’s intent was merely to call attention to consequences of the Anabaptist removal of the sacrament from children. If Baptism is an instrument by which God bestows his Holy Spirit, then by refusing it to children, we also remove from them the normal means of receiving the Spirit.¹⁹ The fact that God gives the Holy Spirit through Baptism to children, does not necessarily imply that he *always* does so or that he *must* do so. Melancthon is concerned not to deny to children the instrumental means whereby God bestows his Spirit.

As we would expect, Melancthon continually rejects the Roman Catholic doctrine of *ex opere operato*. “The following doctrines are clearly false, and foreign not only to Holy Scripture, but also to the Church Fathers. . . . That the reception of the sacrament of repentance *ex opere operato*, without a good disposition on the part of the one using it, that is, without faith in Christ.”²⁰

In Ap XIII On the number and use of the Sacraments” Melancthon returns to the connection between Judaism and the error of *ex opere operato*. “It is much more necessary to know how to use the sacraments. Here we condemn the whole crowd of scholastic doctors who teach that unless there is some obstacle, the sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato*, without a

¹⁹CT 43-44, 245. The very presence of Jonas’s qualifying remarks witnesses to the fact that there was some concern among contemporary Lutherans about the danger of such seeming *ex opere operato* statements.

²⁰Ap XII; cf. Ap. VII-VII, XIII; CT 233, 313.

good disposition in the one using them (*sine bono motu utentis*). It is sheer Judaism to believe that we are justified by a ceremony without a good disposition in our heart, that is, without faith” (*Haec simpliciter Iudaica opinio est sentire, quod per ceremoniam iustificemur, sine bono motu cordis, hoc est, sine fide*).²¹

The Gospel must penetrate to the heart. Without faith the sacraments are ineffectual. Melancthon cites Rom. 4:9 as proof. Abraham was not justified through circumcision; rather “circumcision was a sign presented unto the exercise of faith” (*sed circumcissionem esse signum propositum ad exercendam fidem*). This last phrase is important and points to a continuity between the Old and New Covenant: the purpose of the sacrament of circumcision was to exercise (*excite*) faith in Abraham and his children. Even while Melancthon confutes the Catholic error, he himself does not err in the other direction by reducing the sacrament of its instrumental force.

“Thus we teach that in using the sacraments there must be a faith which believes these promises and accepts that which is promised and offered in the sacrament.”²² Tappet’s translation is rather weak. Melancthon asserts emphatically both the real instrumentality of the sacraments *and* the necessity of faith for the salvific efficacy of the sacraments. The promised things (*res promissas*) that are truly offered in the sacrament (*quae ibi in sacramento offeruntur*) nevertheless are not received (*accipator*) unless faith is added to the ceremony. Indeed, faith must be added (*fides debeat accedere*) if the sacraments are to be effectual. “The promise is useless (*inutilis*) unless it is received by faith. The sacraments are signs of the promises.”

Melancthon calls the *ex opere operato* doctrine a “fanatical opinion” which has caused untold abuses in the church. He challenges his readers to find a “single letter” in the older writers (the Fathers) which supports this scholastic innovation. “In fact, Augustine says the opposite: that faith in the sacrament, not the sacrament justifies.”²³ Whether *fides sacramenti* should be

²¹Tappert, 213.

²²Ibid.

²³Tappert, 214.

translated “faith in the sacrament” or “the faith of the sacraments” does not substantially affect my point. Melancthon here explicitly rejects the notion that the grace of justification is conferred automatically simply by means of the administration of the ceremony of Baptism. Faith is absolutely necessary.

The Smalcald Articles (1537). In Part III, Art. V “Of Baptism” Luther says that the water of Baptism combined with the Word of God *together* create the *sacrament* of Baptism. “Therefore we do not agree with Thomas and the Dominicans who forget the Word (God’s institution) and say that God has joined to the water a spiritual power (*geistliche kraft ins Wasser gelegt*) which, through the water, washes away sin.”²⁴ Luther rejects the late Medieval theology of Baptism whereby the water itself somehow has a power to effect salvation. Clearly Luther denies that Baptism is a *causa causans*. God is the sole *causa causans*, but he has determined that the sacrament (with the Word) will function as *causa causata* (a cause owing its existence to another cause).

Luther goes on to refute the Scotists who deny the genuine instrumentality of the water and the Word in accomplishing redemption. “Nor do we agree with Scotus and the Franciscans who teach that Baptism washes away sin through the assistance of the divine will, as if the washing takes place only through God’s will and not through the Word and the water.”²⁵ Although the sacraments never function autonomously, but always with the Word, nevertheless, they have a real instrumental force.

In Part III, Art. VIII “Of Confession” Luther attacks the enthusiasts’ error of separating the outward, physical Word from the inner, spiritual Word, he extends his critique to those who deny that God uses sacramental outward, physical means to accomplish salvation. “Accordingly, we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external

²⁴Tappert, 310.

²⁵Tappert, 310-311.

Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil.”²⁶ The original has a slightly different slant: Luther warns that the “spirit” that communicates or makes contact with us apart from the outward Word and sacraments, *daß is der Teufel*. Luther does more that identify the sacraments as the Holy Spirit’s instruments. He strongly warns against seeking the Holy Spirit outside of the outward means which he has established. “God grants his Spirit or grace to no one except through or with the preceding outward Word.”²⁷

Alongside such a strong statement of the instrumentality of God’s outward means, Luther clearly states that faith is necessary in order to receive the Spirit and the grace offered in or with the outward means. It is “through the preceding outward Word” alone, whether before or “in” Baptism, that men appropriate the justification conveyed by means of Baptism.²⁸

The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther (1529). In Luther’s Small Catechism we find an emphasis on faith appropriating the instrumental benefits of Baptism. In answer to the question “what does Baptism give or profit?” Luther assures us that “it works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.”²⁹ Here Luther explicitly asserts the instrumental nature of the sacrament. So strong is this instrumentalism that what God properly works is attributed to the sacrament: “*It works forgiveness of sins, etc.*”

That this is not an *ex opere operato* efficacy is made plain by the qualifying clause “to all who believe this.” Thus, without faith, the sacrament does not serve as an instrument of forgiveness and deliverance from death and the devil. In answer to the question “how can water

²⁶Tappert, 313.

