

## Baptism and Justification

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There is no doubt about the connection between Baptism and justification in Lutheran theology. Luther and Melancthon, Pieper, Elert and Althaus are all in agreement on that. The Augsburg Confession (III, IX) defines Baptism with exactly the same terminology that it uses in its definition of justification. A man is justified when he is received in grace and his sins are forgiven; when he is baptized he is offered and received into the grace of God. Baptism is the means of justification. The Large Catechism says it more homiletically: "This is the power, effect, usefulness, fruit and purpose of Baptism: that it makes one blessed . . . which is nothing else than that those whose who have been saved from sin, death and devil enter into Christ's kingdom and live eternally with him" (LC, IV, 24). Franz Pieper reproduces this faithfully in his own discussion of baptism: Baptism offers forgiveness of sins, it is *Rechtfertigungsmedium*.<sup>1</sup> One finds nothing else in modern dogmatists such as Werner Elert and Paul Althaus; Althaus puts it most directly: All of justification is in baptism.<sup>2</sup>

The Council of Trent and Karl Barth are both in opposition to this position. So it might seem that this paper should summarize and consider the extensive literature on Baptism which has resulted from Barth's rejection of infant Baptism in 1943. Or we could review the controversies with Rome or the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. All are highly fascinating possibilities. But if we restrict ourselves to all or any of them, we should overlook one very important fact: The direct connection between justification and Baptism which is so axiomatic in our confessional position plays little role in the thinking of our people. The reason is simple: they have never been taught about it in an effective and theologically coherent fashion. The consideration of that problem is and, since I do not pretend that this paper is the final solution, must remain our first task. Otherwise a liturgical revision or revival of Baptism will remain a matter of esoteric form without significance for the life of the Church which is the congregation of the justified. The prophetic word of the Reformers to the church of the sixteenth century remains such a prophetic word to their descendants.

### I

In his argument against the charge of libertinism in Romans 6, Paul asks a rhetorical question: Do you not know that as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have been baptized into His death? He could ask that question with the certainty that his readers would immediately agree with him. They would agree with him because this was part of the basic Christian kerygma. We could not expect the same immediate agreement from a Missouri Synod congregation.

It is the thesis of this paper that Paul could talk about Baptism as he does because his statements on Baptism were made within the larger frame of reference of the apostolic kerygma. This puts Baptism into a direct relationship to the saving work of Christ. The Baptism of the Christian is, as Paul says, the link which binds him to the death and resurrection of Christ. It binds him just as Christ's own Baptism bound

Him to death and resurrection. The Christian is thus bound by Baptism to Christ's death and resurrection, and at the same time, he is bound to his own death and resurrection. This is the larger context of the doctrine of Baptism from which Paul speaks. It is also the larger context of the doctrine of Baptism in Luther and the Confessions.

It hardly seems necessary to emphasize that this larger context of the doctrine of Baptism has often been lost in modern Lutheranism. Its absence in the Synodical (Conference) Exposition of the Small Catechism is one of that work's major weaknesses. It results in the blank looks on the faces of sponsors who are asked if they are willing to remind the child of his Baptism and teach him what it means for him. For most of them I am afraid that their promise is an oath in uncertain things. Yet this is something that people can understand with relatively little difficulty. In most cases they have not heard. There is a simple reason for that: the confessional basis of catechetical instruction is Luther's Large Catechism; it has, however, been abandoned for all practical purposes. My own catechumenate is still fresh enough in my memory that I can remember a certain bewilderment as to what Baptism was all about—especially under Question 253B which treats the fact that Baptism frees us from death and the power of the devil. The proof-text for freedom from death is Romans 6: 3, "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" Koehler's comment in his *Annotations to the New Synodical Catechism* is quite in place: "The text 632 does not prove what it is supposed to prove." He suggests proving the point at issue on the basis of Galatians 3: 26f, which is a useful suggestion. It indicates however that Romans 6 remains a riddle to him. His suggestion is, from the catechetical viewpoint, a retrogression since it is essentially a return to the Schwan exposition which quotes neither Romans 6 or Colossians 2. The new exposition by at least quoting the text continually reminds us that we have not yet come to terms with it. Both the question and the proof-text in the synodical exposition are true; their immediate connection is, however, somewhat less than obvious. The confessions leave no doubt as to that connection. For that reason it is always a gratifying experience to turn students loose on the Large Catechism or on Luther's *Sermon on Baptism* from 1519.