²⁷CT 496-97; BS 456.

²⁸CT 495.

²⁹CT 551.

do such great things?” Luther denies any intrinsic or special power to the water of Baptism. On the contrary, the water becomes an effectual instrument of salvation 1) because the Word of God is in and with the water, promising that it will be “a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit, and 2) only when faith is present, “which trusts the Word of God in the water.” Once again, we find the instrumentality of the sacrament of Baptism qualified by the necessity of faith. Without faith the sacrament does not actually administer what it offers and promises.

Furthermore, the water itself does not possess such power. “How can water does such great things? It is not the water indeed that does them, but the Word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, *which trusts such Word of God in the water*. For without the Word of God the water is simple water and no Baptism. But with the Word of God it is Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost. . .”³⁰ The validity and power of Baptism is established by means of its connection with the Word of God. The effectual appropriation of all that is therein offered depends upon faith, since it is not merely the Word of God in the water which gives the water such great power, but it is also the presence of an apprehending faith.

The Large Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther (1529). In Part Four Luther deals extensively with the sacrament of Baptism. First, Luther again affirms the instrumental nature of the sacrament of Baptism. Luther will have nothing to do with sects, which in their desire to elevate the Spirit, deprecate the place of external and outward means. God has instituted and established Baptism. When men perform the ceremony according to God’s directions “God himself” baptizes. “Therefore, although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly god’s own work.”³¹ When Baptism is administered there is the strongest possible connection between God’s Word and the promise and the water. Luther forbids “tearing things asunder” that God has joined together:

³⁰Ibid.

³¹CT 735.

“The kernel [*der Kern*] in the water is God’s Word.” It is the addition (*dazukommen*) of God’s Word that makes the water an instrument through which he works salvation.

Luther moves on, then, to inquire into what Baptism “profits, gives, and works” (*was sie nütze, gebe, und schaffe*). “To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save.”³² Luther anticipates an objection: what about faith? Doesn’t “faith alone” justify? How can it be said that Baptism “saves”? Luther’s response is to incorporate faith into the very core of his doctrine of Baptism. “Faith must have something to believe, that is, of which it takes hold, and upon which it stands and rests. Thus faith clings to the water, and believes that it is Baptism, in which there is pure salvation and life.” Luther warns against “separating” faith and that to which faith clings. Baptism may indeed be an external rite, but so what? Even the Gospel comes to us as “external verbal preaching.” The important thing to note is that Baptism, like preaching, “may be apprehended by the senses, and understood and thereby brought into the heart.” God works through such “external ordinances” (*äusserliche Ordnung*) in such a way to elicit faith and thereby salvation. When he explains who profits from Baptism, Luther leaves no doubt: “Faith alone makes the person worthy to receive profitably the saving divine water. For, since these blessings are here presented and promised (*vorgetragen und verheißten wird*) in the words in and with the water, they cannot be received in any other way than by believing them with the heart. Without faith it profits nothing, notwithstanding it is in itself a divine superabundant treasure. . . . For it is determined that whatever is not faith avails nothing nor receives anything.”³³ Without maintaining the necessity of faith, the sacrament may actually degenerate into a new “work” in the minds of many. Placing yourself under the water or allowing yourself to be baptized does not in itself save you. Baptism is not a work that we do or allow to be done to us. It is the promise and work of God, which we must believe in order to be justified.

³²Tappert, 439.

³³CT 741.

Like the Word, the sacrament too becomes effectual through faith. Having linked the Word and sacrament together so strongly, we would expect the sacrament to be fully as effectual as the Word; and this is precisely what we find in Luther. The Word is never effectual simply because it is proclaimed. In order for the Word to be effectual we must respond in faith. So if the sacrament of Baptism is essentially the Word of God included in the water, then it follows that faith must be added to the water of Baptism in order for it to be effectual.

In order to drive home his point so that there will be no misunderstanding, Luther continues: “God’s works, however, are saving and necessary for salvation, and do not exclude, but demand, faith; for without faith they could not be apprehended (*denn ohne Glauben könnte man sie nicht fassen*). For by permitting the water to be poured upon you, you have not yet received Baptism in such a manner that it benefits you anything; but it becomes beneficial to you if you have yourself baptized with the thought that this is according to God’s command and ordinance, and besides in God’s name, in order that you may receive in the water the promised salvation. Now, the hand cannot do, nor the body; but the heart must believe it.” Thus, Luther complains that those who attack “Lutheran” baptismal theology as being at odds with justification by faith alone misunderstand his position. “Actually, we insist on faith alone as so necessary that without it nothing can be received or enjoyed.”³⁴

The strong connection which Luther has made between the efficacy of the sacrament and faith leads directly into a discussion of the meaning of infant Baptism. The central question is framed in terms of the necessity of faith: “Here a question occurs. . . of infant Baptism, whether children believe, and are justly baptized.” After briefly summarizing the argument for infant Baptism, he argues that “whether a person baptized believes or not; for on that account Baptism does not become invalid (*unrecht*). . . . Baptism is valid, even though faith be wanting. For my faith does not make Baptism, but receives it.” Luther here makes an important distinction between validity and efficacy. The sacrament is valid even when it does not produce its intended effect.

³⁴Ibid.

Validity may not be tied to faith, but efficacy (justification) certainly is. This is an argument against the “sectarians,” who tie the validity of Baptism to the faith of the recipient. “Only presumptuous and stupid persons draw the conclusion that where there is no true faith, there also can be no true Baptism.” The fanatics, who demand the presence of faith for baptism’s validity “regard Baptism as a mere *empty* sign.” This is a very great error; but there is another pitfall relating to baptism’s efficacy.

According to Luther, “where faith is wanting, it [Baptism] remains a mere unfruitful sign (*unfruchtbar Zeichen, inefficax signum*).” In order for Baptism to be a *efficax signum*, a *fruchtbar Zeichen*, faith must flourish with its fruits, particularly repentance (*die Buße, poenitentiam*).

“Therefore if you live in repentance, you walk in Baptism, which not only signifies such a new life, but also produces, begins, and exercises it. For therein are given grace, the Spirit, and power to suppress the old man, so that the new man may come forth and become strong.” However exalted the benefits and power of Baptism, it is clear that it does not confer these treasures apart from faith and a life of repentance.

This is all well said, but the question remains: do infants receive the benefits offered in Baptism? Do they do so through faith or apart from faith? Luther’s answer is complex but clear. Throughout his discussion he moves back and forth between the question of validity and efficacy. Luther argues that we do not baptize upon the ground of faith “but solely upon the command of God.” When we baptize an infant “We bring the child in the conviction and hope that it believes, and we pray that God may grant it faith.” The most that can be gleaned from the Large Catechism is that Luther refuses to concede that infants do not have faith. A comment made in passing reveals his thoughts; “For even though infants did not believe, *which, however is not the case*, yet their Baptism as now shown would be valid. . .” One thing is clear, Luther is convinced that the

effectual instrumentality of Baptism needs faith. This is true even for children. “Faith must be present before or rather in Baptism, otherwise the child is not free of the devil and sin.”³⁵

It is not my purpose to describe Luther’s complex theology of infant Baptism, only to show the necessary function of faith in his understanding of the efficacy and instrumentality of Baptism. Gottfried Hoffman sums up Luther’s attitude: “Luther would thus abolish the Baptism of children unless he could prove the faith of children with good reasons. So important is the faith of children to him! In saying this, he does not mean that, apart from the faith of children, the Baptism of children would be invalid and therefore tomfoolery and trickery. There was for him never any question about the fact that, because God acts in Baptism, Baptism is also valid also as the Baptism of children, regardless of whether the baptisand believe or not. Even so, without the possibility of the faith of children, the Baptism of children would be trickery and a blasphemy of God, because it would be irrefutably obvious from the outset that the effect declared by Baptism—i.e., forgiveness of sins, redemption from the power of the devil, and eternal salvation—could not come about. For this effect issues only through faith.”³⁶

This concludes my analysis of the pre-Concord Lutheran confessions and catechisms. Lutheran baptismal theology is often misunderstood by contemporary Reformed theology to be little more than a re-worked *ex opere operato* sacerdotalism; therefore, I have emphasized the importance and necessity of faith in early sixteenth-century Lutheran baptismal theology. Reformed theology, on the other hand, is often misunderstood to deny the genuine instrumentality of the outward, physical means of grace; therefore, in our analysis of John Calvin I will concentrate on the question of the instrumentality and efficacy of the sacrament of Baptism.

³⁵Cited by Hoffman, Gottfried, “The Baptism and Faith of Children,” in *A Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus*, Kurt E. Marquart, John R. Stephenson, and Bjarne W. Teigen, eds. (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1985), 82.

³⁶*Ibid.*; cf. also Wilhelm Maurer, *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession*, trans. H. George Anderson (Philadelphia: Augsburg Press, 1986), 398-99.

John Calvin's Theology of Sacramental Instrumentality

The same themes which dominate the baptismal theology of the Lutheran Confessions are also prominent in Calvin's work. Calvin affirmed the instrumental efficacy of sacred objects and actions. They were genuine means of grace. Nevertheless, as Calvin scholar Brian Gerrish has lamented, "The suspicion has never quite been laid to rest that even when Calvin's language appears to affirm a real presence and the efficacy of sacred signs, he could not honestly have meant it."³⁷ Others have thought that Calvin's sacramental theology was bewilderingly inconsistent, and have even suggested that Calvin's realistic sacramental language should be taken *cum grano salis*!³⁸ I have already quoted Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge's opinion that Calvin's realistic sacramentalism was "an uncongenial foreign element" in his theology. I intend to show that Calvin's instrumental theology of the sacraments is clearly stated, repeatedly affirmed, and cogently defended in his writings, from the first edition of the *Institutes* (1536) to the last (1559), as well as in his other treatises and tracts. Furthermore, a comparison of Calvin's sacramental theology and that of the pre-Concord Lutheran symbolic books will show remarkable correspondence, despite certain differences of emphasis.

Calvin on the sacraments as instruments. In the first edition of the *Institutes* (1536) Calvin answers Zwingli's concern (that the glory and power of God will be eclipsed if we ascribe to the sacraments even secondary causality) by affirming that the sacraments do indeed function as genuine instruments or means of grace: "God uses means and instruments [*mediis ac instrumentis*] which he himself sees to be expedient, that all things may serve his glory, since he is Judge and Lord of all."³⁹ In this paragraph Calvin says that God "distributes his blessings to us by these instruments" and "nourishes faith spiritually through the sacraments." He criticizes as erroneous the Zwinglian notion that the sacraments of the church function as the *sacramenta* of the Roman

³⁷B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 9.

³⁸Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 6.

³⁹Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536 edition), trans. and annotated by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 90.

civil world. “I steadfastly declare that the fathers who applied the name ‘sacraments’ to signs had given no attention to the use of this word by Latin writers, but invented this new meaning for their own convenience, simple to designate sacred signs by it.”⁴⁰

Contrary to those who refuse to see maturation in Calvin’s theology, there is evidence of some ambiguity in Calvin’s sacramental theology at the time of the first edition of the *Institutes*. A few paragraphs after asserting the instrumentality of the sacraments, he seems to assert the contrary: “For the sacraments are messengers which do not bring but announce and show those things given us by divine bounty.”⁴¹ Later, while discussing the Lord’s Supper, he even seems to take back his affirmation of the instrumentality of the sacrament: “Not that such spiritual graces are tied to the sacrament, or enclosed in it, or that a sacrament is an implement or instrument [*organum ac instrumentum*] to the end that they may be conferred on us, but only because the Lord attests to us by this token his will to bestow these things upon us.” These later two quotations may seem like the “true” Calvin, especially in light of later Reformed thought, but the reader should carefully consider that in later editions of the *Institutes* Calvin resolved the contradiction in favor of instrumentality. By 1539, the denial “ that the sacrament is an implement or instrument” is removed, and by 1543 his statement denying that the sacraments as messengers “bring” anything but a bare “announcement” or “show” of what God promises is significantly altered to deny that the sacraments have any power *in se*: “They do not bestow any grace *of themselves*.” Calvin’s final answer (1559) to Zwingli’s stealing-the-glory-and-power-from-God argument is much more satisfying. He refuses to rationalize, but affirms both God’s sovereignty *and* his use of physical, outward means to accomplish his will: “God therefore truly executes whatever he promises and represents in signs; nor do the signs lack their own effect in proving their Author truthful and faithful. The only question here is whether God acts by his own intrinsic power (as they say) or