Luther and the confessions were able to maintain the connection between Baptism and salvation and to make it meaningful to their people because they were operating in the same frame of reference as Paul. Both Paul and Luther see the significance of Baptism within the whole context of the doctrine of justification. It was so obvious to them because they had such a clear picture of justification. If it is less than obvious to modern Lutherans then it is because our understanding of justification is less vivid, less meaningful, than theirs was. Neither Paul nor the confessors found it necessary to work out the explicit context of the doctrine of Baptism in detail. Luther and the confessors seem to have intuitively understood just what Paul was talking about in Romans 6. Thus their discussions are often oriented to the Epistles' statements on Baptism even though they are preaching on a Gospel text. Occasional exceptions are noteworthy. For example in one sermon on Matthew 3, Luther comments on the word spoken over Jesus at His Baptism: "This is my beloved Son, etc." This word is spoken over Him because He fulfills the work the Father has given Him—the work of justification or freeing men from sin, death and devil (WA 37, 655f.) This word is also spoken over us in our Baptism. When I believe Christ's word and am baptized, God says of me, "You are my beloved Son, I am well pleased with you" (WA 34 I, 28).

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Because the Reformers failed to provide a unified comprehensive statement of the relationship between Baptism and justification, they paved the way for its loss in any age in which the doctrine of justification was no longer clearly understood.

## II

Therewith the nature of our task is given. In order to understand the Scriptures and the Confessions on Baptism we must first recapture the frame of reference in which they are operating. We must make those connections explicit which they simply took for granted. We shall approach that task in the following way. It is assumed that the confessors' understanding of justification is in agreement with the New Testament's teaching. We shall, however, try to recapture the dramatic vividness which that doctrine had for them. Against that background, we shall try to illuminate the connections between Baptism and justification which are implicit in the apostolic kerygma.

There might be some question as to whether such a combination of Scripture and Confession is theologically respectable. This paper must prove that it is. We work with the confessors' doctrine of justification because we believe that that doctrine summarizes the entire witness of the New Testament to God's work of salvation—even when the New Testament itself uses other categories. We are concerned with Baptism and justification because we are concerned with Baptism and God's entire work of salvation. When we work with the New Testament understanding of Baptism we are not abandoning the confessors' position; on the contrary we are simply providing the exegetical basis for that position which they did not need to provide.

At this point, the question always arises whether we are not simply looking at the Scriptures through confessionally-tinted glasses. That might be the case and we shall have to guard against it. The danger is not as great as it might be, however, since much of Protestantism is today involved in a full scale discussion of the nature of Baptism. And even though we have not always documented the concerns of those who disagree with us, we have not hesitated to learn from them and gratefully record that they have often made us aware of the good scriptural basis of the confessional position—even in their disagreement with it.<sup>3</sup>

Werner Elert uncovered some very interesting material on the Reformers' concept of the forensic sense of justification. I have put some of that material into English and tried to draw the applications for the American situation in an article in the *Cresset*.<sup>4</sup> That essay concludes with a section on the relationship between Baptism and justification. It may, therefore, be considered a prolegomena to this essay.

We use "justify" to mean that a man has excused himself or, passively, that a man has been excused. Either he has not really done anything wrong or he was not responsible for what he did. Transferred into the language of the courtroom it means that a man is acquitted. Thus a man accused of a crime may "justify" himself by proving that he did not do it or that he is not responsible for having done it. One thing is clear: the man who has not done anything at all is the man who finds it easiest to justify himself in court.

This modern usage of the word "justification" has little relationship to the sense in which this word is used in Lutheran theology. Here the word is used to describe what happens to the man who is a sinner. He is not innocent; he is guilty. The man who is justified by faith has both done that which the law condemns and is responsible for having done it. We describe justification as God's not charging it to him (not imputing it to him).

We have recognized this difficulty and have emphasized that justification is a "declaratory" act of God. We thereby try to translate the Reformers' emphasis on justification as a "forensic" act. The adjective "forensic" indicates that the word justification is to be understood as it is used in the courtroom. But what court uses "justify" as a technical term? When it is used, it is used in the ordinary sense of excusing or vindicating oneself.

We have ordinarily gotten around that difficulty by saying that the comparison lies in the judge's speaking the verdict over the accused. God's act of justifying us is the act of speaking the verdict that we are righteous. Most of our people understand that sort of justification as the verdict that we are innocent or that we are at least treated as though we were—and one must be careful not to do anything wrong which might destroy the illusion. And we are back where we started.

The official catechetical handbook of the Missouri Synod solves this problem by not attempting any "direct" definition of "justification." It is defined by implication (Question 188). This has, however, not proved to be a satisfactory solution. It is particularly inadequate when it is emphasized a few questions later that "justification by faith" is the "chief doctrine of the Christian religion." (Question 194A) (The "chief doctrine" had been introduced via a parenthesis a few pages earlier.) Under these circumstances we cannot be surprised that pastors find it difficult to preach meaningfully about justification, nor that successive generations of Lutherans find that preaching less and less meaningful for their spiritual lives.

The Reformers did not have this difficulty in making justification meaningful to their people. In their society as in ours this word was in every day use, particularly in the courtrooms. Thus the designation of this word as "forensic", or as used in its courtroom sense, was a hard and fast definition. The very phrase, "justification by faith," was itself an explanation.