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹*Institutes* (1536), 92.

resigns his office to outward symbols. But we contend that, whatever instruments he uses, these detract nothing from his original activity.”⁴²

The sacraments are not merely signs designed to confirm and strengthen faith. Had Calvin stopped here this might have been an improvement on Zwingli’s earlier views,⁴³ but it certainly would not be an advance beyond the level of *nuda signa*, since, on this view, the efficacy of the sacraments would reside in the persuasive power they have on the memory of the recipient, a reminder of a past event or deed. Calvin goes beyond such an impoverished sacramental theology. “In the sacraments the reality is given along with the sign.”⁴⁴ What God depicts in the sacraments, he actually bestows by their agency. “Nor does he feed our eyes with only a bare show but leads us to the reality present [*res praesentum*], and what he depicts [*figuratur*] he effectively accomplishes at the same time [*simul*]” (*Inst.* 4.15.14).

Calvin uses the Latin word *exhibere* in his sacramental language in the strong sense, meaning “to proffer” or “to present in reality,” or even “to convey,” rather than in the weak sense of “to show” or “to exhibit.” Therefore, the differences in wording in Article X on the Lord’s Supper between the *Confessio Augustana Invariata* (“vere adsint et distribuantur”) and the *versio variata* (“vere exhibeantur”) may not have terribly troubled Calvin. There is neither evidence to suggest that the original wording was unacceptable to Calvin, nor are we obliged to link Calvin with those who understood *exhibere* as a non-instrumental “showing forth.” Gerrish is correct when he says that “Calvin could readily have subscribed to Article X of the *Invariata* at any stage of his career—even in its German version.”⁴⁵

⁴²Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559 Edition), ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vols. 20-21 of *Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.14.17; hereafter = *Inst.*

⁴³Zwingli seems to have modified his earlier views that the sacraments are merely public acts through which Christians attest to their faith and embraced something very similar to this in his later writings. The later Zwingli admits guardedly that the sacraments can increase and strengthen faith, but not give it. See W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), chap. 9.

⁴⁴Comm. on Isa. 6:7; CO 36:133. *Unde colligere possumus, in sacramentis rem nobis cum signo exhiberi.*

⁴⁵B. A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 182), 402.

Calvin's instrumental view of the sacraments may be easily confirmed from his other writings. Strictly speaking, the instrumental nature of the sacraments was not the issue between Calvin and later Lutheran theologians like Westphal and Heshusius. In his *Secunda defensio* of 1556, Calvin explains his instrumental view of Baptism to Westphal:

But as Baptism is a solemn recognition by which God introduces his children into the possession of life, a true and effectual sealing of the promise, a pledge of sacred union with Christ, it is justly said to be the entrance and reception into the Church. And as the instruments of the Holy Spirit are not dead, God truly performs and effects by Baptism what he figures.⁴⁶

Similarly, in the years leading up to the *Consensus Tigurinus* (1549) Calvin's debate with Bullinger was precisely over the instrumentality of the sacraments. Bullinger, like his predecessor Zwingli, denied that God bound himself to the sacraments. The sacraments did not confer grace; rather, they pictured and testified to God's grace. There is an *analogy* between God's work of grace and the sacraments, Bullinger conceded, but certainly no necessary or *causal* connection. Like Zwingli, Bullinger insists that the "Spirit works on the soul directly, without crass intermediaries like implements or canals for grace . . . he explicitly rejects the terminology of instrument [*instrumentum*] and implement [*organum*]."⁴⁷ Calvin and Bullinger exchanged a massive amount of correspondence on this issue up until the *Consensus Tigurinus* or *Zurich Consensus* of 1549. Throughout this debate Calvin consistently and persistently argues for a strong doctrine of the sacraments' instrumentality. Consider the following excerpts from Calvin's letters:

⁴⁶Calvin, *Second Defense of the Faith Concerning the Sacraments in Answer to Joachim Westphal* (1556); CO 9:41-120; cited in Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptists Radicals*, trans. by William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981), p. 221.

⁴⁷Paul E Rorem, "The *Consensus Tigurinus* (1549): Did Calvin Compromise?" in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor*, Wilhelm H. Neuser, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 82-83.

There is union complementary with the thing figured, lest the sign be empty, because that which the Lord represents in a sign he effects at the same time [*simul efficit*], and executes [*impletque*] in us by the power of the Spirit.⁴⁸

. . . what indeed do we abrogate or take away from God when we teach that he acts through his instruments [*per sua instrumenta*], indeed he alone.⁴⁹

. . . through the sacraments as instruments. . . . the Spirit is the author, the sacrament is truly the instrument used.⁵⁰

Calvin insisted that a sacrament ought to be called a means (*media*), an instrument (*instrumentum*), a vehicle (*vehiculum*), or an implement (*organum*), through which God's grace is conveyed. Bullinger, on the other hand, like Zwingli before him, refused to allow God to use material instruments. "God alone does it, and what God does, implements [*organa*] do not do. . . . the sacraments represent and seal the gifts of God."⁵¹

Calvin on the connection between Word and sacrament. The sacraments confirm and ratify and already existing divine Word of promise. The concepts of confirmation and ratification are foundational to Calvin's doctrine of the sacraments. He sometimes also refers to them as appendixes (*appendicem*) or adjuncts (*adiungi*) attached to the Word in order to authenticate the verbal promise (*Inst.* 4.14.3). It is clear that Calvin binds the Word and sacraments together in the strongest possible way. Take away one or the other and something essential would be lost. "As soon as the sign itself meets our eyes, the Word ought to sound in our ears."⁵² The Word without the sacrament is incomplete, just as the sacrament without the Word is incomplete. Word and

⁴⁸Letter to Bullinger, 25 February 1547 (#880); CO 12:482; cited in Rorem "The *Consensus*," 78. Rorem mistakenly cites the CO reference as CO 2. It is actually CO 12.

⁴⁹Letter to Bullinger, 25 February 1547 (#880); CO 12:485.

⁵⁰CO 7:702. *Spiritus autor est, sacramentum vero instrumentum quo utitur.*

⁵¹CO 7:712. *Deus agit solus, ergo id quod Deus agit non agunt organa. . . . sacramenta dona Dei repraesentant et obsignant.*

⁵²Comm. on Gen. 17:9; CR 23:240.

sacrament are distinguishable, nevertheless, inseparable. The sacraments are not valid or effectual apart from the Word. When severed from the Word they become *mortuum et inane spectrum*.⁵³ Both Luther and Calvin follow Augustine: the physical elements only become sacraments when the Word is added (*Inst.* 4.14.26).

Calvin on the instrumentality of Baptism. What is offered in this sacrament? Nothing less than Christ himself is offered by means of the Word and the water. “Christ is the matter (*materiam*) or the substance (*substantiam*) of all the sacraments” (*Inst.* 4.14.16). Everything that is offered in the Word is offered in Baptism (*Inst.* 4.14.14). The whole Christ, not merely the benefits of Christ or the blessing of Christ, but Christ offers *himself* to us in Word and sacrament.

In his *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* (1545) Calvin begins with a definition of sacrament that may at first glance appear more Zwinglian than it actually is. A sacrament is “An outward attestation [*testificatio*] of the divine benevolence towards us, which represents [*figurat*] spiritual grace symbolically [*signo*], to seal the promises of God in our hearts, by which the truth of them is better confirmed”(Q. 310).⁵⁴ That Calvin means something completely different than Zwingli when he uses the words “represent” (*figurat*) and “symbolically” (*signo*) becomes evident as we move through the Catechism.

The next question (Q. 311) introduces a positive sense in which a certain “virtue” subsists in the sacrament that should “establish our conscience in assurance of salvation.” To be sure, the sacrament does not possess this virtue *per se*, but God has instituted the sacrament to this end. We can imagine such sacramental language calling forth the next question (Q. 312) from Zwingli himself: “Since it is the proper function of the Holy Spirit to seal the promises of God in our

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴*The Catechism of the Church of Geneva*, in J. K. S. Read, ed. and trans., *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, vol. 22 of *Library of Christian Classic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), p. 131. The Latin text of the Catechism is found in *Joannis Calvini opera selecta*, eds., Peter Barth, Wilhelm Niesel, and Doris Scheuner (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1926-52), 2:59-157. That Latin edition is later than the French, incorporating Calvin’s own amendments and corrections to the original document.

minds, how do you attribute this to the sacraments?” Calvin answers by assuring us that the Spirit himself does work assurance in the heart and mind of the Christian, “but this does not in the least prevent God using the sacraments as secondary instruments [*secundis organis*], and applying them to any use he deems proper; and this he does without derogating in any way from the virtue of the Spirit.”

Just to make sure we get the point, Calvin’s next question (Q. 313) concerns the source of the “power and efficacy” of the sacraments: “. . . it pleased God to exercise his virtue through his instruments, for to this end he destined them. And this indeed he does, so as in no way to detract from the virtue of his Spirit.” Q. 328 concerns Baptism: “*M.* But do you attribute nothing more to the water than to be a mere symbol of ablution? *C.* I think it to be such a symbol that reality is attached to it. For God does not disappoint us when he promises us his gifts. Hence both pardon of sins and newness of life are certainly offered to us and received by us in Baptism.” This kind of language is clearly not Zwinglian; if anything it is Lutheran.

These sample questions and answers taken from Calvin’s *Catechism* clearly distinguish Calvin and Zwingli on the question of sacramental efficacy. They are each working with completely different concepts of sacramental symbolism. Calvin’s theology of symbolism is such that a symbol “causes and communicates” (*apporter et communiquer*) what it symbolizes.⁵⁵

Calvin on Baptism, Faith, & the Spirit. The Holy Spirit alone makes both Word and sacrament effective unto salvation. The Word alone cannot effect what it promises apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, and neither can the sacrament autonomously deliver what is offered without the work of the Spirit. Not even the combined power of Word and sacrament properly united in the public administration of Christ’s promises is sufficiently powerful to give Christ. In Calvin’s theology, both the Word and sacrament are both *instrumenta sive media gratia*, but they are not to be understood independent powers, only as *instrumenta sive media Spiritus Sancti*. It is

⁵⁵This is the language Calvin uses in his *Confession à presenter à l’Emereur* (1562); CO 9:764; cited in Gerrish, *Old Protestantism*, p. 122 (cf. note 21, p. 330).

not the baptismal water as such, not even the Word as such, which communicates Christ to the believer; rather, it is the Holy Spirit who uses the water and Word as genuine vehicles of grace (*Spiritus auctor est, sacramentum vero instrumentum quo utitur.*)⁵⁶ Calvin says that it is an “hallucination” to refer to the water of Baptism as having a virtue or power of its own apart from the Spirit (. . . *eorum hallucinationem, qui ad aquae virtutem referunt omnia. . . Inst. 4.15.2*).

Consider Jill Raitt’s summary of Calvin’s doctrine of Baptism: “All that is signified in Baptism—remission of sins, regeneration, and adoption by God—is offered by God through the Holy Spirit to all the baptized. But not all are able to receive what is offered, since the external actions are effective only through the power of the Holy Spirit acting in concert with the gift of faith. In themselves, the sacraments and their benefits are ‘distinct but not separate’ . . . the signs are not ‘nude.’”⁵⁷ In other words, the sacraments become effectual instrumentally only in those whom the Holy Spirit grants faith. Calvin even labels the sacraments as *spiritus organa*.⁵⁸ The instrumental power of the sacraments are not inherent or autonomous. When viewed from the perspective of God’s use of the Holy Spirit as the instrument of justification, he calls Baptism an *inferius organum*.⁵⁹ The sacraments are instruments whenever and wherever God so chooses to use them. They are effectual only “where and whenever God is so pleased” (*Ubi et quoties Deo placet, Inst. 4.14.7; cf. AC V, wo und wann er will*). This is no denial of the instrumentality of the sacraments on Calvin’s part; rather, he denies that they are autonomous, that their instrumentality binds God. There is no latent power in the sacramental materials, especially no power independent of God. “God acts in such a manner, that the whole efficacy depends upon his Spirit.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶CR 35:702.

⁵⁷Jill Raitt, “Probably They are God’s Children: Theodore Beza’s Doctrine of Baptism,” in James Kirk, ed., *Humanism and Reform: The Church in Europe, England, and Scotland, 1400-1643* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 158.

⁵⁸Comm. on Lev. 16:16; CR 24:504.

⁵⁹Comm. on Acts 22:16; CR 48:496.

⁶⁰Comm. on Eph. 5:26; CR 51:223. *Nam ita Deus per signum agit, ut tota signi efficacia nihilominus a spiritu suo pendeat.*

Furthermore, Calvin, like Luther and Melancthon, is concerned to safeguard the instrumentality of faith. Calvin agrees with Luther, that it is not the sacrament, but faith in the sacrament (*fides sacramenti*), that saves. Luther can even say that there is no sacrament without faith (*nullum sacramentum sine fide*).⁶¹ Justification without genuine faith is inconceivable, and genuine faith is the gracious result of the internal, invisible work of the Holy Spirit.

Calvin on infant Baptism. How is Calvin's instrumental theology of the sacraments illustrated in his doctrine of infant Baptism? Calvin, like Luther, in order to remain faithful to the Word of God, maintains that Christ and his benefits are genuinely offered to all by means of the Word and sacrament, but are only received by those who respond in faith (*Inst.* 4.14.7). Furthermore, like Luther, Calvin teaches that God does not ordinarily work outside of the means of grace, the Word and sacraments; in fact, Calvin, again like Luther, says something even stronger: "Whether, therefore, God makes use of man's help in this or works by his own power alone, he *always* represents himself through the Word to those whom he wills to draw to himself" (*Inst.* 3.26).

Jill Raitt nicely summarizes Calvin's next step: "Thus, in the case of unbaptized infants, or in [baptized-JM] children who die before reaching the age of reason, God's Word works mysteriously to arouse faith, but neither the Word nor faith may be bypassed in those whom God justifies and sanctifies to himself."⁶² Christ himself was sanctified from conception "in order that he might sanctify his elect from among every age without distinction" (*Inst.* 4.16.18). Calvin says that there is no danger in asserting that infants receive "some measure of grace," which he later calls "a small spark" of illumination (*Inst.* 4.16.19). Finally, Calvin argues that infants are granted through the work of the Holy Spirit "a seed [*semen*] of future faith and repentance [*baptizari in futuram poenitentiam et fidem*]" (*Inst.* 4.16.20). "It were dangerous to deny that the Lord is able to furnish them [infants] with knowledge of himself in any way he pleases" (*Inst.* 4.16.18).

⁶¹Luther, *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium*, WA 6:533-534; LW 36:67.

⁶²Jill Raitt, "Three Inter-related Principles in Calvin's Unique Doctrine of Infant Baptism," *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 11 (1980): 53.

Raitt makes two very important observations about Calvin's doctrine: 1) Contrary to some Calvin scholars, Calvin's doctrine of infant salvation does not bypass the human intellect. Both in the case of adults and infants, God's does not work on stones; no matter how strong Calvin's doctrine of the depravity of our postlapsarian nature, he is always careful, even in the case of infants[!], to assure the involvement of the human intellect; and 2) Apparently for Calvin (is he following Luther here?) the Word is not bound to the preacher, but may, in certain extraordinary cases, "sound in the mind apart from the usual means of 'hearing the Word' through which faith is given."⁶³ So faith comes through hearing (*fides ex auditu*), but we need to be careful, according to Calvin, not to rationalize and therefore limit what is meant by "hearing." Elsewhere, in his controversy with Heshusius, Calvin allows for the growth of faith and the gradual maturing of faith, from infancy to adulthood.⁶⁴ "Infants are renewed by the Spirit of God according to the capacity of their age, till the power which was concealed in them grows by degrees and becomes fully manifest at the proper time."⁶⁵ "I would not wish to make the rash claim that infants are endowed with the same faith that we experience in ourselves, or have a faith-knowledge quite like ours. I prefer to leave that in suspense (*Inst.* 4.16.19).

Calvin's understanding of the necessity of Baptism for salvation allows for salvation apart from Baptism in *extraordinary* cases (like the death of an infant before the possibility of Baptism by a minister). God has bound himself to the sacraments, but not *absolutely* so as to be unable to regenerate and save infants who die without the possibility of being baptized. Even though Calvin is able to connect the ministry of the Word and sacraments and salvation with language just as

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Calvin, "The Clear Explanation of Sound Doctrine. . ." in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. and trans. J. K. S. Read, vol. 22, *Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 291-92.

⁶⁵Comm. on Matt. 19:14; CR 45:535. *Renovari Dei spiritu pro aetatis modulo, donec per gradus suo tempore quae in illis occulta est virtus augeat, et palam refulgeat.*

strong as the Lutherans,⁶⁶ he refuses to bind God's saving power *absolutely* to the sacraments. He writes to the ministers of Montebéliard that Luther himself would not deny salvation to those who are born within the sphere of the Church and yet through extraordinary circumstances are not able to be baptized.⁶⁷ If Baptism, which is a sealing of the promises of God to our children, *cannot* be performed, then certainly God is able to fulfill his promise of salvation to our children in such unusual circumstances.⁶⁸

Furthermore, the instrumental efficacy of Baptism is not necessarily tied to the time of its administration, according to Calvin. Despite the frequent *simul* references in Calvin's discussion of the sacraments,⁶⁹ nevertheless, he also speaks of the *res signata* in the past and future tenses as well. The future tense is easily explained. Baptism has no saving efficacy where there is no faith in the recipient. Calvin uses almost the same language as Luther: "From this sacrament we gain nothing, unless in so far as we receive it in faith."⁷⁰ Baptism's saving efficacy may remain latent until the Holy Spirit works faith in the recipient (*Inst.* 4.15.17). "The advantage received from the sacrament ought not to be restricted to the time of external partaking."⁷¹ Baptism's efficacy extends from birth to death. Although the genuine offer of grace and justification may remain unapprehended by the one baptized for a time, the grace of Baptism is always present even long

⁶⁶"Whether, therefore, God makes use of man's help in this or works by his own power alone, he *always* represents himself through the Word to those whom he wills to draw to himself" (*Inst.* 3.26).