The German word for justification (*Rechtfertigung*) is used in modern German in the same sense that the English word justification is used in modern English. It indicates that a man has excused himself or proved himself innocent. From the later Middle Ages until the seventeenth century it is, in addition, used in quite a different sense: the execution of the death penalty. It is also used to refer to the entire process of trial, examination by torture, and execution of the condemned criminal. This is the picture which the word "justification" produced in the minds of Luther's hearers. It should be immediately obvious, not only that this is quite different from the sense of justification today, but that this picture also provided a number of possibilities for relating justification to the entire work of salvation.

Elert offers a number of examples to illustrate this usage. The Diet of Augsburg of 1530 at which the Augsburg Confession was read and presented did not only discuss theology. It also discussed and adopted the reform of the penal code proposed by Emperor Charles V. The proposed code contains the word "justification" ten times. In some of these instances it refers to the entire trial of the accused, including the examination by torture or the ordeal. In these cases it is theoretically possible that the accused would be found either guilty or innocent. It is, however, a peculiarity of the legal language of the time that the word "justification" is no longer used whenever it becomes clear that the accused is innocent. For "justification" carries with it the sense of guilt and execution and is used three times in this sense in the code of Charles V. Typical of this usage is the rule that the accused is to be allowed three days to consider his sins, to mourn, and to go to the confession before he is "justified."

Earlier penal codes contain the same usage and are at times even clearer. Thus the purpose of two such codes is "that criminals might be justified and punished in a more proper and better manner." And detailed regulations are given for the raising and paying of the executioner's fee for justifying a man.

The Lutheran dogmatists of the seventeenth century were well acquainted with this usage. Up until the legal reforms of the eighteenth century there were few crimes that were not punishable by death. Thus one judge in Saxony took part in the condemnation to death of twenty thousand criminals in his lifetime. He was Benedikt Carpzov—related to but not to be confused with the theologians of the same family. His handbook on law quotes the usages of "justification" referred to above and uses them independently. The executioner's salary is treated under the heading: Costs of painful justification. And he leaves no doubt what he means by "justification" when he speaks of the body of the man who has been "justified by the sword." Against this background the insistence of contemporary theologians on the substitutionary character of the death of Christ becomes quite meaningful.

In any case it should be clear that justification was never a simple declaratory process for the Reformers. It is never anything as simple as some sort of heavenly bookkeeping which could have been carried out even if Christ had not died. It is a declaratory matter, to be sure, but it is always a matter of life and death—as our justification before God always is.

The modern meaning of justification as excusing or vindicating or proving innocence does not appear in the legal terminology of the sixteenth century. It is certainly possible that the trial results in the verdict of not guilty. As soon as this becomes evident, however, the word "justification" is no longer used in connection with it. From then on another term is used. "Justification" means that the criminal has been brought to justice.

This usage of the word is the background of its understanding as a theological term by the Reformers. It was pointed out above that the Diet of Augsburg dealt with a penal code in which the word "justification" was often used in its courtroom sense. It was not accidental then that Melancthon referred to this forensic usage in trying to define the sense of the word in the theology of the Reformers. It is equally interesting that the German edition of the Apology does not translate either of the two references to forensic justification. The German reader would take that for granted. The Latin term however was loaded with the scholastic interpretation of justification as a process of actually being made righteous. We have in our teaching retained the antithesis to the scholastic interpretation. We have ordinarily overlooked the fact, however, that there is a closely related and equally dangerous misinterpretation suggested by the current modern usage of justification.

### III

Luther carries this picture of courtroom justification over into his description of the justification of the sinner before God. The criminal is put to death; the sinner is not put to death himself, for he has been justified in Christ. Christ's justification becomes his justification in faith; he does not have to be justified in and for himself. But this never means that the sinner is declared innocent or that God acts as though he were innocent. On the contrary the admission and recognition of his guilt before God remains the first prerequisite of his justification. Since the recognition and confession of guilt is worked by the Law, it is interesting to compare Luther's understanding of the Law with our own as indicative of our understanding of justification.

It is of the essence of the courtroom justification that the criminal is dealt with and executed under the law. Here the New Testament understanding of justification both parallels and deviates from the courtroom usage. The sinner who is justified before God is not justified under the Law; he is free from the Law. But he is free from the Law because Christ has been justified under the Law. Because Christ was made to be sin for us and made under the Law, we are under the Gospel. It is here that the forensic usage of "justification" helps to clarify the work of salvation. The substitutionary atonement of Christ under the Law becomes our justification without the Law. The Law is both satisfied and broken in the work of redemption.

At this point it becomes clear that the Reformers did not take their understanding of justification from the lawbooks but from the New Testament. The courtroom usage of the term, however, provided a ready made set of associations which made the New Testament significance of the term immediately understandable to the common people. The transference was relatively easy for the Reformers because they were living in the same context of legal thought as the New Testament writers. And there is good evidence that the word justification could be used in first century Greek just as it was used in sixteenth century German. We shall deal later with the implications of the fact that there has been a radical revolution in legal thought and practice in the last three centuries. It is important to note it now, however, so that pictures of sixteenth century and twentieth century legal procedure will not be confused.