⁶⁷CO 11:705-8.

⁶⁸Calvin also disapproved of midwives administering the sacrament. Baptism must never be separated from the ministry of the Word, which belongs to the service of the ministers of the Word, not to lay women. What good is the sacrament of Baptism without the Word?

⁶⁹"Nor does he feed our eyes with only a bare show but leads us to the reality present [*res praesentum*], and what he depicts [*figurat*] he effectively accomplishes at the same time [*simul*]" (*Inst.* 4.15. 14). "There is a union complementary with the thing figured, lest the sign be empty, because that which the Lord represents in a sign he effects at the same time [*simul efficit*], and executes [*impletque*] in us by the power of the Spirit" (Letter to Bullinger, 25 February 1547; CO 12:482).

⁷⁰*Inst.* 4.15.15; cf. Luther's Large Catechism, CT 741.

⁷¹CR 7:720; cited in Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament* (1953; reprint, Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1982), 188.

after the memory of the visible, outward rite has faded. “We must hold that there is a mutual relation between faith and the sacraments, and hence that the sacraments are effective through faith. Man’s unworthiness does not detract anything from them, for they always retain their nature. Baptism is the laver of regeneration, although the whole world should be incredulous (Titus 3:5).”⁷²

Explaining the past tense is a little more difficult. It seems like an inconsistency in Calvin’s doctrine when he argues so strenuously for the instrumental efficacy of the sacrament and then *along side* of that argument we find him explaining infant Baptism as a sign and seal of something already possessed by the infant by virtue of its being born within the sphere of the church. “It follows that the baby children of believers are not baptized to make them sons and daughters of God for the first time, as though they were strangers to the church before. Rather, because they already belonged to the body of Christ by the privilege of the promise, they are received into the church by a solemn sign.”⁷³ One should not be too quick to dismiss these references as inconstancies in Calvin’s sacramental theology. Even in the passage quoted—one of the most strongly worded examples—the “past” grace is the “privilege of the promise” which infants born in the church possess. The past grace experienced by infants is the grace of being born within the sphere of the Church! They are born within the sphere of the *promise* of justification. The promise is instrumentally actualized for them when “they are received into the church by a solemn sign.” This kind of language is not really Zwinglian at all. The sacrament of Baptism is not merely a symbol of a grace received in the past, but an instrument whereby the infant receives what is promised—reception into the Church, which is nothing less than union with Christ and all of his benefits! It is important to remember that there is no absolutely necessary *temporal* connection between the action of the Spirit and the administration of the sacrament.

⁷²Comm. on Ezek. 20:20; CR 40:492; cited in Wallace, 186.

⁷³*Inst.* 4.15.17. Citations from Calvin that link infant Baptism to a grace received in the past could be multiplied. See Egil Grislis, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Baptism,” *Church History* 31 (1962): 55-65, and Peter A. Lillback, “Calvin’s Covenantal Response to the Anabaptist View of Baptism,” in *The Failure of the America Baptist Culture*, ed. James B. Jordan, vol 1 of *Christianity and Civilization* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School, 1982), 185-232.

“Whenever he sees fit, God fulfills and exhibits in immediate effect that which he figures in the sacrament. But no necessity must be imagined so as to prevent his grace from sometimes proceeding, sometimes following, the use of the sign.”⁷⁴

Calvin & The Lutheran Confessions Compared

We are at the point now of being able to compare the Lutheran Confessions and Calvin on the question of the instrumental efficacy of the sacrament of Baptism. First, the areas of continuity can be listed. They are extensive. Both Calvin and the Lutheran confessions and catechisms agree. . .

1. That God uses physical means as instruments (*media ac organum ac vehiculum ac instrumentum*)
2. That the sacrament combined with the Word has real virtue or power (*efficacia, virtus*) to communicate what it offers.
3. That the element itself (water) has no inherent power (*per se*) to effect salvation.
4. That in theologizing about the instrumentality of the sacraments philosophical dichotomies ought to be avoided, especially the neoplatonic matter/spirit or outward/inward dualism that would preclude physical things from acting upon the soul.
5. That the sacraments are not naked symbols (*nuda signa*)—the positive role of the sacraments ought not to be *reduced* to the impoverished notion that they powerfully appeal to man outwardly by means of his senses. They certainly do this, but this is not all they do.
6. That what is symbolized in the sacrament is really offered and received by means of the sacrament.
7. That the sacrament of Baptism is not merely a public testimony of a grace previously received.
8. That “through Baptism, believers are assured that the condemnation [of original sin] has been removed and withdrawn from them, since the Lord promises us by this sign that full and complete remission has been made, both of the guilt that should have been

⁷⁴CR 9:118; cited in Wallace, 170.

imputed to us, and of the punishment that we ought to have undergone because of the guilt” (*Inst.* 4.15.10; cf. AC II).