The Law does not allow justification by faith. Neither the Law proclaimed in Scripture nor the penal codes of men allow the imputation of sin. No man can take another man's place before the Law. No man can be tried for another man's crime. No man is excused from execution because another has been put to death. There is neither guilt nor execution by association. Yet that is exactly what the doctrine of justification by faith proposes has happened. If that has happened, then the legal framework of our relationship to God has been destroyed. Justification is therefore more than God's simply not imputing our sins to us by correcting our sheet in the heavenly ledger. Justification is a two-fold process. The sinfulness of the sinner is not imputed to him because it has been imputed to Christ. And at the same time that Christ is made to be sin for us, His righteousness is imputed to us—we are made the righteousness of God in Him, as Paul says.

Luther uses a number of pictures from the legal practise of his time to illustrate this. Christ is often referred to as the one who stands in our place as the "accused." And Christ's death is equated with our justification. The importance of this point cannot be overemphasized. It is common in our time to think of Christ's death as the cause of our justification; as a legal penalty which makes God's judgment of forgiveness over us possible. Christ's death and our justification thus stand in a cause-and-effect relationship. That is one possibility. Luther was, however, able also to reproduce the related material in Romans and Galatians much more directly. "So Christ . . . is called my death, sin against sin, because when He dies sin dies also, and in this way I am justified" (WA 40 I, 278, 5). The death of Christ is my death; His death is my justification. "Because I believe in him, I die with Him and I am crucified to the Law, so that the Law has no jurisdiction over me; the Law has let me loose and has been tied hand and foot, for I have died and am crucified with Christ through faith" (280,6). Here Luther uses the picture of justification as execution of the criminal to give vivid expression to what Paul says in Galatians 2:19f. In Romans 6 Paul speaks of Baptism and its relationship to the death and resurrection of Christ; and Luther's exposition of Baptism must be understood from the viewpoint of Romans 6.

Whoever has read Luther will have noted the ease with which he moves from one form of expression to another, from one picture of the work of salvation to another. He is not bound by any one but is using all of them to express the central Biblical truth. It would not be entirely inaccurate to say that our preaching and teaching have lost that mobility. The rather lifeless treatment of Luther's dramatic exposition of Baptism—death of the old man, resurrection of the new man—which we so often find is typical of that. That mobility has often been lost because we have tried to make justification not only the center but the total content of the proclamation of God's work of salvation. That is, in itself, not objectionable but when it is accompanied by a reduction of the sixteenth century concept of forensic justification to the narrow limits of declaratory justification, it has cut us off from some of the central analogies of the Christian faith. Luther could preach sermon after sermon, he could even explain the second article of the Creed without once referring to justification. And one will read the Small Catechism from beginning to end without finding one reference to justification. Luther uses other pictures and is still teaching forensic justification, for each of these pictures points up the relevance of Christ's suffering and death and resurrection for the sinner in the judgment of God.

We, on the other hand, find ourselves in the embarrassing position of not being able to directly relate the suffering and death and resurrection of our Lord to our justification. The closest relationship is that of cause and effect; and we find ourselves somewhat embarrassed when Paul and Luther speak very vividly about dying with Christ, rising with Him, of being crucified with Him and suffering with Him, of our being in Him and He being in us. Somehow they do not fit into the center of justification. But for Luther they were part of the center itself.

153 It cannot be over-emphasized that "the content of the Reformers' doctrine of justification comes from the New Testament and not from the legal practice of the time." The courtroom concept of justification provided an extremely useful vehicle for the transmission of New Testament thought, however. The Reformers could speak of justification to the common people against the background of, and with implicit reference to, the common understanding of justification. This background made many things in the New Testament understandable which are otherwise rather difficult to express. For the New Testament, too, operates with pictures and language of the law-courts. The final suffering and death of Christ takes place within that context. The concept of law at the time of the New Testament was essentially the same—at least in its relevant aspects—as in the sixteenth century. It was, therefore, no distortion of the New Testament when the Reformers emphasized justification by faith as one of the most effective ways of describing the Gospel.

#### IV

Under these circumstances we are compelled to consider the possibility of using new pictures and new formulas—pictures and formulas which have counterparts within the everyday experience of our people. They should, of course, be Biblical. One immediately suggests itself which is also an integral part of the Catechism: Baptism. Like justification, this picture of God's saving work integrally relates Christ's death and resurrection with our death and resurrection. Through it we die with Christ and rise from the dead with Him. We who were dead to God die to ourselves and become alive to God. We who could only look to God as our con-

demning judge can now look to Him as our Father. Christ has given us power to become the sons of God. This new life is really a new life; it is a life with a new father and under completely different conditions.

It is interesting to note that the Reformers' rediscovery of Paul's teaching of justification was accompanied by a rediscovery of the Biblical teaching on the Sacraments. One cannot be preserved without the other. And our people lack not only an understanding of the Reformation doctrine of justification but also of the significance of Baptism for their own lives. There is hardly a trace of understanding of Baptism as the beginning of the daily repentance of the Christian. And there is no appreciation of Baptism as the beginning of God's work in us which reaches its culmination in the death and resurrection of our bodies. The Reformers rediscovered the Sacraments on the basis of their understanding of the work of salvation. Perhaps we can make the work of salvation meaningful again by using the picture of Baptism.

Baptism has two obvious advantages as such a starting point. First, it is part of the experience of every Christian. It is that which actually brings him into the fellowship of Christ's death and resurrection; it is, therefore, not only a picture of the reality for which another picture might just as easily be substituted but part of the reality itself. Through Baptism Christ's death and resurrection become our death and resurrection. Through sharing in His death and resurrection the character of our bodily death and resurrection are transformed; but more than that, this life itself is transformed—the change is literally the change from death to life. Thus the work of salvation becomes a matter of life and death rather than a simple juggling of the heavenly books. Secondly, the pictures which Scripture uses to describe Baptism are readily understandable and within the common framework of experience. It is the ship which saves us from being drowned in the flood. It is a washing. It is a being born again to a new life. The latter should be particularly meaningful to a society in which adoption is as popular as it is today. Even the younger children can understand what it means to be an orphan; and they can appreciate the new life which the orphan receives when it is adopted.

This concept of justification which establishes a direct connection between the death and resurrection of Christ and the believer was well suited to synthesize the various statements which the New Testament makes on Christ's saving work. It was especially well suited as an aid to understanding Paul's statements on Baptism in Romans 6 and Colossians 2. This connection provided a means for concretizing the effect of Christ's death. The confessors had no doubt that the man who is dead is justified from sin.

But what is there about Baptism itself which makes it such a comprehensive summary of the significance of Christ's saving work for the Christian? There are two things. First, Baptism itself through the immersion in water is symbolic of dying and coming to life again. We can see just how literally this was taken by the early Church in 1 Peter 3. Noah was saved through water—not in an instrumental sense—the ark did that!—but in the sense of passing through water. That becomes clearer in the light of the Jewish legend which describes Noah's hesitancy to enter the ark even though the flood had begun. Finally God takes him by the hand and forces him to wade through the water. He passes through the water which brings death to sinful men and thus is saved.<sup>6</sup> The same is true of Baptism. Paul uses a somewhat similar picture when he compares Baptism to the passing of the children of Israel through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10: 2). Just as all who passed

through the Red Sea were saved from the Egyptians and made members of the people of God, so all who are baptized are saved from sin and made members of Christ. They pass through the water and are thus saved from it.

That is, however, not yet the central point. For although these make clear the connection between Baptism and death and God's work of salvation, they establish no direct connection to Christ. They do not point directly to the work of Christ. That connection is established by Christ himself on three separate occasions: His own Baptism, his reference to His suffering and death as His Baptism, and His conversation with Nicodemus.

When Jesus went to John to be baptized, John could not believe that the promised Messiah should participate in the Baptism of repentance. Jesus, however, answered: It is proper for me to fulfill all righteousness. Some scholars (e.g. Lampe, p. 35ff., other literature there) have considered this as a reference to Isaiah 53: 11, "My righteous servant shall make many righteous and he shall bear their iniquities." This seems especially probable in the light of John's witness to Jesus as the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. It is also indicated by the fact that the Father's word from heaven is the beginning (Isaiah 42: 1) of the suffering servant passages in Isaiah.

When the successor to Judas was picked Peter pointed out the necessity that he had been a witness to all things beginning with the Baptism of John. Luther calls this the beginning of the New Testament (WA 34 I, 21-31). Now actually the work of salvation begins with Christmas, so none of them could have witnessed the entire saving work of Christ to which they bear witness. The Baptism of John, however, begins the public ministry of Jesus. And for this at least the apostles could be eye-witnesses. Beginning the public ministry with the Baptism by John, however, indicates that the public ministry was not primarily a ministry of teaching and healing. The public ministry of Christ begins with his Baptism when He received the Holy Spirit. The first event after that is not a preaching tour, but the Holy Spirit leads him up into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. The character of those temptations indicates quite clearly what was at stake. The Devil tempted our Lord to abandon the way of the cross for the way of glory; men are to be saved by something else than suffering and death. And this temptation remains with our Lord up until the point of His death—whether we think of His own prayer in Gethsemane or of the taunts of the Jews standing below the cross calling Him to come down. The risen Christ speaking to the disciples on the road to Emmaus echoes His words at the Baptism: it is necessary for all of these things to happen to the Christ. The Baptism is such a significant point in His life because it marks the beginning of His public suffering and dying, the beginning of His daily temptation to abandon the Father's plan for the salvation of the world.