9. That the sacrament of Baptism does not eliminate the corruption of our nature associated with original sin.
10. That the instrumental efficacy of Baptism may not be bound to the time of its administration, but covers the whole life of the Christian from infancy to death.
11. That the sacrament of Baptism is not the sole instrument of justification. Baptism ought never to be understood as a isolated, autonomous means of grace.
12. That even though Baptism is a true *instrumentum* used of God, nevertheless it is God who sovereignly works through its administration, when and where he pleases, to graciously impart the Holy Spirit and faith. The Holy Spirit effects the *res signata*. It is ultimately God who works through the sacrament to effect justification for the believer.
13. That the sacrament does not justify the sinner *sine fide*. Both reject the late medieval doctrine of *ex opere operato*. Truly, Baptism is a *medium iustificationis sive remissionis peccatorum*. Baptism confers nothing else but what the Gospel itself offers and imparts—not, however, *sine fide*!
14. That the Church cannot be sufficiently described “according to outward rites” or merely as an “outward society” (Ap IV), but some measure of discernment must be brought to bear which distinguishes between “outward” and “living” members of the Church.
15. That unless faith is present in the baptized infant the child would not be “free of the devil and sin.” The difference between Calvin and Luther on the question of baptismal efficacy cannot be located in the essential role Calvin gives to faith as an instrument. Both Luther and Calvin teach the absolute necessity of faith as the instrument of justification.
16. That the baptized children of believers are to be counted as regenerate, justified members of the Church.
17. In their rejection of the rationalistic notion that infants are incapable of faith. Both teach that infants are capable of faith and that God may indeed work such faith in baptized infants even if such an operation remains a mystery to us.
18. That the *validity* of Baptism does not depend upon the presence of faith in the recipient.
19. That it is difficult to define precisely what the instrumentality of Baptism effects in infants.
20. That Baptism is sufficient to judge infants and small children as Christians, but that as they mature other factors must be taken into account. Our judgment of baptism’s effectual significance must necessarily be modified as the child grows and matures.

The areas of *discontinuity* between Calvin and early Lutherans might be understood as different emphases.

1. More than Luther and Melanchthon, Calvin emphasizes the covenantal continuity between Old and New Testaments (circumcision and Baptism) in his defense of the validity of infant Baptism. Melanchthon indeed uses the same argument, but it does not have the foundational significance in his thought as it does in Calvin (cf. AC V and Ap V).
2. Alongside of Calvin's argument for sacramental instrumentality exists a different line of reasoning: that God adopts the babies of Christian parents even before they are born. Calvin often stresses the fact that our babies are already part of the family of God because of the covenantal promises; therefore, they ought to be baptized. This line of reasoning overshadows Calvin's instrumental argument in later Reformed theology.
3. Calvin's understanding of the necessity of Baptism for salvation allows for salvation apart from Baptism in the extraordinary cases (like the death of an infant before the possibility of Baptism by a minister).
4. Even though Calvin insists in places that the *res signata* is accomplished at the same time (*simul*), he is nevertheless willing to acknowledge that the reality presented in Baptism may not be fully appropriated until the child grows up. The efficacy of the sacrament is not tied to the time of its administration. Similar statements to this effect can be found in the Lutheran Confessions and by Luther, but Calvin seems to make more of it than Luther or Melanchthon.
5. Calvin might be judged as wavering between theologizing about Baptism from the perspective of a covenantal ecclesiology (the outward, sacramental means of grace) and the perspective of God's predestination (which remains hidden).⁷⁵ Nevertheless, predestination is not *central* to Calvin's sacramental theology as it tends to become in later Reformed theology.

After Calvin's death Reformed and Lutheran sacramental theologies begin to diverge. The reasons for this parting are complex and demand much more scholarly attention.⁷⁶ I believe that

⁷⁵Grislis, "Calvin's Doctrine of Baptism," 55-57.

⁷⁶See Jill Raitt, *The Colloquy of Montbeliard: Religion and Politics in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); "Probably They are God's Children: Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Baptism," in *Humanism and Reform: The Church in Europe, England, and Scotland, 1400-1643*, ed. James Kirk (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Lewis W. Spitz and Wenzel Lohff, *Discord, Dialog, and Concord: Studies in the Lutheran*

there is a profound connection between the obvious embarrassment of later Reformed theologians with respect to Calvin's positive evaluation of Luther and his theology and their gradual abandonment of Calvin's hearty sacramental theology. Gerrish points out that even as early as Beza we discover something of an mild annoyance with Calvin's sacramentalism. As the editor of Calvin's correspondence, Beza "censored" certain portions of Calvin's correspondence that seemed to him to be evidence of too much compromise with Luther.⁷⁷ In addition to this, under Beza's leadership Calvin's doctrine of predestination takes a more central, defining place within Reformed theology. This may have precluded later Reformed theology from fully utilizing Calvin's robust theology of sacramental instrumentality. A modified Zwinglian view, which is more compatible with a centralized doctrine of predestination, seems to make headway in the late sixteenth century.

The *Consensus Tigurinus* (1545) did not help Calvin's sacramental program either. Unfortunately, for the sake of political and ecclesiastical unity, Calvin compromised his sacramental theology in the *Consensus Tigurinus*. As Rorem suggests, it was a "compromise by omission." The *Consensus* contained much that was Calvinian, but tragically omitted any reference to Calvin's instrumental theology of the sacraments.⁷⁸ Consequently, for later Reformed theologians who had no first hand acquaintance with the details of the correspondence leading up to the *Consensus*, the *Consensus* was hailed as the high water mark of Calvin's sacramental theology. When, in fact, even though Calvin defended it valiantly, the *Consensus* represents the climax and triumph of Bullinger's modified Zwinglian sacramentology. Rorem's conclusions are true *mutatis mutandis* for the sacrament of Baptism:

. . . two views of the Lord's Supper have managed to live side by side within the Reformed tradition for centuries. Does a given Reformed statement of faith consider the Lord's

Reformation's Formula of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); and Mark D. Tranvik, "Jacob Andreae's Defense of the Lutheran doctrine of Baptism at Montbeliard," *Lutheran Quarterly* 6 (1992): 425-437.

⁷⁷Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism*, 32, 285.

⁷⁸Rorem, p. 88.

Supper as a testimony, an analogy, a parallel, even a simultaneous parallel to the internal workings of God's grace in granting communion with Christ? If so, the actual ancestor may be Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zurich. Or does it explicitly identify the Supper as the very instrument or means through which God offers and confers the grace of full communion with Christ's body? The lineage would then go back to John Calvin (and to Martin Bucer), despite the opposition he faced among his Reformed brethren on this very point and despite his own compromise by omission in Zurich in 1549.⁷⁹

⁷⁹Rorem, p. 90.

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