Since Jesus' public ministry does not begin with a preaching tour, but rather with His Baptism, it seems quite fitting that for most of us the life of Christ also began with our Baptism rather than with a revival service. However that may be, Baptism does effect in us something directly related to Christmas (washing of regeneration!) and Christ's own Baptism. Note that Paul in Romans 6 runs down the list: crucified, dead, buried, risen with Christ.

Jesus' Baptism was, therefore, a Baptism in preparation for and into His death. This connection was so clear in His own thinking that He can speak as though the real Baptism is still to come. "I have a Baptism to be baptized and how I long

for it to be completed" (Luke 12: 50). (The common rendering "baptized with" represents an interpretation of the text.) Here we have a direct parallel between Luther's treatment of the Baptism of the Christian and Christ's own Baptism: both culminate in death and resurrection.

Such a parallel is quite legitimate. For Jesus Himself draws it. When the sons of Zebedee desire the first seats in the kingdom, Jesus tests their readiness to discipleship with sacramental pictures (Mark 10: 38). They are to drink the cup which He drinks and they are to be baptized with the same Baptism as He. He calls them to be like Him—great through being servants. This, however, does not determine their rank in the kingdom. It simply indicates that whoever is not baptized with this Baptism is not in the kingdom at all. Dying with Christ is the *sine qua non*.

That is what Jesus tells Nicodemus (John 3). Flesh cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. A man must be born again of water and of the Spirit. This is an obvious reference to Baptism. But up until this point there had been only one Baptism with both water and the Spirit—that was Jesus' own Baptism. In demanding Baptism as the qualification for entry into heaven he is demanding nothing less than faith in Himself and the sharing in His Baptism which is the fruit of such faith. For a few verses later, He states the same qualification in different terms: man must look to the crucified Christ to be saved just as the Israelites in the wilderness looked to the brazen serpent. These obviously are not two different qualifications for entry into eternal life but are one and the same: the one looking back to the beginning of his Messianic ministry, the other looking forward to its completion in His crucifixion.

His own Baptism is completed in His crucifixion and resurrection, for only then is He able to give His Holy Spirit to His disciples. He gives it to those who were with Him before His crucifixion through the wonder of Pentecost. Ever since then He has given it through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism (1 Cor. 12: 13; Acts 1: 5, cf. Matt. 3: 11).

If there is one apparent exception, it is that of Cornelius and his household who received the Spirit before they were baptized (Acts 11: 16f.). That does not separate Baptism and the gift of the Spirit in any way. On the contrary the Spirit was given to these people before they were baptized as an invincible proof to Peter that Christ was willing to receive them through the Baptism by water. Far from separating the two, this confirms the connection.

We have so far noted two parallels between the baptism of Christ and the baptism of the Christian: 1) Baptism marks the beginning of Christ's Messianic ministry just as it marks the entry of the Christian into the kingdom of God. In both cases the Holy Spirit begins His work. 2) The Baptism of Christ culminates in his death and resurrection just as the Baptism of the Christian does. The latter is emphasized by Paul in Romans 6 and Colossians 2. In both the effect of Baptism is to join the believer so closely to Christ that He shares in all things which are Christ's. Specifically He shares in Christ's death and resurrection.

In these two passages the connection between Baptism and the death and resurrection of Christ is explicitly drawn. In both cases Paul then makes the direct application of this to the justification of the Christian. In Romans 6 he points out that the man who is dead is justified from sin. In Colossians 2 he uses both the picture of justification and the picture of redemption. The forgiveness of sins which

Baptism brings is our being set free from the Devil and death. In light of this, it is all the more tragic that it is not quoted in the synodical exposition of the Catechism. This same theme is echoed in other places in Paul's letters:

But when the goodness and kindness of God our Savior were revealed, he saved us, not for any righteous actions we had performed, but from his own mercy, through the bath of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit, which he has poured out upon us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be made righteous (justified) through his mercy and become possessors of eternal life in fulfillment of our hope (Titus 3: 4-7).

Compare this with 1 Corinthians 6: 11:

But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Or with Ephesians 5: 26:

Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.

These passages express the same thoughts as Romans 6 and Colossians 2. But they do it without making the explicit connection between the results of Baptism and the suffering and death of Christ.

We conclude on the basis of this that the New Testament sees a direct connection between the Baptism of the Christian and the death and resurrection of Christ. Since we are justified by the suffering and death of Christ, the New Testament also sees a direct connection between the Baptism and the justification of the Christian. Basic to this is the relationship between Christ's and the Christian's Baptism. The language of the New Testament itself permits no other conclusion. The Confessions have very properly made the same connection even though they have not explicitly stated the Scriptural basis for this.

## V

We now turn our attention to the actual statements of the Confessions themselves. We are concerned with the way in which they explicate the relationship between Baptism and Justification. We can sum it up very simply before we start. The confessions see Baptism as God's means of justifying us. Baptism, therefore, does everything for the Christian which is done in justification. Just as justification is the work of God and not of man, so Baptism is the work of God and not of man. The Confessions explicitly make this point; and it is here that the argument with all of those who reject infant Baptism must be joined. It is for this reason that Karl Barth's rejection of infant Baptism has stimulated such a fruitful discussion. Barth explicitly rejects Baptism as God's means of justifying us. For him it is only a symbol of what has already taken place in Jesus Christ. It has, therefore, only cognitive and not redemptive value. For all of Barth's careful analysis of the pertinent texts, he cannot overcome the weight of the evidence. The New Testament always speaks of Baptism as God's work through which he forgives sins. One example must suffice. Barth treats Romans 6: 5 as evidence of the symbolic nature of Baptism. We are, Paul says, united with the *homoioima* of Christ's death. Barth understands *homoioima* as our Baptism. It would then be a picture of Christ's death. This does not do justice to the text, however. If this is a symbolic and not a real union, then the same must be true of Christ's being made in the *homoioima* of a

man in Philippians 2. Our death in Baptism is no more a symbol than the Incarnation itself is. Certainly Baptism is a symbol—but it is an instrumental symbol and not merely cognitive.<sup>6</sup>

The Confessions are quite explicit about this: The grace of God is offered through Baptism; through Baptism we are received into the grace of God. (If Baptism is in any way the work of man, then the confessions are teaching work-righteousness, and so is Peter when he writes, "Baptism does indeed save us" (1 Peter 3: 21).

Since Baptism justifies, it makes us members of the body of Christ, which is the congregation of the justified saints (1 Corinthians 12: 13; Apology IX, 2).

Like the proclamation of the Gospel and the distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar, Baptism remains valid even when the person being baptized does not believe (Large Catechism IV, 54). In each case faith receives the promise of God; but in each case this faith is worked by the means itself.

Because this faith and this justification is meaningful every day of our lives, Baptism itself is meaningful every day. This is the position maintained by Luther in his *Sermon on Baptism* of 1519 and in his *Prelude to the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. Here he rejects the medieval idea that Baptism saves until the first sin after Baptism. In medieval theology Baptism was compared to a boat and the first sin to the destructive act which knocked a hole in its bottom. The sinner was left in the water and the Church threw him a life-preserver or plank in the Sacrament of Penance. Luther rejects this because the promise of God in Baptism is not invalidated by man's sin (Large Catechism IV, 80-82). This remains the chief point of controversy between Chemnitz and the theologians of Trent. What is at stake here is nothing less than the basic understanding of sin and of justification. Baptism is valid and significant for our entire life precisely because justification is.

Rome cannot accept the Lutheran doctrine of Baptism because it cannot accept the corresponding doctrine of justification. For Rome justification is only a stage completed by meritorious good works. Baptism is one way of achieving this condition—of entering under the law of Christ.

The gift which Christ gives to His Church is His Holy Spirit. This gift is given through Baptism. Through Baptism the Holy Spirit carries out His daily work in the life of the Christian. It is daily because of its very nature. It is the two-fold work of justification: the work of putting to death by water and by confession—and the work of making alive by bringing out of water and by absolution. This work shows itself in the daily life of the Christian as repentance and as faith (Apology XII, 46). In the Large Catechism (IV, 65) Luther puts it like this:

These two parts, being dipped under water and emerging from it, indicate the power and effect of Baptism, which is simply the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man, both of which actions most continue in us our whole life long. Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily Baptism, once begun and ever continued.<sup>7</sup>

And again (Large Catechism IV, 74-6):

Here you see that Baptism, both by its power and by its signification, comprehends also the third Sacrament, formerly called Penance, which is really nothing else than Baptism. What is repentance but an earnest attack on the old man and an entering upon a new life? If you live in re-

penitance, therefore, you are walking in Baptism, which not only announces this new life but also produces, begins and promotes it. In Baptism we are given the grace, Spirit, and power to suppress the old man so that the new may come forth and grow strong.

And in the *Instruction of the Visitors* of 1528 we read:

Baptism does not only mean that God wills to accept childhood but rather our entire life. Baptism, therefore, is not only of significance for children but it also stimulates and exhorts the adults to repent. For repentance, contrition, and sorrow are signified through the Baptism with water. Baptism should also thereby awaken the faith that the sins of those who are contrite are washed away and pardoned. And this faith is the perfect Baptism (WA, XXVI, 213).

I would suggest that the most dangerous Romanizing tendency in our Synod (Missouri) is a "Romanizing" reduction of the significance of Baptism to its significance for the day of our Baptism.

This understanding of the significance of Baptism for the daily life of the Christian depends upon the understanding of justification and its meaning for that daily life. Rome sees the mortal sin which so often occurs during that daily life as a *de facto* invalidation of that Baptism; even though re-baptism is forbidden, Penitence is provided as a second Baptism. For Luther even the battle with sin is part of the effectiveness of Baptism and its true meaning is revealed when the baptized person finds himself a sinner. Then his Baptism is not a sunken ship, but the eternal promise of God eternally valid in his life.

155 The death of the old man and the coming to life of the new take place in the forgiveness of sins; they are not an effect of forgiveness they are forgiveness. This is sometimes denied out of a concern to preserve the distinction between justification and sanctification<sup>8</sup>. We are also interested in preserving that distinction; but nothing is helped by this sort of separation.

God carries out His work of justification through His Word. His Word is Law and Gospel, and it is this Word in and with the water which works Baptism. We shall be able to test the soundness of the relationship which we have posited as existing between Baptism and justification by testing whether it corresponds to the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. As C.F.W. Walther points out, this distinction is the keystone of every doctrine of Lutheran theology. To carry out this task at this point would mean repeating the essay—actually another paper. I suggest it, however, as perhaps the most fruitful point at which to begin the discussion. Here I should only like to point out that Baptism is probably the most useful example of the way in which Law and Gospel are always found together. Contrition and faith, mortification and vivification are here separated neither temporally nor conceptually. It is the two-fold working of the Holy Spirit: distinct but always together. It is the mathematical point at which we can see them touching one another: we enter the water of Baptism to die; we come out of the same water to a new life.

It is for that reason that I believe that a confessionally oriented revision of our practise of and preaching on baptism will lead to a deepened awareness of the doctrine of justification in our entire theology. When I give myself into the hand of the baptizer, I give myself into death. Who knows whether he will let me up out of the water in time. Just this is also what I do when I confess my sins to the

confessor. Who knows whether he, who knows whether God, will forgive me. I can be assured of that only because I have been baptized into the Christ who God has raised from the dead. God did not leave Christ in death; and because I am buried with Christ in Baptism he also will not leave me in death. (It is of course true that this symbolism is not so obvious without immersion. Luther himself was well aware of this and I would agree with him that a reintroduction of the custom of immersion would make the symbolism of Baptism much more vivid. Only then does the mortifying quality of water become apparent.)

The easiest point at which to test our theology of Baptism is at its relevance for our theological understanding of the practical function of confession and absolution in the life of the church.

We have seen that there is good Scriptural evidence for the Confessions' treatment of Baptism as the means of justification. Because of their vivid and dramatic concept of justification they were able to do this for their day and age in terms of Romans 6 and Colossians 2. The implications were so direct and the connections so intensely felt that they were not explicitly discussed. That is no longer possible for twentieth century Lutherans. In our context of social justice, the concept of justification can never be made as vivid and dramatic as it was in the sixteenth century. We must be explicit where the Reformers were not. We must relate the Baptism of the Christian to the Baptism of Christ. When we have done that, we will be able to recapture the significance of Romans 6 and Colossians 2. And not the least of the unintended benefits will be a deepening of our understanding of God's work of salvation which the Reformers called "justification." Melancthon summed it up very well in his *Loci Communes* of 1521 (CR 21, 159): "We are justified, therefore, when, having been put to death through the law, we are made alive by the word of grace which is promised in Christ and when we hold fast to that faith in the Gospel which forgives our sins, in no wise doubting that the righteousness of Christ is our righteousness, that the satisfaction of Christ is our atonement, that Christ's resurrection is our resurrection." I would add: In no wise doubting that Christ's Baptism is our Baptism, because we have been baptized with His Baptism into His death and resurrection.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Christliche Dogmatik*, III, 309.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Christliche Wahrheit* (2. Auflage, 1952), p. 549f. Cf. Elert, *Die Christliche Glaube*, (3. Auflage, 1956), p. 359.

<sup>3</sup> Cf., e.g., G.W.H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit* (1951). (Other literature listed there.) A good bibliography of the German literature in Elert, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Werner Elert, "Deutschrechtliche Zuege in Luthers Rechtfertigungslehre," in *Zeitschrift fuer systematische Theologie*, XII (1934/5). Cf. "Justification in the 16th and 20th Centuries" in the *Cresset*, (October, 1957), pp. 6ff. Rather extensive sections are incorporated into this essay since that article will not be generally available and these conclusions are essential to the conclusions of this paper. I am indebted to the *Cresset* for permission to reprint this material.

<sup>5</sup> An interpretation first suggested by Fr. Hauck, cf. Bartsch, "Die Taufe in Neuen Testament" in *Evangelische Theologie*, VIII (1948/49), p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> *Die kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe* (1943).

<sup>7</sup> Translation quoted from Theodore G. Tappert, et al, *The Book of Concord (Muhlenberg Press, 1959)*.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Franz Pieper, *op. cit.*, 297-339.